

Femalities: Materialist Embodiment in Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing

by

Lesli A. Vollrath

A dissertation submitted to the English Department,
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in English

Chair of Committee: Jason Berger

Committee Member: W. Lawrence Hogue

Committee Member: James Pipkin

Committee Member: Elizabeth Gregory

Committee Member: Amir Jaima

University of Houston
December 2019

Copyright 2019, Lesli A. Vollrath

for river

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you, Jason Berger, for being an incredible dissertation chair and mentor. I am deeply indebted to you for your belief in my work and for challenging me to consider aspects of the literature I might have overlooked if not for your questions. Our time together has expanded my literary and theoretical horizons. You introduced me to Margaret Fuller during your class on 19th century American literature, an encounter that changed the trajectory of my thinking and writing in ways I couldn't have anticipated.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to my committee for their wisdom and guidance: Jim Pipkin, Lawrence Hogue, Elizabeth Gregory, and Amir Jaima. Jim, as one of my first professors at UH, you have been instrumental to my development as a scholar and writer. Thank you for pushing me to strive for excellence and for your friendship through the years. Elizabeth, I am grateful for your support of my teaching and your feminist leadership. Lawrence, thank you for sharing your passion for critical theory, American literature, and feminism. Amir, thank you for signing on to my project and sharing your philosophical and literary knowledge.

This work would not have been possible without the financial support of the Anne Perrin Award from the English department and the Maud Smith Paddock Fellowship from the Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies department at the University of Houston. Special thanks to Sally Connolly, Ann Christensen, Sarah Ehlers, Michael Snediker, Maria Gonzalez, and Bill Monroe for your inspiration and encouragement.

I am extremely grateful to my dear friends for their support during my time in graduate school: Zachary Turpin, Erin Singer, Christopher Murray, Aisha Sadiq, Adrienne Perry, Christian Bancroft, Dino Piacentini, Matt Seubert, Hope Jackson, Amy Lindsey, Liz Blomstedt, Wendy Wood, Sam Chesters, Sadie Hash, Maureen Ogbaa, Amma Asare, Mark Sursavage, Marina

Trninic, Mike Barnes, Max Rayneard, Laura Bland, Hayan Charara, Jesse Rainbow, Julia Brown, Ashley Jones, Deborah Whalen, Brigid Schiro, Kim and Zeb Scoville, Kellie Farrell, Jennifer Gadd Edwards, Jennifer Bradford, Tricia McFarlin, and Ranjana Varghese.

Thank you to my family for your love and encouragement: Brittany and Courtney Cox, Aaron, Tracey, Nadia, Delaney, Asher, and Braylon Vollrath. This dissertation would not have been possible without the love and unwavering support of my parents, Fred and Debbie Vollrath. I am grateful to each of you for encouraging me to pursue my dreams with hard work and persistence. I am also deeply indebted to my husband, Rich, for helping me reach this dream. Thank you for your proofreading skills and for cheering me on to the finish line. I could not have completed this dissertation without your endless support, love, and sacrifice. My closing thanks goes to my daughter, River Svoboda, for giving me laughter, joy, and love when I needed it the most. You were kicking in my womb during my exams, you were up during the night when I was working on my prospectus, and now you are writing your name as I near my graduation. May you follow Fuller's proverb by making a name for yourself by traveling. This dissertation is for you.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a study of movements—those that occur on, within, and beyond the body and those set in motion by the energetic and endlessly renewing material forces that take on different forms outside of it. In my introduction, I trace Margaret Fuller’s use of the concept “femality” in her early writing and *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) before reconfiguring femality within a new materialist framework. Building on innovative interdisciplinary work within the field of nineteenth-century studies as well as working with critical studies in a number of related theoretical fields, such as new materialism, posthumanism, and animal studies, I examine women’s novels such as Julia Ward Howe’s *The Hermaphrodite* (unpublished in era, 1840s), Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s *A Story of Avis* (1877), and Hannah Crafts’s *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* (unpublished in era, 1850s). Each chapter explores the concept of femality in a wide range of experience and materiality. As a paradigm that creates various modalities of potential between the body and materiality, femality demonstrates how materiality shapes personhood through complex and surprising encounters. In these chapters, I explore several of these modalities, such as materiality as textures of ecstatic connection and metamorphosis as fluidity (Howe), animality as co-existence and plurality (Phelps), and the wild as experiential ground for female ecologies (Crafts). In the epilogue, I return to Fuller to consider how a recognition of materiality’s potential might transform our view of everyday moments. This study seeks to unsettle traditional conceptualizations of the body by reformulating it within a materialist domain. In contrast to a frame that posits the body and materiality as passive entities, femality, as a materialist optic, recognizes both the body and materiality as potentialities of contact, exchange, and transformation. As a secondary concern,

movements between female bodies and entities of the environment, such as plants, trees, and birds, reveal a configuration of womanhood that is plural and ecological. While some movements eventually slow or reach their resting state, others keep going, endlessly becoming, to take on new forms and ecological dimensions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Epigraph.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Abstract.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1. Textures of Intimacy in Julia Ward Howe's <i>The Hermaphrodite</i>	27
Chapter 2. Companion Skies: Shared Flights of Resistance in Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's <i>The Story of Avis</i>	58
Chapter 3. Ecologies of the Wild in Hannah Crafts's <i>The Bondwoman's Narrative</i>	96
Epilogue.....	139
Notes.....	144

Femalities: Materialist Embodiment in Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing

I thought while the child is in the womb it grows to its perfect form, but breathes not yet. So soon as it emerges into freedom, its lungs begin to play, and it is a living body, an individual in its species. A little longer it grows and develops the organs of its mental being; they begin to play as it breathes in air from the great sea of soul, and becomes a living soul, (a person in the universe) the breath of life the breath of soul animate this being, working with harmonizing laws, till (after this stage has long enough endured) the body can no longer hold together and her soul disengages itself into the electric element.

—Margaret Fuller, unpublished journal entry¹

Margaret Fuller depicts an image of nascent life, an infant developing into its “perfect form,” in a series of progressions: lungs shape it into a “living body,” breath of air transforms it into a “living soul,” the “breath of soul animates” it into a realm of harmony. This passage highlights Fuller’s awareness that development, even prior to one’s initial entrance into the world, requires growth as one shifts from one state of being into another. In *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) and across her early writing, Fuller incorporates this image of movement into broader networks of materiality to emphasize the power of the female body and the need for gender equality. In mediums such as “electricity,” “impulses,” “flows,” and “unfoldings” that appear across her work, Fuller links the female body with movement to argue for a qualitatively different form of growth based upon the specific conditions and potentials of women. In contrast to the antebellum construct that defined women by limitation, Fuller saw women’s potential for expansion in all realms of life, including intellectual development through education, independence within marriage, and leadership roles in society.

The open variety of material conditions provides Fuller with different mediums for highlighting significant elements of women’s potential. In the following passage from *WNC*, Fuller uses the image of the fold to suggest that a woman’s talent is layered and

requires nurturing for progression. She argues that a woman needs “a nature to grow,” “an intellect to discern,” and “a soul to live freely and unimpeded, to unfold such powers as were given her.”² In order for a woman to “grow,” she must develop her intellect and have space for open expansion instead of restriction. By calling for the space surrounding the soul to be both “free” and “unimpeded,” Fuller correlates the internal movement of a woman’s soul with the openness of the space required for such development. Fuller then depicts a woman’s movements towards potential—her discovery of her own powers—as an “unfold[ing]” within and beyond the corporeal frame. This complex notion of expansion portrays development as process, or to use Deleuze’s words, “The unfold is not the opposite of the fold, but follows one fold unto the next.”³ This vision of dynamic personhood—a word I have chosen to describe identity because “person” applies to those who are not necessarily subjects or citizens and might be on the boundary of a community—anticipates contemporary formulations of the “self [as] a modality” or a “fold of immanent expressibility.”⁴

While Fuller’s use of dynamic materiality as an approach for arguments about gender equality positions her as a fundamental part of this study, it is Fuller’s use of “femality,” an example of this strategy, that depicts the feminine as a modality of connection and endless exchange with its environment. Femality provides a useful foundation for exploring the relationship among female embodiment, resistance, and materiality in the nineteenth century. By taking up these subjects, this dissertation participates in the recent “material turn” by engaging with emerging scholarship that offers new and at times speculative perspectives on material reality.⁵ Operating across a range of fields and often grouped under the broad term “new materialism,” these critical theories

emphasize materiality as a central concern. Some new materialists recognize matter “as possessing its own modes of self-transformation, self-organization, and directedness,” instead of viewing it as “passive or inert.”⁶ In this vein of critical new materialism, the human becomes another participant in the environment instead of its “master” while matter gains recognition for its own “agentic capacities.”⁷ These pivotal recalibrations of matter and agency are foundational components for the theoretical framework of this dissertation.

Working from these and other new materialist concerns, I redefine “femality” and then use it as an optic for reconsidering characters in nineteenth-century American literature. Femality unveils how material forces provide relational possibilities for bodies in motion to create surprising and generative interconnections. By studying these encounters when female bodies touch materiality, such as plants or trees, or non-human beings, such as animals, this project offers a feminist approach to new materialism that reveals how these interconnections create ecological modalities of resistance for women within and against systems of oppression. Inspired by the concerns of material feminists, this dissertation aims for “definitions of human corporeality that can account for how the discursive and the material interact in the constitution of bodies.”⁸ I have included the term “embodiment” in my title to emphasize this turn towards the body as a primary concern. By approaching women’s writing in the nineteenth century through the lens of femality, I take the materiality of the body and its surroundings into account to open up new possibilities for personhood.

Building on innovative interdisciplinary work within the field of nineteenth-century studies as well as working with critical studies in a number of related theoretical fields, such as new materialism, posthumanism, and animal studies, I examine women’s novels

such as Julia Ward Howe's *The Hermaphrodite* (unpublished in era, 1840s), Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *A Story of Avis* (1877), and Hannah Crafts's *The Bondwoman's Narrative* (unpublished in era, 1850s). Each chapter explores the concept of femality in a wide range of experience and materiality. As a paradigm that creates various modalities of potential between the body and materiality, femality demonstrates how materiality shapes personhood through complex and surprising encounters. In these chapters, I explore several of these modalities, such as materiality as textures of ecstatic connection and metamorphosis as fluidity (Howe), animality as co-existence and plurality (Phelps), and the wild as experiential ground for female ecologies (Crafts). Using contemporary theoretical approaches, this project gives critical attention to each of these three lesser-known novels.

This dissertation seeks to make a number of important contributions to a diverse range of fields, including nineteenth-century studies, women's studies, and new materialism. First, it aims to challenge previous formulations of the body as a closed entity or passive surface of contact. Femalities, as bodies of processes that touch and move within a reality comprised of dynamic exchanges anticipate Americanist scholarship that addresses posthuman formulations of bodies characterized by openness and relationality. Second, through the perspective of femality, this study shifts the materiality of a person's surroundings into prominent catalysts for the formation and metamorphosis of identity, instead of viewing it as inert or entirely overlooking it in the background. Third, this study aims to complicate traditional conceptualizations of womanhood by envisioning embodiment as plural—a combination between the human and the non-human, the living and the inorganic—within, beyond, and on the surface of the corporeality.

FEMALITY AS A MATERIALIST FORM

To counter the historical limitations demarcating women within conventional roles, Fuller creates an alternative gender construct, what she terms “femality.” In “The Great Lawsuit. Woman vs. Women. Man vs. Men” (1843), an essay she later extends into *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Fuller derives her use of the term from a series of anonymous articles titled, “Femality,” that were published in the New York *Pathfinder*. Jeffrey Steele highlights the significance of this periodical for its contribution to “the radical originality of Fuller’s vision of womanhood,” tracing some of Fuller’s crucial revisions to her conception of femality in *WNC*.⁹ I turn to an influential passage in the *Pathfinder* article to examine the inspiration behind Fuller’s rendering of femality as a principle of movement and interconnection. The anonymous writer encourages femality to transmit its power by flashing its electric energy into a variety of sources: “Femality must develop its pictorial—its decorative powers. Its high electric nature must flash, if it be but in little disconnected scintillations, constantly in and about all created things.”¹⁰ Here, feminine power exists in the image or “pictorial” frame and becomes influential through repetition and relation: “flashes” diffuse “in” and “about created things.” Positioning womanhood within a religious frame, the anonymous writer references God as a powerful creator by designating that the sources of the flashes are “in and about all created things.” Women must tap into their “high electric nature” by lighting their surroundings through “flash[es]” or “little disconnected scintillations.”

In “The Great Lawsuit,” published four months after the publication of the *Pathfinder* article, Fuller adapts femality from this original context by incorporating and redefining it in her argument for gender equality. She transforms the anonymous writer’s

language of circuitry into a modality for female embodiment: “The electrical, the magnetic element in woman has not been fairly developed at any period. Everything might be expected from it; she has far more of it than man.”¹¹ In Fuller’s translation, the anonymous writer’s “pictorial” becomes the female body—a site where female power can be harnessed and expressed through materiality. Many scholars have discussed Fuller’s use of electricity, but my interest centers on how Fuller might have translated the “electric” into other configurations of movement, specifically as elements of her construct of “femality.”¹² Working from what the anonymous writer characterizes as a “flash” of light, an image of vigor and brightness, and “scintillations,” repetitions that emphasize the sparkling nature of these flashes, Fuller recasts these movements of light into other modalities of movement to create femality as a dynamic alternative to the antebellum construct that relegates women to a limited sphere.

In *Woman and the Nineteenth Century*, femality is a part of Fuller’s larger theoretical paradigm for gender. After asserting that all souls are the same, Fuller asserts that the especially feminine aspect of the soul is femality, a development that configures the female body as a site of exchange and process with the natural world (*WNC* 308). In the remainder of this section, I distill Fuller’s concept of femality into various patterns of thought in order to show how Fuller envisioned its facets of movement as different mediums of materiality.

In her early writing, Fuller depicts the concept of femality as an intermingling between corporeality and materiality. In “Leila” (1841), an early sketch published in *The Dial*, Fuller describes an encounter between Leila, a mythical goddess figure, and an unnamed speaker who calls on her for solace and companionship. As the “moving

principle,” Leila has the power to transform into the material world: “You look on her, and she is the clear blue sky, cold and distant as the Pole-star.... [S]he is the mild sunset, and puts you to rest on a love-couch of rosy sadness, when on the horizon swells up a mighty sea and rushes over you till you plunge on its waves, affrighted, delighted, quite freed from the earth.”¹³ Leila counters the fixed gaze that attempts to bring her into focus by morphing between different registers of the sky’s colors, creating an ecstatic emotional experience for her viewer that is also described in material terms—a rushing of waves. In a letter to her close friend, Caroline Sturgis, on October 22, 1840, Fuller depicts her body as a permeable interface with the material world: “I cannot plunge into myself enough. I cannot dedicate myself sufficiently. The life that flows in upon me from so many quarters is too beautiful to be checked. I would not check a single pulsation.”¹⁴ In this complex image of self-reflexivity, Fuller both “plunge[s]” and thrusts into herself, conceptualized as a body of water, because she feels that life is “flow[ing] in upon [her].” Water acts as a metaphor of her “dedication” to herself and the force of life that rushes in from the outside, but, she shifts her metaphor by equating the flow of the water to the beating or “pulsation” of the heart, a repetition of beauty she refuses to “check” or regulate.

In her autobiographical writing, Fuller creates intersections between temporality and materiality—a subtopic of her concept of femality—in her study of a tree’s various capacities of movement. In her undated reading journal, Fuller ruminates on the process of seed dispersal as a form of flight to explore trees as a symbolic representation of growth and development across time. As a structure that carries reproductive elements of one tree to become the origin of growth for another tree, a seed offers an embodiment of flight and regeneration. She notes that some plants “are fitted for dispersion by means of an attached

wing.”¹⁵ She then cites the fir tree as an example of a tree that has “winged seeds,” a fact she attributes to Linnaeus.¹⁶ On another page of her journal, Fuller sketches a tree and seeds across the page:

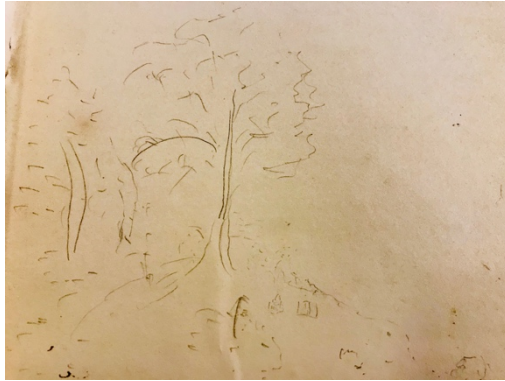


Figure 1. Fuller’s Journal, Courtesy of Margaret Fuller Archive

With this sketch, Fuller explores the materiality of the shape of the tree and its seed dispersal through the act of drawing. The scattered dots that randomly mark the bottom left and outlying areas of the page resemble seeds. At the bottom of another page, Fuller includes an allusion to Horace’s *Odes* with the Latin phrase, “Crescit occult velut arbor aevo,” which translates as “[he/she/it] grows imperceptibly, like a tree over time.”¹⁷ Each of these distinct formulations reflects Fuller’s preoccupation with understanding the complexity and variety of movement that the materiality of trees can produce.

If we follow this line of thought, we can see how Fuller translates her study of the tree into her feminist argument for social equality. In *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, she writes, “It is time, indeed, that men and women both should cease to grow old in any other way than as the tree does, full of grace and honor” (340). This line echoes Horace, but Fuller reshapes it for her own purposes. Fuller asserts that “it is time,” placing emphasis on present-day action as a modality for social change. Fuller contrasts this urgent need for societal reform in the present with the slow growth of the tree as a symbol of

“grace and honor”—a model of development for men and women. In order for humankind to experience this graceful aging, like a tree that grows across the span of many years, it must create a society that upholds gender equality. This grouping of thoughts on the materiality of a tree and its seeds reveals how Fuller converts her examination of materiality into a temporal representation of human experience—a strategy she executes by envisioning the female body as endless in her concept of femality.

While scholars have discussed Fuller’s illness as a modality of empowerment, I use brief readings that center on Fuller’s physical challenges to fill out an understanding of her use of femality.¹⁸ Fuller envisions the body during moments of pain as an interface of exchange and extension into its surroundings—an orientation she includes in her concept of femality. In a journal entry written while at work on *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Fuller collapses the binary between her body and the landscape to describe an interconnection with her surroundings: “I have been ill, too, and in a way that binds me deep in nature. I am much earthy.”¹⁹ Fuller envisions her body “[bound]” “deep” in nature, an image that implies a complex root-like fastening between her body and the earth. Even though her pain is noteworthy, Fuller translates her aching body into a modality that unites her with the landscape. Cynthia Davis offers a similar reading of Fuller’s vision of the body as a “physical source of metaphysical insights into the intersections between nature and soul, suffering and transcendence.”²⁰ In a journal fragment written in 1840, Fuller expresses her singular interest in “listening to the secret harmonies of nature” before explaining that “this music is sweet in my soul to very pain.”²¹ She then describes her distress when faced with the challenge of trying to stop the music as a means of streamlining her thoughts into a single coherent expression: “I cannot alter it, and the hour

when I do so seems afar, yet it swells my heart painfully, thoughts move and push forth from my heart like young birds from the nest, but as yet, if any tries to take wing it falls back into the nest ruffled and trembling with cold.”²² Although Fuller references pain here, it’s unclear whether or not she is experiencing one of her nervous headaches.²³ In contrast to other passages I have discussed, this description focuses on simultaneous forms of materialist movement with the competing sounds of nature’s harmonies, the expansion of her heart’s movement as a response to the music, and the counter forces of her half-formed thoughts that “move” and “push” before failing at flight like fledgling birds. By likening her brain to a bird’s nest and her half-formed thoughts to fledglings attempting to take flight, Fuller processes her experience of helplessness and pain through the materiality of animal bodies. While Fuller does not specifically include animal bodies in her concept of femality, this journal entry demonstrates that Fuller saw animals as another embodiment of movement within the natural world.

Inspired by Fuller’s flight of “femality” from the pages of the *Pathfinder*, this dissertation begins and expands from Fuller by configuring femality as a materialist optic for viewing female embodiment in nineteenth-century women’s writing. Using “femality” as a palimpsest for her argument, Fuller enacts something approaching what Hélène Cixous describes as flight born from theft: “To fly / steal is woman’s gesture, to steal into language to make it fly.”²⁴ Fuller uses femality as a gender construct to inspire women in the nineteenth century to free themselves from patriarchal control using movement; by stealing “femality” from Fuller, I seek to reveal alternative flights, or different viewpoints, of embodiment in the nineteenth century. I also hope to understand how these women writers negotiated the historical limits of their particular moment. Even though each of

these alternative flights is not entirely successful, they provide glimpses of different modalities of materiality while also unveiling the far-reaching undercurrents of patriarchal power.

Caroline Levine's contemporary definition of form provides a framework for understanding how Fuller's concept of femality can be used as a template for considering materiality and embodiment in nineteenth-century women's writing. Levine posits form as "an arrangement of elements—an ordering, a patterning, or shaping," and borrows the term "affordances" from design theory to "ask what potentialities" exist in "aesthetic and social arrangements."²⁵ Within this framework, the form of femality might offer new optics for viewing the material and historical constraints on the female body throughout the nineteenth century. Since forms are portable and "lay claim to a limited range of potentialities and constraints," an examination of their affordances "open[s] up a generalizable understanding of political power."²⁶ I use femality as a schematic that positions the female body as an interface with the kinetic forces of materiality. Indeed, this structural grounding is readily apparent in Fuller's vision of femality:

As far as [the soul] is modified in her as woman, it flows, it breathes, it sings, rather than deposits soil, or finishes work, and that which is especially feminine flushes, in blossom, the face of earth, and pervades, like air and water, all this seeming solid globe, daily renewing and purifying its life. Such may be the especially feminine element, spoken of as Femality. (*WNC* 309-310)

Femality "flows," "breathes," and "sings," actions that describe movement—a transfer from one state into another or an interconnection between one being and another. Femality is regenerative because it is "daily renewing" and "purifying its life," but it does not "deposit soil" or "finish work," registering identity in endlessness—open-ended potential for connection. Fuller's elemental imagery of "earth," "air," and "water" highlights the

materiality of the universe as a space “that is constantly in the process of making,” what new materialists describe as the “movement, vitality, morphogenesis, and becoming of the material world.”²⁷ In these moments of metamorphosis, the lines of corporeality blur to create a complex personhood comprised of the human body and materiality.

In an effort to build a concept that returns to Fuller’s nineteenth-century concerns using contemporary critical perspectives associated with new materialism, I use “femality” to address a cluster of concerns that stem from encounters that take place between the materiality of bodies and the varying capacities of agency that surround them. Following Fuller, femality offers a materialist rubric for thinking about the ways these entanglements transform personhood. In a contemporary environmental context, this formulation is similar to what Stacy Alaimo defines as “transcorporeality”: “the time-space where human corporeality, in all its material fleshiness, is inseparable from ‘nature’ or ‘environment.’”²⁸ Although femality can describe movements that take place across and through different types of bodies in a direct exchange, it can also portray relationality as another strategy of proximity and becoming. Bodies can exist within a contact zone and engage in relational movement that exists within each body separately or as parallel movement between two different types of bodies. Femality also operates as a paradigm for a way of being in the world, a modality of practice that reflects an ongoing engagement with materiality as a force of potentiality. Sara Ahmed’s work on orientation and phenomenology provides a frame for understanding the significance of femality as an orientation of the body with its surroundings that has the potential to lead to a reorientation of the self. Ahmed writes, “Orientations shape the corporeal substance of bodies and whatever occupies space. Orientations affect how subjects and objects materialize or come to take shape in the way

that they do.”²⁹ As a paradigm that orients the human body as an open interface of interaction and engagement with materiality, femality affirms personhood as plural and dynamic.

A few critics touch on femality as an aspect of Fuller’s theoretical schema, but its significance for contemporary concerns deserves more attention. Lauren Berlant highlights Fanny Fern’s reference to femality in *Fern Leaves* (1853), defining it as a “force in excess of the forms of negation and containment that characterize life within the patriarchal mode.”³⁰ Dorri Beam interprets femality as a feminine “force” of ecological grounding that results in a “feminine self” that “troubles solidity” and “points to another dimension.”³¹ In her astute reading, Fuller’s construction of femininity is “the vital fluid that connects and transforms matter and spirit,” and a way for Fuller to use “metamorphic energies” for feminine agency. While I also consider femality as a possible modality of the feminine, I carry this connection further by recasting femality as a new materialist form. In this reconfiguration, femality reveals the complex relationship between embodiment, materiality, and power in the nineteenth century.

Even though this study primarily focuses on interconnections between female bodies and their surroundings, I pause to note that Fuller envisioned an equal exchange between the feminine and masculine with her radical concept of gender identity. In *The Great Lawsuit* and *WNC*, Fuller anticipates feminists such as Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir in her radical departure from the antebellum construction of gender identity: “There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman” (310). As dynamic liquids that continuously “pass into one another,” the masculine and feminine morph between chemical states: “Fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid” (310). In another

passage, Fuller incorporates the masculine into her definition of womanhood by offering two metaphorical paradigms of equality: “[a woman is] the other half of the same thought, the other chamber of the heart of life” (252). Many critics have discussed the radical nature of Fuller’s thought regarding gender, but this study focuses on femality, a subfield that Fuller identifies as the feminine principle within her extended theoretical discussion of gender. While the majority of characters that I focus on in this study of femality are women, I also include Laurence, an intersex protagonist in Howe’s *The Hermaphrodite*, to disrupt this pattern and explore the relationship between materiality and a body that is part male and part female.

A NOTE ON METHOD

Following Jane Bennett’s suggestion in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010) that “a cultivated, patient, sensory attentiveness to nonhuman forces operating outside and inside the human body” is necessary for a pursuit of materialism, I approach these selected novels of the nineteenth century with an openness that searches for a reorientation of the body, personhood, and the environment.³² Each chapter of the dissertation uses a critical framework that includes an explanation of terms, historical contexts, and theoretical underpinnings for the materialist femality being discussed. Knotting each novel’s critical genealogies—including residual, dominant, and emergent threads—with contemporary and historical lineages of critical subject areas, I intervene in a variety of planes to examine the relationship between embodiment and materiality in nineteenth-century women’s writing.

Working against a traditional literary-historical model that configures the past and present as disparate worlds, several contemporary scholars and historians examine the past

for its relationship to the social present. Following Matthew Jacobson's claim that "we can answer only the questions that our current conditions have prompted us to ask," I see my project as one that is "presentist" in its orientation to history.³³ I hope to add my voice to the historical conversation that scholars such as José Munoz and Elizabeth Freeman have sparked. Munoz argues that we should read the past as "performative" and "animate[d]"; it should be "call[ed] on" because it "does things" while Freeman theorizes a relationship to history that supports Derrida's reading of a Marxist "ethics of responsibility toward the other across time—toward the dead or toward that which was impossible in a given historical moment."³⁴ Inspired by contemporary formulations of blackness produced by scholars such as Fred Moten, Christina Sharpe, and Katherine McKittrick, I study the racist history of the antebellum period as a means of understanding current concerns for black life in America today.³⁵ By studying embodiment in selected women's novels, I hope to open up new ways of thinking about power dynamics and modes of resistance in the nineteenth century as well as explore new possibilities for conceptualizing one's being in the environment.

In the next section, I address critical trends and concepts that this dissertation takes up in the field of nineteenth-century studies. I then provide a brief overview of the various theoretical fields, such as new materialism, posthumanism, and black studies, and the questions surrounding them. Each chapter cuts across these various contexts and theoretical threads in its own way. My first chapter on Howe creates intersections among gender theory, body studies, and queer theory to consider a concept of ecstasy that offers and interpretation of materialist experiences of connection. In my second chapter on Phelps, theoretical fields, such as new materialism, posthumanism, and feminist theory open up

questions about womanhood, marriage, and female empowerment within a patriarchal system. The final chapter on Crafts focuses on the antebellum era of slavery and delves into questions of black women's materialist experience, ecomaterialism, and spatial studies, to explore how female ecologies channel resistance within and beyond the plantation zone.

FEMALITIES IN CONTEXT

Recent scholarship on both the nineteenth century and the assumptions and terms of traditional scholarship on womanhood has shifted away from the demarcation of women and men into separate spheres, opening up new opportunities for reconsidering the relationships among gender, domesticity, and power. In the past, scholars relied on the binary model of the separate spheres to analyze women's roles.³⁶ The complicated relationship between sentimentality and womanhood has also been debated throughout nineteenth-century scholarship.³⁷ By examining women's culture and the sentimental as a "form," Berlant makes a significant contribution to sentiment scholarship by highlighting the problematic limits of a mass-mediated identity that constructs femininity as a mode of social belonging, homogenizes intimacy within certain constraints, and reveals the function of fantasy in ordinary life.³⁸ Even though sentiment is not my primary concern, it is important to consider how my analysis of female embodiment speaks to the broader conversation about sentimentality. In her essay on "Manifest Domesticity" (1998), Amy Kaplan complicates the ideology of separate spheres in antebellum America by configuring domesticity as "mobile" and integral to the nation's empire building: "it travels in contradictory circuits both to expand and contract the boundaries of home and nation and to produce shifting conceptions of the foreign."³⁹ I, too, will emphasize mobility, although in a different context, by defining femality as a dynamic interaction between female

corporeality and the environment. Reminding us that Foucault's notion of power is "non-egalitarian and mobile" instead of emanating from a single source, Lara Romero argues, "We can better understand the seeming incommensurability of political visions represented in early-nineteenth-century texts—and perhaps temper our disappointment when we realize that authors have not done the impossible, that is, discovered the one key for the liberation of all humankind."⁴⁰ Even though I primarily examine how materialist embodiment produces potential openings for women within a patriarchal system, I agree with Romero that the political visions of these texts cannot be read as all-encompassing; these moments may exist as singular or contradictory to other modes of female personhood in the text.

The nineteenth century's configuration of what Justine Murison refers to as an "open body" reinforces this study's conceptualization of the body as a site of relationality and connection with its environment. In *The Politics of Anxiety in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (2011), Murison links the instability of the nineteenth-century body to the prevailing view of the governing power of the "nervous system," which consisted of the brain, the spinal cord, and the nerves.⁴¹ Because the "body was seen, metaphorically, as a system of dynamic interactions with its environment," it was "always in a state of becoming—and thus always in jeopardy."⁴² This configuration of the body echoes post-humanist subjectivity, "an open state" that is in "constant communication with the exterior."⁴³ This dissertation is situated throughout the nineteenth century and extends Murison's argument by exploring the potentialities of femalities, bodies that enact a different type of openness within their environment.

A somatic approach is also beneficial for examining how enslaved women's relationships with the environment produced ecological resistance.⁴⁴ In *Closer to Freedom*

(2004), Stephanie M.H. Camp argues that black women's "imagined reproductive labor" and "unique forms of bodily suffering" highlight the value of examining slavery with an emphasis on female corporeality.⁴⁵ Camp also identifies the enslaved female body as a central component of slavery: "Perceptions of the proper uses of the black body, especially the female body, were central, materially and symbolically, to the formation of slaveholding mastery."⁴⁶ Although slaveholders saw the land as an extension of their authority, enslaved women still managed to create their own relationships with the materiality of their surroundings. By focusing on exchanges between black female bodies and the environment, I hope to reveal how materiality offered enslaved women an alternative modality of empowerment within the system of slavery.

As the first nineteenth-century study to focus on femalities by studying intersections between embodiment and new materialist concerns in American women's writing, this dissertation aims to contribute to a field that includes diverse conversations about female corporeality. Scholars have discussed how women's relationship to food is "gendered," how marked female bodies reveal a relationship between agency, power, and identity, and how black female bodies enact varying forms of resistance through performance.⁴⁷ In *Out in Public: Configurations of Women's Bodies in Nineteenth-Century America* (2004), a study that focuses on intersections between female embodiment and power in women's writing, Alison Piepmeier destabilizes the public and private categories that dominate nineteenth-century studies of womanhood to explore how acts of agency and resistance arise within a system of oppression.⁴⁸ Like Piepmeier, I explore "modalities of embodiment" that are "multiple" and "transitional," but I depart from her thesis by analyzing the nineteenth century through a contemporary lens shaped by theoretical fields,

such as new materialism and animal studies.⁴⁹ I see my work in conversation with each of these texts, some more directly than others.

This dissertation participates in a recent emphasis on posthumanist and materialist concerns within studies about American literature and society. In *Ariel's Ecology* (2013), Monique Allewaert examines how African-Americans created different modes of bodily resistance against colonialism in the American tropics. Allewaert studies the relationship between corporeality and materiality to suggest alternative conceptualizations of African-American political personhood and resistance.⁵⁰ Colleen Boggs's project on animals and biopolitical subjectivity, *Animalia Americana* (2013), emphasizes literature as a space where humans and animals interact and form relationships with one another to raise crucial questions about subjectivity.⁵¹ Intersecting biopolitical theory with animal studies and literature, Boggs offers a new understanding of the animal's influence on the "psychosexual formation of biopolitical subjectivity" by taking gender and sexuality into account.⁵² Building from historicist concerns of the nineteenth century and materialist thinkers, such as Deleuze and Jane Bennett, Branca Arsic investigates what she defines as Thoreau's "complex materialist epistemology," with a special emphasis on how birds fly throughout his body of work.⁵³ She argues that the significance of birds for Thoreau resides in their symbolism as "undying repositories of memory."⁵⁴ Inspired by these interdisciplinary studies that intersect emergent theoretical fields with historical concerns of the nineteenth century, I aim to join these conversations by contributing a new understanding of the significance of the connections between bodies and materiality.

The vibrant interdisciplinary nature of new materialism offers a productive landscape for understanding how materialist experience reconfigures the concept of

antebellum womanhood. New materialism's intersections among eclectic fields, such as feminism, ecofeminism, posthumanism, ecotology, critical science studies, affect studies, and political theory open up various possibilities for analyzing female embodiment.⁵⁵ This study is indebted to key thinkers of the field, such as Donna Haraway, Stacy Alaimo, Karen Barad, Rosi Bradoitti, Claire Colebrook, and Diana Coole. Instead of turning away from nature as feminist theorists have done in the past, material feminists seek to reimagine nature as a space where the materiality of the female body and the environment take center stage.⁵⁶

With her concept of “agential realism,” Barad provides materialist optics for understanding the relationship between the female body and its surroundings. In *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), Barad coins “agential realism” to describe a materialist world where “boundaries are reconfigured” and bodies in the universe—human and nonhuman—are intertwined and vibrant.⁵⁷ She writes, “Bodies do not simply take their places in the world. They are not simply situated in, or located in, particular environments. Rather, ‘environments’ and ‘bodies’ are intra-actively co-constituted. Bodies (‘human,’ ‘environmental,’ or otherwise) are integral ‘parts’ of, or dynamic reconfigurings of, what is.”⁵⁸ This interconnected universe is comprised of multitudinous connections that involve more than one type of “body.” In contrast to a passive construct of the body, femalities configure female bodies as modalities of interaction and exchange with their environment. For Barad and other new materialists, the human subject is no longer regarded as the sole agent in the universe since matter is capable of agency. “If matter itself is lively,” Bennett writes, “then not only is the difference between subjects and objects minimized, but the status of the shared materiality of all things is elevated.”⁵⁹ To use Allewaert's neologism

for a study that combines ecocritical and new materialist concerns, I see this dissertation as “ecomaterialist”: “an interrogation of how the corporeal and noncorporeal, organic and inorganic materials and parts that compose beings and places emerge.”⁶⁰ I examine nineteenth-century women’s writing for these transformational moments, when the lines of the body can be redrawn to reveal how a “shared materiality” results in a different construction of nineteenth-century personhood.

Posthumanism’s emphasis on the role that embodiment plays in the formation of identity makes it a useful field for conceptualizing femalities in the nineteenth century. In *What is Posthumanism?* (2013), Cary Wolfe argues that posthumanism requires attention to the “[human’s] embodiment, embeddedness, and materiality” and the ways that these are “shaped by consciousness.”⁶¹ While the term was initially associated with the influence of technology on subjectivity, posthumanism has led to an exploration of embodiment as it pertains to many diverse fields, such as animal studies, sound studies, and new materialism.⁶² Posthumanism’s decentering of the human as the primary concern of study also highlights the possibility and value of other areas of examination, such as non-human beings and inanimate elements of the environment. Cristin Ellis explains how posthumanism leads to this egalitarian approach: “Although posthumanism does not deny that there are substantial differences between forms of life (between, say, humans, octopi, and mushrooms), its materialism does highlight the impossibility of empirically justifying the categorical moral superiority of any one form of life over others.”⁶³ This non-hierarchical strategy for recognizing materiality of the living and non-living, as well as entities that are seen and unseen, offers possibilities for dynamic encounters. These interconnections between female bodies and components of the environment result in a

posthumanist subject—“a relational subject constituted in and by multiplicity” that includes the “non-human” and “earth” others.⁶⁴

With a focus on the “environment” instead of “nature,” this dissertation affirms a contemporary ecological reconfiguration of place and space. In *Ecology Without Nature* (2007), Timothy Morton privileges the term “environment” instead of “nature” to envision life as a “being-with” or “continuity” between humans and other forms of life, such as plants and animals.⁶⁵ As a “transcendental term in a material mask,” the term “nature” has come to signify so many realms that it fails to function as a lucid symbol of meaning.⁶⁶ Like Morton, I opt for the term “environment” as a strategy for discussing intersections between all forms of being within a particular place. Kathleen Kirby’s definition of space offers another foundational concept for this study: “Space forms a medium for reconnecting us with the material, but it also maintains a certain fluidity, a mobility: If we are speaking of space in the abstract, it is susceptible to folding, division, and reshaping.”⁶⁷ Kirby’s description of space as a fluid medium helps us envision the array of connections that the body creates with its surroundings. As an intermediary between bodies and material forces, space becomes an integral component for the construction of femalities.

Building on contemporary concerns that address the complexity of blackness, this project also joins current conversations in the field of black studies. Creating intersections among fields such as black studies, spatial studies, and geography, Katherine McKittrick asserts that the “interplay between domination and black women’s geographies is underscored by the social production of space.”⁶⁸ McKittrick emphasizes space and geography as sites that produce alternative forms of knowledge for female blackness, an approach that I explore as a means for understanding enslaved women’s

interconnectedness with their environments during the antebellum period. Following Sharpe's call to activism, I see this project as a way of thinking about "Black flesh, Black optics" and "producing enfleshed work."⁶⁹ In tandem with what Sharpe describes as "wake work," this project turns to the antebellum period to examine black enslaved women's experience as a strategy for excavating the racist history of our past and for recovering new stories about black women's resistance to oppression.⁷⁰

The stakes of my arguments about materialist embodiment might also be thought of in terms of Elizabeth Grosz's work on alternate ontologies. Grosz elucidates how ontologies offer alternative vistas for understanding the world: "It is because ontologies have ethical and political—as well as aesthetic and cultural—resonances that they provide limits and obstacles, an outside, to epistemological frameworks."⁷¹ By exploring intersections between women and non-human bodies within and "outside" the patriarchy, I explore how this materiality offers a different mode of being that has political and personal implications for women in this period.⁷² At the conclusion of her study on the relationship between ideality and materiality, Grosz proposes a new ontology, what she terms "ontogenesis," "a thinking of the processes that engender all kinds of becomings."⁷³ My dissertation is just such an ontogenetic project, and I use Grosz's characterization of the mutuality between divergent beings as a foundational idea for my critical framework: "At their most consistent and unchanging, beings are nevertheless points of convergence for an infinity of relations that ensure the entire system of things, the universe, is always changing, becoming."⁷⁴

This dissertation uses femality as a wide rubric of experience to explore how materiality alters human embodiment through diverse interactions and exchanges. Each

chapter offers different orientations of femality to open up questions and concerns about the relationship between the body and the materiality of its surroundings. These femalities suggest different modalities of being in the world, revealing how encounters between material bodies and diverse agencies generate a concept of personhood that is at times plural and ecological.

My first chapter, “Textures of Intimacy in Julia Ward Howe’s *The Hermaphrodite*,” expands the nineteenth-century concept of ecstasy by examining how performativity creates spaces of intimacy and connection through textures that are materialist and somatic. Synthesizing Berlant’s concept of “intimacy” with Eve Sedgwick’s understanding of “texture,” I argue that performances of poetry, drama, and music, provide Laurence with ecstatic connections of intimacy that are powerful, yet transient. In the spaces of his art performances, Laurence expresses his intersex body through various types of materiality. As a ballerina, Rösli enacts a different type of performance that offers an artistic visualization of matter’s dynamism to inspire a futurity of gender fluidity for Laurence. Although Laurence never comes to fully accept his intersex body, his somatic experiences of materiality allow him to feel textures of intimacy within artistic spaces of creativity and performance.

My second chapter, “Companion Skies: Shared Flights of Resistance in Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s *A Story of Avis*,” moves from the materialist connections of performance to the human-animal relationship in order to consider companionship as a modality of shared time and personhood. By intertwining significant moments of Avis’s development with bird life, Phelps demonstrates how “shared flights” between humans and animals produce resistance against patriarchal oppression. Motherhood offers a complex experience of

restriction and agency to create unsuccessful conditions for flight while also engendering flights of futurity. Phelps creates a feminist approach that recognizes and incorporates birds as central figures throughout her novel. The variety and complexity of shared flights between female and bird bodies opens up new possibilities for a shared world of co-existence.

My third chapter, “Ecologies of the Wild in Crafts’s *The Bondwoman’s Narrative*,” examines how female ecologies are created by the materiality of the wild by focusing on Rose and Hannah, two enslaved women who encounter the environment in distinct ways. For Rose, the linden tree, as an element of the wild of the plantation zone, is a site of both suffering and resistance. After Sir Clifford tortures her on its branches, Rose’s presence diffuses into the linden to transform it into a site of paranormal agency. During her escapes into the wild of the forest, Hannah experiences an alternate temporality and demonstrates her knowledge of the environment. Hannah’s retreat into a cottage space at the end of the novel offers an ambiguous representation of freedom. Although Hannah offers a picture of freedom, the realities of the antebellum period haunt the frame to suggest that the threat of the wild can never be fully escaped.

This dissertation is a study of the potentialities that exist in moments of contact and relationality between bodies and materiality. Quilting historicist concerns of the nineteenth century with emergent theoretical fields that address contemporary concerns, this project seeks to unsettle traditional conceptualizations of the body by reformulating it within a materialist domain. It is a study of movements—those that occur on, within, and beyond the frame of the body and those set in motion by the energetic and endlessly renewing material forces that take on different forms outside of it. In contrast to a frame that posits

the body and materiality as passive entities, femality, as a materialist optic, recognizes both the body and materiality as potentialities of contact, exchange, and transformation. As a secondary concern, movements between female bodies and entities of the environment, such as plants, trees, and birds, reveal a configuration of womanhood that is both ecological and integrated within its surroundings. While some movements eventually slow or reach their resting state, others keep going, endlessly becoming, to take on new forms and ecological dimensions.

CHAPTER ONE

Textures of Intimacy in Julia Ward Howe's *The Hermaphrodite*

Sound, gladsome measure! at whose bidding once
 I felt the flush of pleasure to my brow,
 While my soul shook the burthen of the flesh,
 And in its young pride said, 'Lie lightly, thou!'¹

In this excerpt from “My Last Dance,” which appears in the collection, *Passion-Flowers* (1854), Julia Ward Howe details the ecstasy of a body taken over by the sound of music and the power of dance. The speaker's brow “flush[es]” in response to the music's entreaty as she begins to move beyond her bodily form. The image of the soul, “shak[ing] off the weight of her flesh,” corresponds to the nineteenth-century view of “ecstasy” as a moment of rapture when the soul transcends its bodily form. In *Reminiscences 1819-1899* (1899), Howe uses “ecstasy” to depict a new believer's religious experience upon encountering the divine: “The rapture of this new freedom, of this enlarged brotherhood, which made all men akin to the Divine Father of all... might well produce in a neophyte an exhilaration bordering upon ecstasy.”² In this religious example of bodily “ecstasy” or “rapture,” an encounter with the Other inspires the movement of the soul's flight beyond its boundary. While Howe codes ecstasy as an experience of transcending the corporeal that results from a passionate encounter with music or divine power, I want to expand, or thicken, what ecstasy entails by examining *The Hermaphrodite* (unpublished in era/composed in 1840s) for its textures within modalities of performativity that function as alternative fields of intimacy.

José Esteban Muñoz's queer formulation of ecstasy as utopic provides a foundation for my reading of ecstasy as somatic and performative. In *Cruising Utopia* (2009), Muñoz works from Ernst Bloch's understanding of utopia and Heidegger's theory of temporality

to argue that queerness is “performative because it is not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future.”³ As a horizon of possibility and potentiality that opens up the present by disrupting “straight time,” queerness can be understood as a “modality of ecstatic time” that offers up an alternative futurity.⁴ Muñoz not only reformulates the notion of queerness by positioning it within futurity but also reconfigures ecstasy into a paradigm that does not rely on a single participant. In contrast to the religious view of ecstasy that offers a “singular shattering” to describe the “jouissance” or the “transport of Christian rapture,” Muñoz argues that we should “take ecstasy with one another, in as many ways as possible” to experience the potentialities of queer futurity.⁵ Drawing from this recalibration of ecstasy into a collective, temporal experience, I reimagine Howe’s nineteenth-century variety of ecstasy as a materialist experience of a body in performance that creates surprising relations across time and space.

The Hermaphrodite tells the story of Laurence, an ambiguously sexed protagonist, whose search for self-acceptance and romantic fulfillment is never realized. In section one, Laurence shares details about his physicality and two of his romantic relationships, one with Emma von P., a widow and classmate during his time at a German university, and the other with Ronald, a young man, who develops affection for Laurence that ends in frustration when Laurence refuses to live as a “woman” for him. Section two chronicles Laurence’s time in Rome with Berto, a Roman nobleman who tutors him on a variety of subjects. Disguising himself as a woman named Cecilia, Laurence spends time with Berto’s sisters to hide from his father. In the final section of the novel, which is a continuation of section two, Laurence reunites with Ronald before falling ill.

The Hermaphrodite has been read as a transcendentalist text that marks Howe's beginnings as a feminist writer as well as a daring text that is unprecedented in American literature for its depiction of an intersex character.⁶ As Gary Williams and Renée Bergland assert, the novel "forces us to reexamine what we thought we knew about the range of possibilities entertained by writers in Howe's era concerning variations in sex, gender, and sexuality."⁷ Although the subject of Laurence's ambiguity, specifically regarding his gender and sexuality, has taken center stage in contemporary scholarship on the novel, the significance of the role of performativity in the novel has been overlooked.⁸ I will add to these conversations by offering a viewpoint of Laurence that holds up Howe's use of performativity to the light to consider how art outlines the shadows or redefines the contours of ecstatic connection for othered bodies. By examining how ecstasy opens up the possibility of different connections of and beyond the body, I hope to contribute to the field of queer studies by formulating different modes of intimacy.

In order to construct a contemporary lens that constellates performance along lines of intimacy, I work from Lauren Berlant's definition of relation as a mode that "builds worlds."⁹ In contrast to the idea of intimacy as a stable attachment, Berlant defines intimacy as a "drive" that "creates spaces and usurps places meant for other kinds of relation."¹⁰ Performances of art—spaces where textures of ecstasy circulate—produce heightened moments of intimacy that draw lines of connection between both the artist and audience and within the artist himself. By "performance," I primarily refer to an artist's performance of his/her art, such as a play, piece of music, or artwork before an audience. However, when I discuss Laurence's performance of womanhood, Judith Butler's influential concept of gender performativity also applies. Butler asserts:

Acts, gestures, and desire produce an effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.¹¹

Gender is a socially constructed performance of acts and gestures that signify a particular identity. Butler's emphasis on the bodily nature of such constructions is important when considering moments in the novel when Laurence filters his performances through his intersex body. By mapping ecstasy as sites of performance throughout the novel, I delineate intimacy as a materialist experience, taking the sensory elements of each experience of a body in motion into account. Using Eve Sedgwick's notion of "texture," a term she defines as "an array of perceptual data that includes repetition, but whose degree of organization hovers just below the level of shape or structure," I trace the materiality of the body, through entities such as voice, touch, and movement, in order to widen the scope of ecstatic experience.¹²

In the first section of this chapter, I examine how the textures of Laurence's performances—as a poet, woman, and artist—transport him into realms of ecstasy, where different types of world-making occur. Then I shift to a queer ecological perspective to consider how the relationship between Laurence and the dynamic ballerina Rösli offers Laurence a utopic vision of ecstasy. On stage, Rösli portrays a metamorphic power of renewal through dance to provide Laurence with a representation of fluidity. In the final section of this chapter, I build on and depart from Bergland's discussion of Howe's relationship to sculpture by highlighting some of the text's foreclosures—moments when silence, coldness, immobility depict textures of isolation, when worlds cannot be made and relations aren't possible. Laurence's othered body reveals dynamic exchanges that occur

across textures of intimacy to suggest that ecstasy arises and extends from materialist embodiment.

EPIC DRAG

As epic poems that offer early imaginings of gender hierarchies within a patriarchal system, Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* have inspired many feminist writers to revise narratives of the past as a strategy for telling new stories about women's lives.¹³ In her lecture on this subject, Carolyn Heilbrun uses Penelope's weaving and unweaving as a metaphor for women writers' need to alter the past: "We cannot yet make wholly new fictions; we can only transform old tales, and recognize how women have transformed old tales in the past. Out of old tales, we must make new lives."¹⁴ In *The Hermaphrodite*, Laurence's poetic performance, which Howe places within a classical frame, gestures towards this potentiality of transformation.¹⁵ In this section, I examine how Laurence combines elements of his materialist corporeality with poetic form to produce an ecstatic connection during his poetic performance.

Laurence's first performance takes place during college when he recites a poem for an esteemed competition. Prior to his performance, Laurence singles out the poems of his worthy competition, such as the "disquisition on the sufferings of Dido" and the "ode commemorative of the constancy of Penelope," for their surprisingly kind treatment of two renowned heroines.¹⁶ Laurence also gives an overview of the rest of the readings, noting that a revolutionary poem was followed by theological argument in blank verse, "productions" which fell under a "classic" theme (13). In the final act before Laurence, Wilhelm, a classmate who sees Laurence as a threat to his quest to win Emma von P.'s love, reads a "graceful lyric" on the "ever old and new subject of love," in an attempt to

win Emma von P.'s approval before confidently announcing that Laurence doesn't have a poem for the competition (14). Since Wilhelm burned Laurence's poem the night before the competition, Laurence decides to repeat his poem "memorata" for his audience. And yet, instead of reciting his poem verbatim, Laurence recounts his performance of the poem along with examples of its concrete imagery:

Then with a voice of silvery sweetness, and in a measure peculiarly my own, I *sang the sufferings of a soul* exiled from heaven, and sent into this world invested with the semblance, but not the attributes of humanity. *I told of its solitary wanderings on earth*, how it could nothing make, nothing possess—how its abstract orphanhood could establish no relationship, and extort no sympathy from the souls of men, veiled in a flesh of whose wants and powers it knew nothing. The alternative was then offered to it of becoming utterly mortal, or of returning to its ghostland, and I closed with some thrilling numbers descriptive of the noble scorn with which the pure spirit refused to bear the free and fearless courage with which it spread its wings, and flew back to the bosom of its God. (14) (my emphasis)

Laurence begins his song by highlighting two textures of his performance: his voice of "silvery sweetness" and the "measure" of his poem that is "peculiarly his own." As a physical product of his intersex body, Laurence's voice offers a portrayal of what Roland Barthes defines as the grain of the voice—the "body in the voice as it sings."¹⁷ Prior to the competition, Laurence shares that he wrote his poem without "labour" and "almost without any fixed design." His writing process reflects the ancient belief that a visit from a daemonic spirit resulted in creative inspiration. By recording his "states of feeling," Laurence follows "the guidance of voices" which come to him at various points throughout the day, "utter[ing] themselves in song" (10). As an intermingling of voices, Laurence's poetic song combines textures of sound that resonate across historical and temporal boundaries. Crafting his poem from the choir of his imagination, he then shares his voice through the medium of lyric poetry. Laurence's sonic textures simultaneously reverberate in the present while echoing the past.

Rewriting Homer's *The Odyssey* within Laurence's poetic song, Howe pushes against the construct for an epic hero by replacing the conventional masculine Odysseus with a soul who is similar to Laurence, one who is "exiled from heaven" and does act with "free and fearless courage."¹⁸ In *The Odyssey*, the bard's opening lines offer several points of comparison to Laurence's poetic song:

*Sing to me of the man, Muse, the man of twists and turns ...
driven time and again off course, once he had plundered
the hallowed heights of Troy.
Many cities of men he saw and learned their minds,
many pains he suffered, heartsick on the open sea,
fighting to save his life and bring his comrades home.*¹⁹

Like Odysseus who "is driven time and again off course," Laurence experiences "wanderings" and inspires a song about "suffering." In contrast to Odysseus, who reunites with Penelope in a final heteronormative, domestic homecoming, Laurence never recovers from his initial exile as a soul "veiled in flesh," living without knowledge about his physicality. Odysseus shares camaraderie with his shipmates while Laurence travels alone. When given the choice between becoming mortal or returning to his "ghostland," Laurence chooses the spiritual realm. While Odysseus battles the adversities of the sea, the wandering soul cannot escape its "orphanhood," failing to receive any "sympathy" from humanity.

Laurence's reading is a queer performance, or what I think of as epic drag, a moment that allows him to touch and, in a sense, rewrite epic history through the texture of language, specifically poetic song. Elizabeth Freeman's work on the relationship between allegory and temporal drag elucidates how the queer performing body becomes a site where new meaning can be fashioned from a renowned story of the past.²⁰ Building on Butler's foundational work on performative drag, Freeman coined the term "temporal drag"

to describe a performing body that “crosses” through time, “a mode of stubborn identification with a set of social coordinates that exceed [one’s] own historical moment.”²¹ Freeman’s discussion on the relationship between melancholia and allegory gives insight into Laurence’s revision of Homer:

Melancholia connotes inward movement, for it preserves the lost object as an aspect of one grieving person’s subjectivity, interior, unconscious. Allegory, on the other hand, traffics in collectively held meanings and experiences, pushing the melancholic’s rather solipsistic incorporation back outward in order to remake the world in a mock-imperialist gesture. Allegory’s narrative “cure” can never be merely personal, or the allegory itself would not make sense: the prior story that gets retold must already be in the public domain.²²

By choosing Homer’s *The Odyssey* as a loose palimpsest for Laurence’s ghostland poem, Howe creates contact between Laurence, the intersex protagonist on his journey, and Odysseus, the ur-construct for masculinity. In this framework, Laurence translates his grief and melancholia into a collective experience by reciting a poem that acts as a “mock-imperialist” gesture to signal the possibility of a different construct for masculinity housed within an ambiguously sexed body. Laurence’s journey of isolation becomes that much more poignant within the frame of *The Odyssey*, a renowned “story” within the “public domain.” In musical terms, Laurence’s lyric poem functions as a cover song of Homer’s epic poem, what Judith Halberstam defines as “a drag act, a way of inhabiting another persona or body or voice, and it is a way of doing so while consciously registering the performance rather than merely blending into the original.”²³

Even though his recital of the poem is public, Laurence experiences the ecstasy of intimacy with his audience by giving voice to his isolation as an othered body. Susan Stewart’s understanding of poetry as a mode that incorporates the body into its method of expression affirms Laurence’s intersex body as a significant element of his performance:

“*Poiēsis* as figuration relies on the senses of touching, seeing, and hearing that are central to the encounter with the presence of others, the encounter of recognition between persons.”²⁴ Paradoxically, as Laurence sings about his tragic journey of isolation and rejection, he captivates his audience: “My audience was deeply and attentively silent, and when my voice ceased, one long-drawn breath betrayed the interest with which I had been heard”(14). The audience’s rapt attention and held breath throughout the reading signal their engagement with his performance. By creating a shared space of sound and silence through his poetic song, Laurence uses his voice as a mode of relation, overcoming his separateness through the art of performance.

Laurence’s ecstatic connection with his audience is short-lived. Immediately following his reading of the poem, Emma von P. professes her heterosexual desire for Laurence by asking, “Why do you take no one with you?”(15). This heteronormative question emphasizes Laurence’s failure to achieve the romantic model of courtship by choosing a solo journey. During the celebratory dance that follows the competition, Laurence overhears the conversation of two strangers debating the exact nature of Laurence’s beauty. One stranger remarks, “His beauty is of a more vague and undecided character—it is a face and form of strange contradictions—the eye and brow command, while the mouth persuades”(16). He then compares Laurence to the renowned hermaphrodite statue in the Villa Borghese. At the mention of this comparison, Laurence no longer listens, his eyes tear up, and his heart feels heavy (16). Within the textures of his first performance, Laurence sings his own poetic song to be seen as a poet instead of solely as a hermaphroditic body or representation of beauty that has yet to be classified. As a medium of materialist ecstasy, lyric poetry provides Laurence with a creative space to

voice his body and achieve an intimate connection with his audience in the present, while simultaneously altering the sonic poetic tradition of the past.

“WHAT IS IT TO BE A WOMAN?”

Our internal imaginings of the self materialize in the pieces of clothing we wear each day. These stylistic choices in turn produce our outward representations of gender along the spectrum of masculine and feminine as well as anything that falls between. In *The Hermaphrodite*, Howe shows an awareness of this interconnectedness between clothing and gender by creating several materialist encounters for Laurence’s experience of womanhood through fashion. During his time with Ronald, Laurence becomes the Shakespearean actress Juliet in an impromptu public performance of the play; then later, in a much more intimate encounter, Laurence dresses as a woman to hide from his father while staying with the sisters of his friend Berto. Joanne Entwistle’s definition of dress provides a useful framework for considering why Howe chooses clothing as a method for Laurence’s experience of womanhood: “Dress is an embodied practice, a situated bodily practice that is embedded within the social world and fundamental to microsocial order.”²⁵ Laurence’s cross-dressing and undressing encounters with the fashion of womanhood reveal how antebellum society constructed the feminine while also showing the disconnect that can occur between the mind and body.²⁶ Although Laurence’s intersex body gives him the physical capacity to be dressed for and move within both masculine and feminine worlds, he never successfully merges these worlds into a harmonious selfhood. In this section, I examine Laurence’s experimentation and role-playing with feminine clothing to explore the various intersections that Howe creates between gender identity, fashion, and

shame. Although Laurence experiences temporary identifications with womanhood, he channels ecstasy through the medium of performance within the public and private domain.

Laurence's first cross-dressing performance as a woman takes place during his public performance of Juliet. When the tragedian fails to show up to perform as Juliet, Laurence steps in after being cajoled by the crowd that includes his beloved friend, Ronald. Howe sets up a parallel to his later encounter with woman's clothing by providing details of his behind the scenes preparation:

The dress of the ill-fated Juliet was there, waiting for me, but it was with a strange foreboding that I clothed myself in its white draperies. Romeo was at hand eager to lend me any assistance in his power. He undid my queue, and marveled at the abundance and beauty of my hair. I suffered it to fall in loose locks upon my neck, and bound some trumpery garland about my brow. (81)

Similar to the intimate encounter that appears later in the text, Laurence struggles to put on women's clothing without help from someone else. He is not overtly exuberant about putting on the "white draperies" to become Juliet but instead experiences a "strange foreboding." Laurence also notes how Romeo comes to his aid by helping him get dressed and by taking his hair down. Howe emphasizes Laurence's striking appearance by highlighting how Romeo "marvel[s]" at the luxuriance of his hair.

As Juliet, Laurence experiences the ecstatic intimacy of a theatrical performance.²⁷ Connecting with the feminine as Juliet, Laurence experiences the ecstasy of self-acceptance: "Utterly indifferent as I was to the approval of those around me, I soon forgot them, and felt for a moment a nameless pleasure in being something other than myself. My heart warmed, my voice became deeper and fuller, and I found myself giving fervent expression to the glowing words of the Italian woman-child" (81). Howe denotes the somatic qualities of his ecstasy with the "warm[ing]" of his heart, the shift in the register of

his voice, and the rise of excitement he feels when speaking Italian. In this ecstatic moment, Laurence enjoys an intimate connection between himself as Juliet, forgetting the insecurities he often dwells on concerning his body.

In section two of the novel, Laurence enacts an intimate performance of womanhood that leads to an ecstatic experience of self-knowledge. Laurence dons the restrictive clothing of womanhood to live undercover as a woman with Berto's sisters as an "English lady of distinction" to avoid being discovered by his lurking father (133). In an embodied "gesture" of womanhood, what Carrie Noland conceptualizes as a "unit of significant, visible shape" and a "quantity of employable force," Laurence performs Cecilia and intimately experiences femininity. Bodies take on meaning through gestures, and gesturing is also a mode where cultural meaning becomes embodied and transmitted.²⁸ With his choice of dress, Laurence not only reveals the societal constraints of nineteenth-century womanhood but also portrays his understanding of womanhood through the textural materiality of clothing. As a woman, Laurence speaks in a playful tone that suggests his enjoyment and surprise during his womanly "masquerade":

What will you say to me, fair reader, if I present myself before you in feminine masquerade, stockade with buckram and cotton, hanging out the veil, that feminine banner of deceit, upon a tower (in Solomonic phrase) some six feet in height, and with a wide moat of emptiness between the outer curtain of my entrenchments, and the inner, inexpugnable fortress of myself. Will you recognize me with an astonished smile, and a "who would have thought it?" or will you treat me as men and women are apt to treat an old friend in an equivocal position, and pass me staring at nothing, or at me as if I were nothing?...If you know me not, now, you never knew me, and so, questioned or unquestioned, let me pass. (130)

By becoming Cecilia through the art of fashion, Laurence experiences ecstasy in the interstitial space of play produced by performativity. In this rare direct address as Cecilia, Laurence flirts by posing questions of possibility, such as "What will you say to me?" or

“Will you recognize me with an astonished smile?” By directly addressing the reader, Laurence initiates a role-playing game between the play, the spectator, and the recognition that language produces double entendre. Bianca Idelson argues that this tripartite paradigm disrupts the conventional position of the unconscious that exists between spectator and play by shifting the spectator into a participatory mode: “Thus the spectator’s function seems to take on a particular importance. S/he is no longer a passive participant but actively takes part in the process of producing meaning, which is the most enjoyable part of all.”²⁹ Laurence’s direct address to the reader is a bold expression of confidence that stems from his ecstatic, implied connection with the reader or viewer of his performance.

While speaking within this register, or texture, of femininity, Laurence also intimately engages with the womanly textures of fabric, feeling the materiality of the “buckram” and “cotton” against his skin. As a signifier of his feminine side, his dress reveals an aspect of his identity he has previously ignored. Christina Giorcelli’s and Paula Rabinowitz’s description of the interconnection between clothing and identity is useful for considering how Laurence’s experience of clothing generates multiple meanings for him that remain unseen by his audience: “The conjunction of clothing and identity is always an exchange, a substitution of the visible outer layer for a supposed inner one, impenetrable to the gaze but in endless circulation within multiple locations and temporalities.”³⁰ With the choices of defense terms such as “stockade” and “entrenchments,” Laurence implies that the feminine clothes forge a protective boundary for the “inexpugnable fortress” of his hidden selfhood. Paradoxically, he takes on the affect of the feminine while also shielding himself beneath it. Throughout this scene, Laurence shows awareness of his performance with self-reflexivity by pointing out that he is in a “new guise” and a “feminine

masquerade.” In contrast to the timid Laurence that we see earlier in the novel, Laurence, as Cecilia, exhibits confidence by asserting, “If you know me not, now, you never knew me,” a sassy phrase that expresses Laurence’s lack of concern for what his audience thinks about his new appearance.

This scene of performance takes on more significance in light of Laurence’s complex relationship with womanhood throughout the novel. In an early conversation with Emma von P, Laurence asks himself, “What is it to be a woman?” before admitting, “It is obviously a matter of which I have small conception” (15). Not long after this initial questioning, he asks himself again, “What is it to be a woman?” (16). Although he is curious about womanhood at the beginning of the novel, he also demonstrates antipathy towards aspects of himself that might be considered womanly during and after his time at the hermitage. He tells Ronald, “No woman shall tend me,” and “I cannot suffer the presence of woman,” even declaring his competitive rock toss as not a “woman’s throw”(52, 61). After Laurence’s flawless acting performance as Juliet, Ronald asks Laurence to live as a “sweet, warm, living woman” with him, only to be met with silence (86).

In his intimate encounter with femininity, Laurence experiences an ecstasy of knowledge from his newfound education about womanhood. Even though the chapter opens with Laurence’s confident address, he later tells his audience that figuring out how to put on the women’s clothing required all of the skill that he and Berto could muster. Laurence gives details about their tactile process of learning: “Our clumsy fingers were sadly at fault among the endless hooks and eyes, the lacings and eyelet holes. I pricked myself with the pins, and strangled myself with the ribbons” (136). Overwhelmed with his

lack of dexterity, Laurence highlights his discomfort by “prick[ing]” his skin and “strangl[ing]” himself with the intricate fastenings of the dress. By giving the reader a peek into Laurence’s intimate act of dressing, Howe constructs a reverse strip tease that transforms the reader into participant viewer in a move that recalls Laurence’s earlier playful description of his womanly disguise. And yet Howe undermines the potentiality of the erotic desire of this reverse strip by highlighting Laurence’s clumsiness and inability to put on the women’s clothing by himself. He later compares the dress to the “fabled dress of Hercules” which was “full of uneasiness and of torture”(136). Nevertheless, he passes as a woman with Berto’s sisters without being discovered.

After gaining a deeper understanding of womanhood, Laurence deconstructs the artfulness of woman’s fashion by pivoting on the term “masquerade” for his critique. As scholars have noted, Howe uses this scene that details Laurence’s experience of confinement to criticize the patriarchal construct of womanhood. After he draws his audience in with his playfulness, Laurence contends that “there is another masquerade the reverse of this”—the patriarchal surveillance of women within society. In this other masquerade, women are “adored” without being “trusted,” “golden treasures” that must be “kept under lock and key,” victims that face the “interrogation of public opinion” (131). Laurence admits that it must be “odd” for him to give up his freedom by conforming to “the bondage of this narrow life (the true meaning of the term ‘petticoat government’ being that the petticoat governs her who wears it)” (131). Howe uses Laurence in this scene to vent her own frustrations against the societal restrictions she faced within a patriarchal system.

As an educated woman living in the antebellum period, Howe was fully aware of the significance of the relationship between gender equality and clothing. In *Sex and Education: A Reply to Dr. E.H. Clarke* (1874), Howe writes:

Boys are much in the open air. Girls are much in the house. Boys wear a dress which follows and allows their natural movements. Girls wear clothes which impede and almost paralyze their limbs. Boys have, moreover, the healthful hope held out to them of being able to pursue their own objects, and to choose and follow the business or profession of their choice. Girls have the dispiriting prospect of a secondary and derivative existence, with only so much room allowed them as may not cramp the full sweep of the other sex.³¹

In each of these comparisons that draw on children's play space, clothing, and aspirations, Howe emphasizes the way society places a boy within a space of freedom and a girl within a space of restriction. By focusing on children, Howe highlights the underlying structure of patriarchal society: the coded messages we receive about gender are subtly packaged and communicated before we are fully aware of their significance. She also shows how the patriarchy reinforces a pattern of confinement across different threads of life experience, designating a young girl's inability to imagine a future for herself as one of the most destructive consequences of these influences.

Even though Laurence gains self-knowledge and a deeper understanding of womanhood in his performance, his identification with Cecilia is temporary. In a later private scene of intimacy, Laurence stands in front of the mirror, contemplates how he got into the "complete armour of silk and linen," and surmises that it will take a "sudden burst of fury" to free him from the "eyelets, laces, buttons, and all" (147). He then considers using scissors to cut up the fabrics before deciding to "untie little knots" and to "follow little strings to their remote sources." Once he unravels the corset, he repeats "I, a woman?" to himself before jumping onto the bed "in shame" and hiding his head beneath the clothes.

Butler's discussion of the instability of gender identification offers insights into why Laurence struggles to fully identify with one sex:

This "being a man" and "being a woman"...are always beset by ambivalence precisely because there is a cost in every identification, the loss of some other set of identifications, the forcible approximation of a norm one never chooses, a norm that chooses us, but which we occupy, reverse, resignify to the extent that the norm fails to determine us completely.³²

Laurence renounces his femininity by aggressively tearing off his clothing, an act that expresses his decision to reaffirm his prior identification with manhood. Sarah Munty's description of shame is useful for understanding why Laurence might have responded to his identification with womanhood in such an aggressive manner: "Shame is an emotion that can occur momentarily, and intensely, in moments of acute embarrassment and humiliation."³³ Although Laurence's experiences with womanhood have the potential to be transformational, he ultimately decides to live as a man.

Laurence's rejection of womanhood circles back to his earlier denial of Ronald's request for him to live as a woman. In this moment of shame about his ambiguous body, Laurence confronts his repressed desire for Ronald: "And I dreamed, oh! I dreamed of one who had once almost made a woman out of me!"(147). By removing the corset, which is a representation of female erotic beauty, or what Valerie Steele describes as "a machine for the erotic production of seductive femininity," Laurence demonstrates his inability to fully express his sexual desire as a woman.³⁴ In this affirmation of manhood, Laurence also remembers Ronald's desire and request for him to adopt a life of womanhood. Although Laurence "dreams" of the possibility of a life with Ronald, he is never capable of translating his dreams into reality.

CECILIA'S SONG

According to Howe's daughters, Laura E. Richards and Maud Howe Elliott, music was one of the "passions" of their mother's life.³⁵ In *Reminiscences 1819-1899* (1900), Julia Ward Howe describes the musical education she received as child. She shares that it "was the best that the time could afford," while she recounts the variety of musical teachers and training she received. She learned to appreciate the great composers, Beethoven, Handel, and Mozart.³⁶ Once she was old enough to train her voice, Howe did "daily exercises in holding long notes" to strengthen her lungs and "improve" her voice "in character" and "in compass."³⁷ Her daughters describe the impact these lessons had on Howe's development as a singer: "Julia's voice developed into a pure, clear mezzo-soprano, of uncommon range and exquisite quality."³⁸ As an adult looking back on this poignant educational moment of her childhood, Howe reveals her awareness of the depth of the influence music had on her life: "I think I have felt all my life through the benefit of those early lessons."³⁹ In *The Hermaphrodite*, we see Howe's affection for the power of song in the various musical scenes of the novel. As another form of artful connection, music provides Laurence with a different type of expression for his intersex body. In this section, I examine how Laurence's singing performance translates into an ecstatic moment of intimacy within and beyond his corporeal frame.

In section three of the novel, Laurence, as Cecilia, sings and plays on the piano an original piece of music for Berto's sisters. Laurence's piano score and vocal performance spark an ecstasy of intimacy from musical improvisation, what Gillian Siddall and Ellen Waterman define as "a form of knowledge creation through expressive practice" that allows one to "narrate the past through the filter of the present moment."⁴⁰ Instead of "wait[ing] for suggestions of the company," Laurence "follow[s] songs as they suggest

themselves” (150). By singing, Laurence transmits sonic textures of his embodiment while also producing a variegated medley, or “odd mosaic,” to communicate facets of his unconventional bodily experience:

I gave them my souvenirs of Malibran in Otello and Cenerentola, snatches from Beethoven, von Weber, and Bellini—a melody of Schubert’s, a barcarole of Venice, a jodel of the Alps were each in turn woven into this odd mosaic, which terminated in a magnificent strain that I had caught, that very morning, from the mass in the famous side chapel at St. Peter’s. (150)

Laurence combines the eclectic musical textures of the opera singer Maria Malibran’s voice, “snatches” from composers Beethoven, von Weber, and Bellini, along with a “melody” of Schubert’s, a “baracole” of Venice, a “jodel” of the Alps, and a religious “strain” from the mass at St. Peter’s to create what Richard Dyer defines as *pasticcio*, a work that puts elements “from elsewhere” together.⁴¹ Because *pasticcio* “breaks boundaries of medium and genre, and refuses decorum and harmony,” it questions “received wisdom about what is proper” and “about what goes with what.”⁴²

During Laurence’s performance, music inspires ecstasy. With “each note” played and sung, Laurence’s voice “swells” in unison with his soul (150). This progression of intensity breaks open a “new depth” to the music and a “new power” within Laurence to produce it. As his performance crescendos, Laurence delves within to discover his musical power “to the utmost,” before succumbing to its power as he “abandons” himself to the “momentary passion” that comes over him (150). Prior to his performance, Laurence explains how singing high notes leads him to experience a materialist ecstasy of the soul: “To somewhat infinitely above himself, yet also infinitely within himself he addresses those deeply breathed passages, those daring flights, those high notes which seem, like the song of the soaring lark, to drop full of liquid light, from the empyrean” (149). The spatial

movement of the infinite “within” and “above” Laurence’s soul both corresponds to and thickens Howe’s nineteenth century configuration of ecstasy. Paradoxically, Laurence must breathe “deeply” to make a “daring flight.” By comparing his breath to flight and his production of “high notes” to the song of the “soaring lark,” Laurence experiences ecstasy as an expansion of the soul within the corporeal frame, not just beyond it. Embodied sound is ecstatic because it is of the body. When Laurence sings as Cecilia, he intermingles both genders within a single voice to express a medley from his intersex body. Like “liquid light” that spills across the heavens, ecstatic sound diffuses within and transmits from his corporeal frame.

When Laurence’s audience fails to recognize the beauty of his quilted melody, he renounces singing. After he finishes his performance, an anonymous audience member exclaims: “It is precisely the voice of Uberto.” Another audience member seconds this comparison by crying out, “Yes! It is indeed quite the voice of Uberto.” Once Laurence determines that Uberto is the famous Contraltiste in the choir of the Sistine chapel, he loses his composure. Briseida notices a “sudden change of colour and expression” on his face and leads him to the balcony to assuage his sudden onset of illness (150). Laurence then declares, “From that night, I sang no more in Rome.”⁴³ Laurence’s rejection echoes the earlier scene when he reveals his ambiguous body to Emma, only to be met with her vicious insult: “Monster!” (19). Like Emma’s failure to see the beauty of Laurence’s masculine and feminine body, his audience misses the artful design of his sonorous mosaic. Instead of commenting on the diversity of textural sounds, they hear only a male voice—one strain of music expressed.

ECSTASY IN BLOOM

Although Julia Ward Howe loved the theater, performed plays, and even attempted to write a play as a child, her father regulated her exposure to the theater, equating it with immorality.⁴⁴ In June of 1843, Howe was finally able to explore her passion for the theater on her honeymoon since Howe and her husband, Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe, never declined seats to attend shows at Covent Garden in London. Howe recounts in her journal, “I had been denied this pleasure [attending the theater] in my girlhood, and my enjoyment of it at this time was fresh and intense.”⁴⁵ Of all the shows that she attends, Howe singles out the ballet as the most delightful. She writes, “The best stage dancing gives us the classic in fluent form, with the illumination of life and personality.”⁴⁶ In London, she saw the performances of Fanny Elssler and Fanny Cerito, two renowned Romantic ballerinas of her era, who might have inspired the character of Rösli.⁴⁷ Although Howe’s honeymoon was a few years prior to the time that she most likely started to compose *The Hermaphrodite*, Howe’s elaborate ballet scene in the novel shows the theater continued to be a source of inspiration for her as a writer into adulthood.⁴⁸

Although the richness of Laurence’s account of the ballet, *L’eremito degli Alpi*, translated as the *Hermit of the Alps*, and his performance of womanhood that follows this section highlight Rösli’s influential role in the novel, she has yet to be adequately discussed in Howe studies. Williams briefly describes Rösli as Laurence’s “old flame” and argues, “Laurence returns night after night, his thoughts always on the danger Rösli faces from the wicked world.”⁴⁹ Similarly, Marianne Noble similarly reads Rösli as a paragon of innocence in a world of corruption: “Rösli is a pure Swiss ballerina who must ward off the predatory advances of an aristocratic libertine....”⁵⁰ In this section, I alter the performance paradigm that I have previously followed by focusing on Laurence’s relationship to the

dynamic ballerina, Rösli. As a spectator, Laurence returns to the theater on multiple occasions to watch Rösli dance. By performing a dance of dynamic grace and power, Rösli gives Laurence a kinetic vision of movement's ecstasy.

In the past, queer studies and environmental studies have rarely been discussed together. In his project about what he terms "queer environmentality," Robert Azzarello blames this division on different approaches to theory: "Generally, ecocritics emphasize the use of science and the abuse of theory, and queer critics tend towards the opposite."⁵¹ While Azzarello applies his concept of queer environmentality to discuss how several nineteenth-century writers counter a conventional view of reproduction, my interest lies in exploring how an artful rendering of the natural world as process can be translated into a representation of sexuality.⁵²

By considering Rösli's performance from a queer ecological perspective, I reveal how intersections between queer and environmental textures generate an alternative lens for viewing gender identity. In *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire* (2010), Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson define queer ecology as a critical approach: "The task of a queer ecology is to probe the intersections of sex and nature with an eye to developing a sexual politics that more clearly includes considerations of the natural world and its biosocial constitution."⁵³ As a ballerina whose bodily movements of dance represent the "natural world and its biosocial constitution," Rösli inspires Laurence, who struggles to act on his desire, to consider the possibility of fluidity. Karen Barad points out that the anthropocentric nature of performativity in queer theory has led to a tendency to overlook the value of the role matter plays in the identity of the human subject: "What is needed is an account not only of the materialization of "human" bodies but of all

matter(ings)/ materializations, including the materializing effects of boundary-making practices by which the “human” and the “nonhuman” are differentially constituted.”⁵⁴

Creating intersections between dance, sexuality, and the environment, Rösli offers a kinetic, artful representation of matter’s fluidity, an alternative way of being, for Laurence, who struggles to embrace his intersex corporeality.

Jill Dolan’s work on theater provides a beneficial framework for considering how Rösli enacts this utopic vision of gender fluidity through dance. In *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (2010), Dolan builds from Viginie Magnat’s definition of the theater to set up her frame for utopia:

Theater becomes a privileged, intimate area of human experience within which one can demand that the promise of another dimension of existence be revealed, and that the impossible be achieved/experienced here and now, in the presence of other living human beings—the impossible, namely a sense of unity between what is usually divided in our daily life: the material and immaterial, the human body and spirit, our mortality and our propensity for perfection, for infinity, for the absolute.⁵⁵

Magnat’s formulation of the theater as a space where opposite entities come together is useful when considering how Rösli influences Laurence’s identity. Laurence does not fully explore his feminine side in an intimate setting until after visiting the ballet, and his fascination with Rösli could stem from his desire for that which he feels is impossible—self-acceptance. When Rösli effortlessly shifts between nature’s forms, she demonstrates the power that movement between disparate states generates. As Dana Mills argues, dance fosters intimacy by “opening new futures” and “unraveling new worlds” for its participants.⁵⁶ For Laurence, the impossible resides in his inability to move comfortably between the masculine and feminine domains; instead, he struggles and inevitably fails to find comfort in either gender identification.

In order to understand the significance of Romanticism's influence on early ballet in antebellum America, I turn to Carol Lee's work to offer some historical context for these theatrical scenes in the novel. As the first ballets to be introduced in antebellum America, Romantic ballets shared a variety of core elements that contributed to their popularity. Lee elaborates on the relationship between early ballet and Romanticism: "Because ballet production incorporated transcendentalist ideas, reinforced by visual and aural forces, theatrical dance was rendered a powerful medium of expression. The combined elements of plot, décor, and music were made wonderfully vivid by choreography purposely devised to convey the dramatic content through the work of dancers."⁵⁷ Audiences would attend the ballet for an emotional catharsis, and Romantic ballet offered an escape into a fantasy world where human beings engaged with phantom creatures.⁵⁸ This context suggests that Laurence might have visited the theater on several occasions for an emotional catharsis or because of a fascination with Rösli as a fantasy in another world. Lee also emphasizes the supernatural and woman-centered focus of the ballets: "The intriguing story lines of Romantic ballets were often female-centered; a woman's tragic love was shadowed with villains or spirits."⁵⁹ Howe follows this schematic by giving us the tragic story of Rösli and the evil hermit.

In the first act of the ballet, the hermit is introduced, wearing a black mask, living in a hermitage, similar to the one Laurence visited in his past. The background of the scene has "crag, snow mountains, and torrents" that paradoxically run up and down the hill (108). Laurence describes the hut as one that is "not altogether unlike my sometime Alpine residence," while the corps de ballet wear costumes from the place "in which I had so long made my abode" (108). By comparing the hermitage with the hut in the ballet, Howe sets

up a comparison between Laurence and the hermit, who has been overtaken by an evil spell. Rösli is introduced in the opening act when her movements transform Laurence's gaze into "one of rapt attention" (109). At the conclusion of the opening scene, Rösli removes the hermit's black mask before he strikes her with his magic wand, leaving her inanimate.

The setting of the second scene shifts to a Swiss cottage where Rösli recovers with her mother. They receive a visit from Dorothea, a forlorn mother, who is trying to find her son, who has been overtaken by an evil spell. When Dorothea shows Rösli and her mother a portrait of her son, Rösli recognizes the evil hermit that she has unmasked. Rösli then promises Dorothea to destroy the evil charm that has transformed her son. In the third scene, the act returns to the hermitage at nightfall. With divine aid, Rösli climbs the hut and enters through the chimney to find the hermit sitting amidst his black art books with his angry dog. By performing a magical sensual dance, Rösli enchants the evil hermit. Once she procures his magic wand as a symbol of his pledged love, she waves it three times, killing the dog and dissipating the evil shapes within the fire. The black mask falls from the hermit, his mother enters the hut, and then Rösli turns pale and dies.

Figuratively, the play divides the binary of Laurence's sexuality between the two main characters; the wizard portrays Laurence's inability to act on desire while Rösli's dance portrays the metamorphosis of the environment—an ecological representation of gender fluidity. In the opening act, Howe juxtaposes the wizard and Rösli in oppositional movements: "As he (the wizard) stands passive, transfixed, a light lithe form bound[s] in starry circlings to his feet" (109). In this binary of stillness vs. fluidity, the motionless behavior of the wizard depicts Laurence's experience within an ambiguously sexed body.

Noble's reading of Laurence as an isolated being offers an understanding of how this passivity resulted in a struggle with sociality: "While Laurence's acquaintances acknowledge him as a superior being, he never enjoys close relationships grounded in sympathy."⁶⁰ When Emma asks for one night of passion with Laurence, he responds by telling her to "think of me only as you think of the dead."⁶¹ In response to Ronald's first profession of love, Laurence feels a "sudden pang" in his heart and his face changes color before he swiftly redirects the conversation by expressing an urgent desire to return to work to find a new mineral (69). When Ronald responds to Laurence's attempt to "print the lightest, faintest kiss upon his forehead" by "part[ing] his red lips," Laurence cannot act on his affection; instead, he "[shrinks] back into [himself]" and then "turn[s]" away from Ronald before leaving town (76).

Rösli offers Laurence an ecstatic vision of fluidity through the power of dance. Laurence attentively watches Rösli as she "bounds" onto the stage to make "starry circlings" before the immobilized wizard (109). In another scene, Laurence visually tracks Rösli's "wavy circles," "brilliant leaps," and "fluttering steps"—repetitive constructions of her footwork that highlight the gracefulness of her dance and his enchantment with her (109). Laurence then compares Rösli's movements to environmental textures of beauty: the leaves of the rose that fall when autumn arrives, the wispieness of a cloud's formation, the fluidity of an ocean wave and a windy breeze (109). Like the rose, wave, and peonies in John Keats's "Ode on Melancholy," Rösli moves with striking gracefulness—each movement evokes glorious wonder and the hint of loss marked by fragile temporality. Laurence struggles to describe her "difficult ascent" to the roof of the hermitage because her grace parallels the way the "moonlight walks abroad at night" (111).⁶² When Rösli

performs her magical dance, Laurence studies the motions of her entire body, such as “the thrilling motions of her arms,” “the bendings of her sweet head,” “the infinitely varied windings of her form”(112). Within a new materialist framework that espouses matter as a force of vitality, Rösli offers an artistic, visual representation for the dynamism of the environment, what Diana Coole and Samantha Frost describe as a “choreography of becoming,” through dance.⁶³ As figurations that point to matter’s endless potential to become and interact with the environment, Rösli’s dance movements portray action as a vital component of life.

Laurence’s response to Rösli’s death in the ballet reveals the depth of his emotional response to her performance. Laurence immediately falls “silent,” and shares that he was “more deeply moved than [he] should care to confess” (113). With silence, Laurence projects a form of bodily stillness that parallels her death and contrasts with her dynamic dance performance. Rösli’s inability to prevail over the wizard in the fantasy storyline also foreshadows Laurence’s fate.

LOST WORLDS

In the gaps of time between the textures of intimacy Laurence experiences through performance, textures of isolation reveal the complexity that living a life within an othered body entails. In these moments where ecstasy cannot be found, Howe portrays a loss of attachment. These textures of loneliness and isolation answer Berlant’s poignant question: “What happens to the energy of attachment when it has no designated place? To the glances, gestures, encounters, collaborations, or fantasies that have no canon?”⁶⁴ Building on what Bergland refers to as a sculpture motif in the novel, I consider how the materiality of sculpture translates into a modality of embodiment for Laurence, one that contrasts with

his somatic performances of ecstasy. These bodily gestures of loss and failure course through the novel as counter currents of loneliness to Laurence's ecstatic connections. Layering these textures in Laurence's characterization of his relationships with Emma and Ronald, Howe quilts the intimacy of desire into the fabric of threads characterized by both loss and connection.

Bergland's discussion of Howe's relationship to sculpture offers a strategy for exploring Howe's portrayal of Laurence's lost worlds of isolation. Bergland not only traces the historical significance of sculpture in the nineteenth century, but also reveals that Howe associated sculpture with "artistic genius, with disembodied spirituality, and with sexuality."⁶⁵ As nude representations of death, sculpture "tied sexuality to death and to the confining limits of embodiment."⁶⁶ In what she describes as a sculpture motif, Bergland briefly touches on moments when Laurence is likened to "a series of sculptures."⁶⁷ Building on and expanding this concept, I examine Laurence's embodiment of sculptural elements, what Howe depicts as bodily moments of silence, stillness, and coldness, to reveal lost worlds of connection. In this framework, these corporeal gestures function as textures of isolation that contrast with Laurence's ecstatic connections of performative ecstasy.

At the beginning of the novel, Laurence's relationship with Emma von P. exhibits varying textures of isolation. On her birthday, Laurence composes an extemporaneous poem for Emma that she declares to be "beautiful, but cold"(8). In a playful conversation where they opt to give depictions of one another, Emma von P. tells Laurence that he is a "marble against which I lean my head, whose pulses throb so that there seems to be a pulse in the cold stone itself—thus, a heart near you may think to feel the presence of one in you,

but it is all marble, only marble” (12). Later in this conversation, after Emma reproaches Laurence for being a “trifler” at his age, Laurence responds with a “cold” and “almost rude” response (12). When Emma visits him during the night to request a night of passion, Laurence listens in “stony silence” before touching her with a cold hand (18).

Laurence often returns Ronald’s expressions of affection with disengagement. When Laurence responds to Ronald’s first profession of love by redirecting the topic of conversation to work, Ronald displays an “expressive silence” with “fixed eyes”(69). After Laurence rejects Ronald’s evocative visionary dream about Laurence becoming a woman, Ronald tells Laurence to stop “look[ing] so coldly” at him (74). Instead of returning Ronald’s embrace when they are reunited after time apart, Laurence meets Ronald with “cold displeasure” (77). When Ronald professes his love again with an aggressive advance, Laurence responds with “silence, as of death”(87).

In the final cliff-hanging scene, Howe builds on previous scenes in the novel by constructing Laurence’s experience of desire as a binary of stasis and movement.⁶⁸ Listening to the sounds around him, Laurence lies “without breath or motion,” as a “deadness and numbness” overtakes his physical form (197). Berto and Briseida “rub and chafe” his “lifeless body” but fail to generate a response from him. This scene recalls and juxtaposes an earlier scene of the novel when Ronald finds Laurence “stiff and cold as marble” at the hermitage and then “warms” and “chafe[s]” Laurence’s “frozen hands” until he regains his strength to move again (50). Lying motionless, Laurence then hears the “falling of one upon his knees” beside him and longs for the “dead silence” to be broken by Ronald’s voice so that he can hear it “once more!” (198). While the novel suggests that

Ronald might awaken Laurence with a kiss, it also suggests that the magical power of a kiss has limits.

This fantasy kiss between a motionless Laurence and a vibrant Ronald recalls Rösli's final kiss with the wizard at the end of the ballet. Earlier in the novel, Laurence details Rösli's last moments: "In her last agony, her arms flung over her head, her lips met those of her lover in one fervent kiss—the attitude was precisely that of Canova's exquisite Cupid & Psyche—another moment, and she lay in marble repose, the fairest of the Nibodes"(112-113). In this context, Rösli awakens the wizard by breaking his spell with a kiss, similar to the way Cupid brings the sleeping Psyche back to life. However, Howe inverts the Greek myth that places the kiss as a precursor to marriage between Cupid and Psyche by likening Rösli's pose of stillness to a sculpture. Even if Ronald, like Cupid and Rösli, successfully awakens Laurence, who parallels the sleeping Psyche and the enchanted wizard, with a passionate kiss, death will soon follow. Joyce Warren's comparison of Laurence's paradoxical double death to entombment emphasizes this moment as another failed connection: "The hermaphrodite dies—or is entombed in a living death. There is no place for the man-woman on earth."⁶⁹

Although we want Laurence to find happiness with Ronald or embrace the fluidity of his intersex body at the conclusion of the novel, perhaps his failure to do either of these is more fitting. Following Sara Ahmed's consideration of what it might mean to "affirm unhappiness," I shift from the nineteenth century to a contemporary frame to consider Laurence's experience as an early data point of unhappiness in the history of a queer genealogy.⁷⁰ In *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), Ahmed asserts that a queer definition of love should be defined in contrary terms to happiness since happiness is often framed

within heterosexuality. As for a possibility for queer love, Ahmed directs us to Simone Weil's definition of love: "Love on the part of someone who is happy is the wish to share the suffering of the beloved who is unhappy. Love on the part of someone who is unhappy is to be filled with joy by the mere knowledge that his beloved is happy without sharing in this happiness or even wishing to do so."⁷¹ This definition of queer love allows us to reframe Laurence's unfulfilled desires and connections as affirmative expressions of unhappiness.

Giving voice to both Laurence and Cecilia within a single corporeal frame, *The Hermaphrodite* not only offers an alternative to heteronormative happiness but also directs us towards a materialist path to ecstasy. Through the haptic and the sonic, within textures of intimacy that intersect, dwell within, and rise out of a body in performance, ecstasy travels, offering spaces of connection.

CHAPTER TWO

Companion Skies: Shared Flights of Resistance in Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *A Story of Avis*

Nobody saw her but the baby-bird. He cocked his eyes at her, and flew away as fast as he could fly. Pudge listened for him as she ran along, half frightened, half happy, in the naughty clothes. She thought he would think it was very funny to see her in Bab's clothes. She hoped he would say,—‘Ba-by! Ba-bee!

—Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, “Baby-Birds”

In this short story titled “Baby-Birds” (1869), Elizabeth Stuart Phelps intertwines female rebellion with bird life, in a similar vein that she fully explores eight years later in the novel, *The Story of Avis* (1877). When her mother tells her to “put on a clean apron” and run an errand to her grandma’s house, Pudge disobeys by choosing to wear her brother’s jacket and pantaloons—a transgression seen only by the baby bird.¹ This shared secret between Pudge and the baby bird parallels an early scene in *The Story of Avis* when young Avis discovers her unconventional desire to become an artist while sitting in a tree surrounded by orioles. In both of these moments of adolescent independence, Phelps positions the bird as a confidante and companion for each young girl. In this story and her novel *The Story of Avis*, Phelps recognizes that the human-animal relationship, specifically between the female sex and the bird, functions as a complex space for dynamic cross-species exchanges and patriarchal resistance.

In *The Story of Avis*, orioles, carrier-doves, blue-jays, robins, blue herons, sparrows, and other birds fly throughout the novel, alongside and as images of Avis’s womanhood. By conceptualizing female embodiment as interconnected with and extended by the animal, Phelps counters patriarchal oppression by reconfiguring the concept of late nineteenth-century womanhood. Phelps performs the work of companion species, which involves “living with animals, inhabiting their/our stories, trying to tell the truth about the

relationship, cohabiting an active history.”² By commingling womanhood with animal lives, Phelps signals that animal bodies are bodies of motion that exist yet move beyond the present by embodying the potentiality of the female in flight. Synthesizing theoretical concepts, such as Branca Arsić’s abstract figuration for a bird’s symbolic relationship with human identity and Donna Haraway’s concept of sympoiesis, I explore how Phelps’s unique modes of plural bodies complicates our understanding of the era by depicting collaboration as a form of resistance transmitted across a variety of boundaries.

Some scholars have offered a narrow view of Avis’s connection to the natural world while ignoring the bird as a valid subject of interest.³ The dominant mode of conversation about *The Story of Avis* has been anthropocentric, what Fiona Probyn-Rapsey defines as “a form of human centeredness that places not only at the center of everything but makes ‘us’ the most important measure of all things.”⁴ For example, in the first biography written about Phelps, Mary Angela Barnett argues that Avis’s humanity is the only worthy subject of the novel: “The book is aptly named, for it is truly the story of Avis. Every incident is told with its effect upon her in mind. She is a very real and human person who profits by her experiences.”⁵ Avis Dobell is the titular character, yet we cannot ignore that Phelps includes several species of birds throughout the novel. With the double layering of Avis’s name as the Latin word for bird, the novel is as much about birds as it is about humans. Following Tim Morton’s assertion that “place is no longer simply human,” I argue that the question of the animal is critical, not only as a means of recalculating the limited paradigm for personhood but also as a way of gaining insight into the human-animal relationship in the late nineteenth century.⁶ By considering the value of birds as

creatures and integral carriers of Avis's identity, I hope to diversify the conversation about the novel by bringing it into a contemporary theoretical domain.

Nineteenth-century scholarship has not always regarded the question of the animal as one worth asking, but several contemporary scholars have taken the initiative to remedy this oversight. In *Animals in American Literature* (1983), Mary Allen anticipates future concerns of the field of Animal Studies by granting literary animals their own value.⁷ Although Allen highlights specific animals, such as Melville's whale or London's dogs, she only includes two canonical woman writers, Emily Dickinson and Marianne Moore, in her study. However, by asserting "an astonishing number of actual animals play impressive roles in American Literature," Allen lays the groundwork for a theoretical exploration of animals.⁸ In *Civilized Creatures* (2005), Jennifer Mason argues that the human-animal relationship in the built environment is "essential for understanding the contests for power in the human social order played out in literary texts."⁹ In *Animalia Americana* (2013), Boggs builds on Mason's work by arguing that the human-animal relationship offers insight into the formation of human subjectivity. Boggs sees literature as a critical site of examination of the human-animal relationship: "Literature [is] the site where the relationship with animals is worked out—where it is not an already formed subject that enters into the articulation of its intimate connections, but where the expression of relationships fundamentally confronts us with questions of subjectivity."¹⁰ Each of these Americanist scholars recognizes the literary portrayal of the human-animal relationship as a complex critical subject worthy of being explored, and I hope to build on this work with this study of birds and female personhood.

In another strain of contemporary Americanist scholarship on the nineteenth century, scholars have targeted embodiment as a critical site for exploring the power dynamics of identity. In contrast to former notions of the body as a passive surface or stable entity, Murison examines nineteenth century society's understanding of the nervous system as a way of conceptualizing the body as "open" or, as Charles E. Rosenberg explains, as "always in a state of becoming."¹¹ Building on Murison's work, I envision the female body as "open" and interactive with its environment. Yet, Phelps's commingling of the bird figure with female personhood in various combinations also complicates any singular formulation of the body. In this framework, the female body is a site of plurality—a space of potentiality for dynamic connections with the environment in various dimensions. In *The Story of Avis*, Phelps pluralizes female personhood by pairing Avis's identity with images of birds throughout the novel. In this chapter, I argue that this cross-species companionship is a mode of patriarchal subversion.

Contemporary scholarship that approaches the nineteenth century through the lenses of posthumanism and new materialism contributes to a productive theoretical framework for considering the dynamic relationship between humans and animals in the novel. Identifying posthumanism as a field for rethinking embodiment, Cary Wolfe argues, "We can no longer talk of the body, or even, for that matter, of a body in the traditional sense."¹² In *Bird Relics* (2016) Arsić constructs a theory of bird ontology that classifies the bird as a materialist body that transgresses temporality. She argues that Thoreau envisions the "becoming-bird of a soul as an incessant flight away from fixed identity" or what she imagines pictorially as a "line that endlessly moves without ever forming a fixed shape."¹³ In this reading, Arsić posits the bird as a carrier of a facet of one's identity—repetitive

abstraction into infinity. For my framework, I use Arsic's representation of the bird's flight as an extension of one's identity to assert that Avis's relationship with birds provides insight into her development while also highlighting the significance of the bird itself.

In order to build upon Arsic's conceptualization, I turn to Haraway for her definition of sympoiesis, the act of "making with" or "worlding with, in company" to configure the human-animal relationship as interconnected, intra-active, and entangled.¹⁴ In Haraway's words, "Critters—humans and not—become with each other."¹⁵ By synthesizing Arsic's abstract figuring of the bird with Haraway's concept of sympoiesis, I approach Phelps's novel with attention to what I call "shared flights" that occur primarily between Avis and birds in the novel. While this term signals a level of kinship between the human and animal bodies together in space, it also characterizes the metaphorical "flight," as a representation of various becomings or movements across time and of Avis's development. Augustín Fuentes and Natalie Porter affirm this notion of kinship as an exciting possibility of exchange: "Approaching kinship as a multispecies process moves the concept beyond the enactment of inheritance and into the realm of potentialities of exchange and the construction of relations."¹⁶

Phelps creates encounters between Avis and birds throughout the novel to reveal the relation between the female body and nonhuman being. Avis not only mimics the movement of her body with that of birds in formational scenes, but also enacts various becomings with birds and other animals across zones of time, memory, and patriarchal resistance. Instead of viewing the bird or other animal as an imagistic detail, I consider the integral role that birds and other animals play in the formation of Avis's identity as an artist and woman in a patriarchal society. At times, the birds move towards what we might

consider a “figuration” of Avis, what Rosi Braidotti defines as “an alternative vision of subjectivity”—a “transformer of flows and energies, affects, desires, and imaginings.”¹⁷

By examining Phelps’s use of birds as alternative materialist potentialities for Avis—bodies that share time and offer images of her past and futurity—this chapter opens up new questions about animals, female personhood, power, and resistance in the nineteenth century.

The Story of Avis is a *kunstlerroman* that focuses on the journey of Avis Dobell, or in Kessler’s words, “the *artiste manquée*, the would-be woman artist who never realizes her potential.”¹⁸ As a young girl, Avis aspires to become a painter, a profession her father halfheartedly supports. After a fateful meeting with Philip Ostrander in early adulthood, Avis hesitates but eventually agrees to marry Ostrander, even though she is concerned that her art might suffer from the constraints of marriage and motherhood. Ostrander promises that their union will be unconventional, but in the end fails to fully support, encourage, and help with domestic duties to ensure that Avis’s career as an artist is prioritized. As a mother and domestic manager of the home, Avis struggles to produce art and nurture her creative life. Avis eventually discovers Ostrander’s lack of character in his infidelity, lack of ambition, and failure to thrive. At the end of the novel, Avis sells her art to provide for her family, takes care of Ostrander in his final moments, and signals that her daughter represents the possibility of a more promising future.

In this chapter, I explore the following configurations of “shared flight” to assert that Phelps’s conceptualization of the human-animal relationship transgresses various types of patriarchal and anthropocentric boundaries. In the first section, I examine how Avis’s mirroring or birdlike body postures enact becomings with birds to signal a

transformational moment in her identity. These becomings also create spaces of divergence that intersect Avis in the present with a bird symbolically across multiple zones of temporality. Phelps also aligns women and animals on a shared plane of suffering to argue for social reform regarding inhumane treatment of animals in the late nineteenth century. Secondly, I focus on the image of the Sphinx, a mythical animal-woman creature that is part bird, as a symbol of womanhood—a riddling form that signifies woman’s unearthed potential. In the third section, I consider how Phelps envisions motherhood as a paradoxical flight of stasis and movement within a patriarchal system. To be a mother with ambition means to be a woman oscillating between spaces of entrapment and freedom. These moments of entrapment become failed flights in the novel—moments when Avis is not able to achieve her creative potential or is forced to make decisions for the benefit of the family. In contrast to the notion of failed flights, Phelps also envisions motherhood as a flight of futurity through the images of the child and the parent-child relationship. By developing motherhood as a complex experience of emotionality alongside a variety of exchanges between Avis and a bird body, Phelps complicates motherhood as an ethics of care within a cross-species dynamic.

FLIGHTS OF BECOMING: WORLDS UPON WORLDS

What does it mean for humans and animals to inhabit, build, and share worlds? In *The Story of Avis*, Phelps creates exchanges between Avis and birds as a means of world-making, or what Marisol De La Cadena and Mario Blaser define as a pluriverse, “a practice of a world of many worlds.”¹⁹ In *A World of Many Worlds* (2018), Cadena and Blaser explain that a pluriverse is the practice of “heterogeneous worldings coming together as a political ecology of practices.”²⁰ This concept is helpful for considering the

multiple ways that birds build and share worlds with Avis throughout the novel. These cross-species worlds sometimes involve parallel flights between Avis and the bird as acts of becoming, while other worlds involve different time travelling by the birds and Avis. Phelps demarcates significant moments of transformation in Avis's identity with these becomings while also suggesting that birds are worthy companions of interest and complexity.

Jakob von Uexküll's concept of *Umwelt* provides a critical framework for understanding Phelps's complex merging of human and animal worlds. In biosemiotics, the field of semiotics and biology that interprets the signs and codes of the biological realm, Uexküll is known for his concept *Umwelt*, the idea that every animal exists within its own life world or space particular to its being. In the following passage, Uexküll depicts *Umwelt* as a soap bubble that encompasses the animal's environment:

We begin such a stroll on a sunny day before a flowering meadow in which insects buzz and butterflies flutter, and we make a bubble around each of the animals living in the meadow. The bubble represents each animal's environment and contains all the features accessible to the subject. As soon as we enter into one such bubble, the previous surroundings of the subject are completely reconfigured. Many qualities of the colorful meadow vanish completely, others lose their coherence with one another, and new connections are created. A new world arises in each bubble.²¹

In this lively description of a given summer day, Uexküll emphasizes the possible interconnections that exist in an environment with the figurative image of various bubbles across the meadow. Brett Buchanan explains how *Umwelts* act as invisible boundaries of the organism's world: "The *Umwelt* forms a figurative perimeter around the organism, 'inside' of which certain things are significant and meaningful and 'outside' of which other things are as good as nonexistent insofar as they are hidden in infinity."²² In contrast to viewing each animal as an object, Uexküll asserts that ecosystems are comprised of many

life worlds, comprised of animals whose movement and relationship to space and life are particular to each organism. This worlding framework is productive for deciphering how Phelps combines Avis's human life world with that of the bird's at various moments in the novel to display the potentiality of co-existence.

Phelps positions Avis into the *umwelt* of various birds through Avis's embodiment and birdlike relation to space. Gesturing towards this radical parallel without explaining how the birds connect to Avis's identity, Lori Kelly notes Avis's otherworldly qualities: "The description of Avis in the opening chapters of the novel reinforces the image of an individual who operates not only outside of the bounds of conventional behavior, but ordinary human experience as well."²³ I want to extend this idea by arguing that Phelps complicates Avis's personhood by strategically placing her within the life world of the bird, forcing the reader to imagine parallels between human and bird bodies. Phelps also alters our understanding of female subjectivity by creating moments of time that are shared between woman and bird.

This complex positioning occurs when Avis decides to become an artist, a moment when she also "becomes" a bird in a sense. Climbing up into the trees, a physical act that Aunt Chloe criticizes as "unladylike," Avis seeks out the "highest" and "airiest" branch for her retreat, like a bird looking out on the world below:

She had climbed into the highest, airiest branch of the highest tree in all the orchard, ...here they were, she and Aurora together, tossing like feathers in the apple-bough, high, still, safe from all the whole round, rasping world....It seemed to her to be the first time that she had ever really thought she was alive. But no one could understand: no one should understand. She sat up, and looked at the birds with her finger on her lips.²⁴

Here, Avis holds her book as she inhabits the bird's typical perch high in the trees. In this birdlike pose, Avis portrays something approaching what Deleuze refers to as "becoming-

animal,” a term that Braidotti defines as a “process of redefining one’s sense of attachment and connection to a shared world.”²⁵ Braidotti also explains that “becoming-animal” marks the “frame of an embodied subject” that is fully “immersed in and immanent to a network of nonhuman relations.”²⁶ In this moment when Phelps collapses the human-animal divide to describe Avis as birdlike, Avis says that it is the “first time that she had ever really thought she was alive.” Moments after Avis comes down from the “high, still, and safe,” space of the tree, she tells her father that she will be an artist. She feels “alive,” yet misunderstood. However, in this scene Phelps suggests that where others (specifically humans) fail to understand Avis, the orioles express solidarity by “looking kindly after her.” Phelps also subtly distinguishes the birds as more capable than humans of recognizing Avis’s inner nature: “perhaps either birds or flowers came nearer to the young girl’s heart just then than our tenderest imaginations can ever take us” (33).

This shared flight celebrates both Avis, as a young girl on the cusp of her identity, and the bird by Avis’s physical positioning, as well as by the look of understanding between them. The oriole, as a figuration or doubling of Avis’s identity, exists within and beyond this moment; the bird marks her entrance into a career as an artist while also representing her imagination as an endless well of creative possibility.

Phelps makes a similar parallel between Avis and the birds when Avis first arrives in Italy for art school. The location of her studio as extremely high echoes Avis’s childhood experience in the tree: “Avis, in the little bare studio—high, high, so high that it seemed, by putting her hand out of the window in the roof, she could touch the purple wideness of the Florentine sky,—had her own thoughts about those doves, perhaps” (37). Avis’s gesture of reaching her hand out of the window to “touch the purple wideness”

conjugates the image of a bird body flying in the sky; in this moment, she also has her own thoughts about the “doves,” the type of bird that her father associates her with when he sends her to Europe for art school.

In a later scene when Avis debates whether or not to get involved with Ostrander, Phelps offers another commingling of human and animal *Umwelts* by comparing Avis’s movements with those of the harbor birds. Phelps parallels Avis’s physical positioning during her moment of deliberation with the body of a wounded harbor bird in an earlier scene. Just as Avis shifts toward a decision to be with Phillip by choosing the path of marriage, Phelps parallels Avis’s body with the harbor bird—a harbinger of the limitations that marriage eventually places on her artistic growth:

Avis, looking in through the darkened room, leaning forward a little, hesitating, thought of the Harbor Light, oddly enough, and of the birds....Slowly at first, with her head bent, as if she resisted some opposing pressure, then swiftly, as if she had been drawn by irresistible forces, then blindly, like the bird to the light-house, she passed the length of the silent room, and put both hands, the palms pressed together as if they had been manacled, into his. (110)

Similar to the birdlike position of her perched body during her childhood reflection high in the tree, here Avis “looks in” to the darkness and “leans forward,” gestures that make her human body take on the form of a bird touching air in full flight. With these subtle bodily gestures, Phelps parallels Avis’s flight towards Phillip with the blind flight of the birds toward the lighthouse; just as the birds fly unaware into the glowing light, Avis submits to her passion by agreeing to marry, propelling herself into a painful life of creative suppression, a figurative flight of death.

Phelps also configures worlds that create zones of interference between Avis and the birds—moments when Avis operates within one time zone while the birds simultaneously move through multiple zones of temporality. In Avis’s first extended

encounter with Phillip Ostrander, the wounded blue-jay is as a figuration of Avis's identity that foreshadows her eventual decline. After Phillip rescues Avis along the rocky shore, Avis prompts a discussion about a wounded blue-jay. She interrupts the silence, startling Ostrander with her confession: "I am afraid I have killed the bird" (45). Once she explains that the lighthouse keeper gave her a wounded blue-jay in the hope that she might save it, Ostrander gently commands her to give him the bird, arguing that she is too chilled to take care of it. When Avis complies with his request, Philip "[takes] the bird, and unfasten[s] his coat, [wrapping] it in his breast," an act that Avis interprets as tender and nurturing (46). At the end of this scene, Phelps counters Ostrander's initial gentle response to the bird by portraying him as unaware of the bird's death. Similar to the beginning of the scene, Avis initiates concern for the bird by asking him about its condition: "How is my bird, Mr. Ostrander?" He responds by telling her that he "forgot the bird" before mistakenly believing the bird to be alive when it was actually dead (49). Phelps writes, "He sought for it very gently with his free hand, and said, —'It lives. It is quite warm. But it does not stir'" And then later, 'I hope all is well with the poor thing,' said he. But the bird upon his heart lay dead"(49).

By including the plight of the wounded bird at the onset of Avis's romantic involvement with Ostrander, Phelps depicts a representation of coexistence that "loops" Avis's human body with the bird body across different time zones. In *Dark Ecology* (2016), Morton argues that the infinite "scope of ecological beings" means "all things have a loop form."²⁷ These loops translate into unlimited possibilities between humans and animals in terms of coexistence. Morton offers a variety of loops, such as the positive feedback loop or phasing loop, but this moment between Avis, the bird, and Ostrander enacts what he

defines as a “strange loop,” “[a loop] in which two levels that appear utterly separate flip into one another.”²⁸ In this scene, this strange loop portrays two different beings, Avis and the blue-jay, and three distinct temporalities, Avis’s present and future with Ostrander, as well as the bird’s abbreviated life. By looping Avis’s identity with that of the bird, Phelps configures embodiment between Avis and the blue-jay as shared. As a figuration of Avis, the wounded blue-jay provides a glimpse into Avis’s future to foreshadow her decline as an artist during her marriage to Ostrander. In a later moment of reflection, after she has sold her Sphinx painting and failed to reach her fullest potential as an artist, Avis finds herself “stunned to find how her aspiration had emaciated during her married life” and “counted the cost of her marriage in the blood of her soul”(206). Phelps juxtaposes the death of the blue-jay in Ostrander’s care with Avis’s inability to save it as a harbinger of Avis’s creative fate within the patriarchal confinement of motherhood, domesticity, and marriage.

Although Avis is linked with a variety of birds in the novel, Phelps’s repetition of Avis’s pairing with the blue-jay calls for the reader to consider how the species of the blue-jay operates as another aspect of Avis’s identity. In a later section of the novel, Phelps characterizes Avis as “mopping out there like a chilled blue-jay” after she injures her hand and struggles to fill her days without her art (95). As a symbolic representation of Avis, the blue-jay species is telling. In *Birds of America* (1827-1838), John J. Audubon describes the blue-jay as a bird that is surprisingly not what its beautiful blue and white feathering makes it appear to be: “Who could imagine that a form so graceful, arrayed in a garb so resplendent, should harbor so much mischief; that selfishness, duplicity, and malice should come from the moral accompaniments of so much physical perfection!”²⁹ Like the mystery

of the part-bird, part-woman Sphinx, which I discuss later in this chapter, the blue-jay, and Avis by association, display a power derived from duplicity. That which is hidden becomes a resource for a woman's ability to pose a threat to the patriarchy.

BEYOND THE PAGE: FLIGHTS OF REFORM

In an essay titled "Bird" (2016), the late Mary Oliver describes an encounter she has with an injured black-backed gull she finds while walking along the beach on a December morning.³⁰ Taking it home, Oliver "set[s] up a site" for the bird, feeding it, talking to it, placing the bird towards the light because he loves it.³¹ After attempts to help the bird heal fail, Oliver and her partner try to return the bird to the environment, but he is too weak to survive on his own. They carry him back to their house and provide him with as much comfort as they can: feeding him with a feast of clams, touching his head of feathers in a way the bird enjoyed, including him in their daily routine. Oliver's portrayal of the bird reveals the deep affection she held for him and the loss she feels upon finding him dead on a late February morning: "He was, of course, a piece of sky. His eyes said so.... Imagine lifting the lid from a jar and finding it filled not with darkness but with light. Bird was like that. Startling, elegant, alive."³²

This is a story Elizabeth Stuart Phelps would have liked—an encounter that involves a human responding to animal suffering with respect and mindfulness. A prolific writer and animal activist towards the end of her life, Phelps wrote letters to President Roosevelt, fighting for social reform against animal vivisection, experimental treatments enacted on live animals that took place in the second half of the nineteenth century. In a telegram written to President Roosevelt in 1902, Phelps asks, "Would you be willing to help us at a hearing to regulate vivisection by telegraphing me a word of sympathy with

our purpose?”³³ He responded politely that he supported the “proper regulation of vivisection” but couldn’t show sympathy for her cause when he might have to “endorse” so many others.³⁴ While Phelps does not choose to center this novel on vivisection, she does include a scene that reflects her future concern for animal rights.

Placing female resistance on the same plane with animal suffering, Phelps configures the woman and the animal within a shared flight of patriarchal critique. By following the list of powerful, rebellious women in history with images of animals suffering, Phelps argues for reform, with an attention to human and non-human:

Instantly the room seemed to become full of women. Cleopatra was there, and Godiva, Aphrodite and St. Elizabeth, Ariadne and Esther, Helen and Jeanne d’Arc, and the Magdalene, Sappho, and Cornelia, —a motley company. These moved on solemnly, and gave way to a silent army of the unknown. They swept before her in file, in procession, in groups....Still before her closed eyes the panorama swept imperiously; but it had become a panorama of agonies. For a long time she perceived only the suffering of animals, an appalling vision of the especial anguish incident to dumb things. She saw the quiver of the deer under the teeth of the hound, the heart-throb of the pursued hare, the pathetic brow of dying lioness, the reproach in the eye of a shot bird, a dog under vivisection licking the hand that tore him. (82-83)

Phelps’s selection of women includes women known for their leadership and rebellion, such as Cleopatra and Godiva, women known for their exceptional beauty, such as Aphrodite and Helen, as well as religious figures, such as Esther, Ruth, and Jeanne d’Arc. The women comprise a “motley company” that represents a variety of challenges and victories for womanhood throughout history.

While the women are charted by their actions, the suffering of animals appears in still life frames of physiological specificity such as the “quiver of the deer,” “the ‘heart-throb’ of the hare,” “the pathetic brow.” Phelps’s recognition of animals as fellow bodies of suffering portrays what Cora Diamond describes as vulnerability: “The awareness we

each have of being a living body...carries with it exposure to the bodily sense of vulnerability to death, sheer animal vulnerability, the vulnerability we share with them.”³⁵

In this scene that parallels women’s oppression with animal violence, Phelps argues for a perspective of shared vulnerability, an awareness that animal bodies deserve respect and protection from physical suffering. Phelps also makes a political statement by including the pain of the dog that is the target subject of vivisection for scientific knowledge.³⁶

By making animals the focus of her writing late in life, Phelps builds on animal concerns that she raises in *The Story of Avis* to establish herself as an animal rights activist. Emily VanDette explains that Phelps zeroes in on social reform concerning animal rights from 1899 until her death in 1911 by writing “three impassioned speeches to the Massachusetts Legislature in support of anti-vivisection bills; several works of anti-vivisection fiction, including the novella *Loneliness* (1899), two novels *Trixy* (1904) and *Though Life us Do Part* (1909) at least two short stories and several pamphlets, essays, and articles that appeared in national periodicals.”³⁷ In “Spirits in Prison,” an anti-vivisection essay that appeared in *The Independent* on March 22, 1900, Phelps expresses her need to inform the public about the problematic animal cruelty that takes place under the guise of scientific knowledge: “But the common people do not understand—yet—what vivisection means...No one who knows what goes on in our medical schools, our physiological laboratories, our schools of technology and some of our public schools can pass certain buildings in our large towns without a shudder.”³⁸ In another short opinion piece, “For Anti-Vivisection” (1906), Phelps writes, “If I could influence the disposer of a fortune, I should devote it to humane work, especially in checking what is called scientific research, in the dissection of live animals—a barbarous and unjustifiable practice.”³⁹ Phelps’s

activism against animal suffering is a countercurrent to protect against patriarchal violence against animal bodies, but in the novel she also suggests that womanhood has its own capacity for symbolic systemic violence against patriarchal control.

THE TURNING OF THE SPHINX

O glad girls' faces, hushed and fair! how shall I sing for ye?
For the grave picture of a sphinx is all that I can see.

Vain is the driving of the sand, and vain the desert's art;
The years strive with her, but she holds the lion in her heart.

Baffled or fostered, patient still, the perfect purpose clings;
Flying or folded, strong as stone, she wears the eagle's wings.

Eastward she looks; against the sky the eternal morning lies;
Silent or pleading, veiled or free, she lifts the woman's eyes.

O grave girls' faces, listening kind! glad will I sing for ye,
While the proud figure of the sphinx is all that I can see.⁴⁰

In this poem titled “The Sphinx” (1885), Phelps addresses a graduating class of girls at Abbott Academy with angst about the weight of her emotional challenge by discussing the Sphinx as an image of stoic strength and the mystery of womanhood. The speaker of the poem asks, “How can I sing for ye?” when she can only see the “grave picture of the sphinx.” The majority of the poem details specific aspects of the Sphinx as a symbol: her “perfect purpose,” her hold of “the lion in her heart,” and the way she “lifts the woman’s eyes.” At the beginning of the poem the sphinx conjures a “grave” picture but by the end she is “proud,” perhaps a parallel to the line of progress Phelps hopes to inspire in the young women. The Sphinx is strong and foreboding in an environment characterized by striving in adverse conditions: the sand that “drives” and the “art” of the desert. In this context, womanhood is a complex embodiment of patient power, subtlety, and wonder.

Phelps explores this theme in *The Story of Avis*, which she initially titled “The Story of the Sphinx,” another sign of just how important the symbol of the sphinx was to her.

In “The True Woman,” an opinion piece published in *The Independent* in October 1871, Phelps portrays the Sphinx as a representation of womanhood and female power. As the title implies, Phelps offers a counter argument to the conventional idea that there is such a thing as a “True Woman.” To emphasize the socially constructed nature of this feminine ideal, Phelps mocks the concept with a hyperbolic vision: “‘The True Woman,’ I maintain, earth has never seen. Her beautiful feet are upon the mountains; but only the echo of their stepping stirs the air.”⁴¹ This imagery also implies that women are too lofty and complex to be captured or fully understood. Phelps catalogues a long list of examples of gender equality that have yet to be addressed by society, such as the following (I have selected these grievances from a lengthier paragraph):

- 1) When women are admitted to their rightful share in the administration of government
- 2) When every department of politics, art, literature, trade is thrown open, absolutely, without reservation to the exercise of their [women’s] high energies
- 3) When the state ceases to expend a dollar more for the education of its boys than of its girls
- 4) When marriage and motherhood no more complete a woman’s mission to the world than marriage and fatherhood complete a man’s (“The True Woman” 271-272)

Phelps then emphasizes that once all of these tasks are achieved, “only then can we draw the veil from the brows of the True Woman.” She closes this feminist manifesto with a powerful image of the Sphinx earning a “blessing” before moving her head to face the world:

Only then shall this sad Sphinx—who lost her crown and received her curse for the love of knowledge, yet who has woven out of her love to man the web of earth’s purest dreams and holiest deeds—unclose her marble lips and lift her weary head to take her well-earned blessing. Fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as any

army with banners will be the face which, out of the desert of her long watch and patience, [the Sphinx] will turn upon the world. ("The True Woman" 272)

The sadness of the Sphinx is directly related to women's unequal status in the world; she has "lost her crown" and "received a curse for the love of knowledge"—punishments that echo women's experiences of restriction in nineteenth-century America. Although the list of grievances is long, Phelps offers some vestige of hope by imagining that the Sphinx will "unclose her marble lips" and "lift her weary head" once society responds appropriately to gender inequality. She also parallels the strength of the Sphinx with the masculine "army with banners" to reconfigure womanhood as its own force of merit. Even though the Sphinx signals the potentiality of equality, she cannot make her emphatic "turn" towards the world until a "long watch" has taken place.

In *The Story of Avis*, Phelps reconfigures the symbolism of the Sphinx by correlating its mystery and potential for violence with the empowerment of womanhood. In Greek mythology, the Sphinx had the head of a woman, the body of a lion, and the wings of an eagle and was often associated with guardianship of the dead. Sophocles's *Oedipus the King* (performed 429 B.C.) popularized the now-classic myth that describes the Sphinx as a guardian of the curse of Thebes, a foreboding presence that would kill travelers who were incapable of solving its riddle. The etymology of the word "sphinx" is derived from the Latin word which means "to hold tight," a fitting reference to the sphinx's retaliatory violence. Although the Sphinx operates within the stillness of a statue, the underlying potentiality of its threat to those that cannot solve its riddle suggests that womanhood has the capacity for systemic violence—a radical affront to conventional views of womanhood in late nineteenth century.⁴² Phelps's use of the Sphinx's mysterious power also complicates Murison's notion of the "open body" by suggesting that women have the

capacity to create alternative worlds of power that oppose the dominant patriarchal reality of oppression.

In the shared flight of Avis and the Sphinx, the Sphinx's uniqueness resides in its ability to exist as a singular yet multiple representation of womanhood. Phelps reflects a keen awareness of her duty to other women and her desire to conceptualize a different type of womanhood for her female reading audience. In a letter to George Eliot, written four years prior to *The Story of Avis*, Phelps refers to society's failure to grasp the full potential of female power: "The woman's personal identity is a vast undiscovered country with which society has yet to acquaint itself, and by which it is yet to be revolutionized."⁴³ The Sphinx is a part-human, part-bird representation of this potentiality. Phelps also equates this potentiality with women's ability to succeed in male-dominated fields: "I believe in women; and in their right to their own best possibilities in every department of life."⁴⁴ In *The Story of Avis*, we see this in Avis's decision to become an artist.

Phelps links Avis's plight with the Sphinx and breaks from a narrative structure that centers on a single protagonist to emphasize the universal import of the journey of womanhood. When the passion of the marriage becomes stagnant over time, Ostrander leaves town, inspiring Avis to consider her kinship with other women who have not fared so well as a result of their courtship:

Especially her heart leaned out to all denied and deserted women, to all deceived and trustful creatures. A strange kinship, too solemn for any superficial caste of the nature to blight, seemed to bind her to them all. Betrayed girls, abandoned wives, aged and neglected mothers, lived in her fancy with a new, exacting claim. To the meanest thing that trod the earth, small in all else, but large enough to love and suffer, her strong heart stopped, and said, 'Thou—thou, too, art my sister' (201).

In this low emotional space, Avis finds strength in female camaraderie. This sisterhood of women is a collective group of suffering—a stalwart against patriarchal pressure for

women to live in isolation or surrender to emotional pain. At the end of the novel, when Philip is battling for his health in Florida, Avis connects her experience to that of other women who have come before her: “Her swift, outreaching sympathy gathered in all the other women who had trod this history shore before her, homeless, anxious, and careworn, battling for her husband’s life” (219). In another vulnerable moment, Avis connects her sympathy with other women who have experienced a similar fate by “[trodding] this history shore before her”; when Avis finds herself in a particularly weak or difficult space, she is able to pull herself out of it by imagining herself within this larger community.⁴⁵

Phelps parallels Avis with the Sphinx again when Avis fails to embrace Ostrander’s proclamation of love with happiness and excitement. Once Ostrander decides to profess his love to Avis, a standoff occurs between the couple: “‘I deny it!’ said the woman. ‘I assert it!’ said the man. They faced one another, flashing like duelists” (64). By shifting into the generic terms for Avis and Ostrander as “woman” and “man,” Phelps constructs a love scene of universal import. As Avis continues to “blaze” and grapple for the right words, Ostrander continues to express his affection: “‘I presume to say that I love you,’ he urged, swiftly scintillating into a dazzling tenderness. ‘I quite dare to say that I love you. I know what I am saying. I love you, love you!’” (64). Instead of rushing into his arms, Avis feels “caught between two fires,” repelled that he not only “loved her,” but had also “told her that she loved him” (64). Aunt Chloe interrupts their private moment by announcing that Avis has visitors. The next day, however, Ostrander seeks out Avis to tell her how rare she is: “‘And you,’ he said, with a lover’s ingenious gravity, ‘are like no other woman,—no other that I ever saw. I do not believe the world contains another. You perplex me like the Sphinx; you awe me like the Venus; you allure like the Lörelei! I have dreamed of such

women. I never saw one. I love you!”(66). Ostrander reveals his struggle to characterize Avis by comparing her to three distinct types of women: the “Sphinx,” “Venus,” and “Lörelei.” While Venus suggests illustrious beauty and Lörelei conjures the lure of female sexuality, the “Sphinx” captures Avis’s ability to “perplex” Ostrander.⁴⁶

In “The True Woman,” Phelps builds on this idea to argue that a woman’s enigmatic power makes her more fit for determining the male position in society: “Indeed, if one wisdom must decree for two, woman is far better qualified to regulate the position which shall belong to man. He is not the enigma to her which she must always be more or less to him. His force is more comprehensible to her than her fineness is to him” (270). Phelps makes it clear that part of his attraction to her stems from this desire to conquer her by solving her; Ostrander cannot fully understand the various aspects of Avis’s complexity, which includes her unconventional outlook on love and womanhood.

In one of the most critical scenes of the novel, Avis creates a masterpiece by painting the Sphinx after confronting and coming to terms with an “untouched canvas” (76). Alone in her room, Avis struggles for inspiration by questioning what the “work of women lacked,” only to be interrupted by the sounds of boys singing military songs. Avis drinks an orange liqueur from France, a drink she associates with “carry[ing] many a pretty Parisian to an intrigue or a convent,” before asking, “Could it carry a Yankee girl to glory?” (81). Phelps foreshadows the significance of the Egyptian culture for Avis’s art by describing the first image of her alcohol-inspired vision as an “Egyptian mould” that includes an image of “Isis seeking Osiris” (80). This initial vision sparks an array of visual delights for Avis: a “medley of still life,” a “world of ferns,” a “mid-ocean wave,” and a “medley of outlines”—all of which are enmeshed with the natural world. Her vision moves

from earthly images to figures of women that set the foundation for her imagining of the Sphinx, which then becomes the vital source for her creativity and art:

She saw a low, unclouded Eastern sky; fire to the horizon's rim; sand and sun; the infinite desert; a caravan departing, faint as a forgotten hope; mid-way, what might be a camel perished of thirst. In the foreground the sphinx, the great sphinx, restored. The mutilated face patiently took on the forms and the hues of life; the wide eyes met her own; the dumb lips parted; the solemn brow unbent. The riddle of ages whispered to her. The mystery of womanhood stood before her, and said, 'Speak for me.' (83)

Similar to the poetic stance Phelps takes by attempting to “sing” for the young girls at Abbot Academy, here, Avis is given the responsibility for creating a piece of art that speaks for the Sphinx, or womanhood itself. As an artist, Avis becomes translator and creator—a channel of expression for women with the outside world. The Sphinx is “restored” and takes on the “forms” and “hues” of life to become an image of vitality in Avis’s mind. The locked gaze between Avis and her imaginative vision implies an intimate sisterhood between them or even a pact that becomes sealed with a shared glance. Phelps also loops the reader back to the pivotal scene leading up to this vision. In contrast to Ostrander’s assertive confession of his affection for Avis, the Sphinx requests that Avis “speak for [her],” a gesture of humility that bequeaths her power to Avis.

Ironically, Avis’s moment of profound inspiration occurs when she is alone in her room and Ostrander is away at war. Almost immediately after Avis has her creative vision, she finds out that Ostrander has been wounded. While the Sphinx rises to appear before Avis, Ostrander is shot in the lungs; with this juxtaposition of two critical defining moments, Phelps suggests that violence against the male body might be necessary for a woman’s progress. This contrast also subverts the norm by privileging woman’s creative power as a force that is solely her own—separate and in opposition to the masculine

domain, which can be linked to Ostrander and the boys' army songs that periodically interrupt Avis's attempts to generate inspiration. Once Avis sees the Sphinx, she knows she "[has] seen her picture;" she then sleeps knowing that "tomorrow she could work" (83).

Phelps juxtaposes Avis's loyalty to the Sphinx with her loyalty to Ostrander to imply that marriage often hinders a woman's creative endeavors. After she has become engaged to Ostrander, Avis returns to the Sphinx to paint in her studio after her injured hand heals: "The dust had collected upon her sketches; the boughs of the apple tree were bare; upon the sphinx hung, covered and dumb" (119). Phelps's reference to the barren "boughs of the apple tree" recalls Avis's decision to become an artist while the "cover[ing]" of the Sphinx implies that Avis has forgotten her creative dreams. Once Avis and the Sphinx lock eyes in a shared glance, Avis realizes the mistake she has made by committing to marriage:

She went up and uncovered her sketch. The critical, cool sunlight fell upon it. The woman and the sphinx looked at one another. Avis glanced at the ring that fettered her finger... 'What have I done?' she cried. 'Oh! What have I done?' 'With an impulse which only a woman will quite respect, standing alone there in the silent witness of the little room, she tore off her betrothal ring. Then with one of her rare sobs, sudden and sharp as an articulate cry, she flung her arms about the insensate canvas, and laid her cheek, as if it had been the touch of one woman upon another, against the cold cheek of the sphinx; and solemnly, as if she sought to atone to a goddess for some broken fealty, she whispered—'I will be true.' (119-120)

After locking eyes with the Sphinx, Avis decides to tear "off her betrothal ring," in an attempt to symbolically free herself from Ostrander. This gesture sparks an emotional response in Avis, leading her to sob and then "[fling] her arms" and "[lay] her cheek" upon the "insensate canvas" as if it were the "touch of one woman upon another." Likening the painting of the Sphinx to another woman, Phelps blurs the line between the human and inanimate, doubling female personhood against patriarchal oppression. Avis embraces her

art in this human gesture to apologize for being disloyal before recommitting herself to the Sphinx, which could also represent womanhood or her own ambition by saying, “I will be true.” Avis’s vow to the Sphinx precedes her commitment to marry Ostrander, foreshadowing Avis’s eventual struggle to fulfill her creative potential within the confinement of marriage.

MOTHERHOOD: A PARADOX OF MIGRATION

In 2012, Anne Marie-Slaughter, President of the New America Foundation and the Bert G. Kerstetter University Professor of Politics and International Affairs at Princeton University, wrote an article titled “Why Women Still Can’t Have It All” for *The Atlantic*.⁴⁷ The article would become the most read article in the history of the magazine, sparking a debate about gender equality in the workplace. Slaughter openly shares her struggle to successfully enjoy her dream job as the first woman director of policy planning at the State Department during a time when she felt that one of her sons “clearly needed [her].” Even with a husband who was willing to take on the majority of parenting duties while she was in Washington D.C. as director, Slaughter comes to the conclusion that “juggling high level government work with two teenage sons was not possible.”⁴⁸ After dispelling various myths that surround the “women can have it all” mantra, Slaughter argues that social policies and career tracks must shift in order to accommodate women’s, not just men’s, choices in life if society is to make a healthy, productive life possible for all.

Although Phelps wrote *The Story of Avis* in 1877, she anticipates many of the same concerns that Slaughter raises in her article. To be a woman in the nineteenth century meant living a life structured by patriarchal expectations. In her classic essay, “The Cult of Womanhood: 1820-1860,” Barbara Welter argues that the construct of womanhood in the

nineteenth century relegated women to the domestic sphere while privileging virtues that focused on the morality of the heart instead of the intellect. Being a woman meant privileging four key virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity.⁴⁹ In the introduction to the book, Kessler explains that domestic ideology centered on the following beliefs: 1) the man was regarded as the breadwinner and the woman was associated with the domestic space, 2) heterosexual marriage led to the creation of home and family 3) mother was the “natural guardian” of children, 4) men could experience erotic pleasure, while a woman’s sexuality was regarded as solely reproductive.⁵⁰ By writing female characters that succeeded in traditionally male-dominated roles and rebelled against conventional standards, Phelps reveals her desire to offer a different construct for womanhood.⁵¹ While other women writers of the nineteenth century were describing marriage in a positive light, Phelps took a radical path by “detailing the frustrations and difficulties often found in the marriage state, putting particular emphasis on the toll marriage could exact on a woman’s personal growth and happiness.”⁵²

At the beginning of *Chapters From a Life* (1896), Phelps discusses the vital role that her mother played in her life and gives insight into her view of motherhood as a paradoxical reconciliation between “genius and domestic life.”⁵³ Although Phelps’s mother passed away when she was just eight years old, her influence on Phelps was significant. Phelps explores the paradox of motherhood by characterizing her mother’s struggle as a balance between creative ambition and motherhood duty. Phelps uses the image of a “civil war” to depict the duality of the tension that women face if they choose to be a mother with professional aspirations: “Her last book and her last baby came together, and killed her. She lived one of those rich and piteous lives such as only gifted women know; torn by the

civil war of the dual nature which can be given to women only” (12). Phelps blames the double birth—the creative production of her book and the biological production of her last child—as the sources responsible for her mother’s death.

In each description of her mother, Phelps fails to separate her mother’s writing ambition from her motherly role: “I can remember no time when I did not understand that my mother must write books because people would have read them; but I cannot remember one hour in which her children needed her and did not find her” (13). In another passage, Phelps alternates between images of her mother writing and responding to motherly demands: “I hardly know which of those charming ways in which I learned to spell the word motherhood impressed me most....Now she sits correcting proof-sheets, and now she is painting apostles for the baby’s first Bible lesson. Now she is writing her new book, and now she is dyeing things canary-yellow in the white-oak dye” (14-15). In *The Story of Avis*, Phelps explore this theme when Avis struggles to create her art when faced with pressing motherly duties: “Women understand—only women altogether... ‘When the fall sewing is done,’ ‘When the baby can walk,’ ‘When house cleaning is over,’ ... ‘When we have got through with the whooping-cough,’ ...then I will write the poem, or learn the language, or study the great charity, or master the symphony; then I will act, dare, dream, become” (149). Although Phelps saw her mother successfully balance her ambition with her parental duties, Phelps uses Avis to reveal how the struggle to excel in both realms can negatively affect a woman’s creative production. For Phelps, motherhood is a negotiation that involves balancing a mother’s desire for growth with a child’s need for nurturing. In *The Story of Avis*, Phelps complicates the conventional view of motherhood with the figuration

of the birds while also offering representations of the struggles and triumphs motherhood entails.

Phelps portrays the tensions that arise when a woman attempts to balance creative genius and artistic production with motherhood, marriage, and domesticity throughout Avis's journey. In this section, I argue that motherhood is a paradoxical migration in the sense that stasis and movement often operate within the same emotional space. In the first section, I discuss how Phelps portrays motherhood or domesticity as a form of entrapment, and in the second section, I argue how Phelps envisions flights of futurity that provide alternatives to patriarchal oppression.

ENCAGED

Although *avis* is Latin for bird, its etymology closely relates it to *aviary*, a word derived from the Latin word *aviarium*, which is defined as a large cage, house, or enclosure where birds are kept.⁵⁴ As Kessler points out, "The image of a caged bird is frequent in women's writing, appearing as well in the nineteenth-century song for a woman's voice, 'I'm just a bird in a gilded cage.'"⁵⁵ By considering the taut relationship between *avis* and *aviarium*, between the freedom of flight and the loss of potential inherent in imprisonment, I hope to reveal how Phelps portrays the complex and diverse relationships that women have with patriarchal control. In *Unflattening*, Nick Sousanis combines graphic art with language to encourage the benefits that arise from approaching an object from multiple viewpoints:

Reliance on a solitary vantage point fails to illuminate the whole picture. A fixed viewpoint— a single line of thought— can be a trap— where we only see what we're looking for.... Consider instead, distinct vantage points separate paths joined in dialogue thus, not merely side-by-side they intersect, engage, interact, combine, and inform one another. As the coming together of the two eyes produces

stereoscopic vision outlooks held in mutual orbits, coupled, their interplay and overlap facilitate the emergence of new perspectives.⁵⁶

In this framework, *The Story of Avis* is a novel about flights of resistance as well as a cautionary tale that warns of the possible consequences of patriarchal control. As the symbolism of the Sphinx implies, womanhood has the capacity to create alternative worlds in opposition to those of the patriarchy, but even with counterforce, oppression filters through currents, networks, and systems that are unseen and unresolvable. Alongside representations of the power of female flight throughout the novel, Phelps also gives examples of how the patriarchy clips a woman's wings through control—images of failed flights or what we might also imagine as enclosures.

These failed flights take place when women suppress their desire for success for their partners, a concern that Avis raises when Ostrander tries to persuade her to see marriage as a valuable institution for women: “Success—for a woman— means absolute surrender, in whatever direction. Whether she paints a picture, or loves a man, there is no division of labor possible in the economy. To the attainment of any end worth living for, a symmetrical sacrifice of her nature is compulsory upon her” (69-70). To resist a life of failed flight, a woman must hold on to her own desires, resist the pressure to “surrender,” and protect her space for expansion by refusing to take an unequal amount of labor in comparison to that of her male partner.

By referring to the marriage between Avis's parents in the opening section of the novel, Phelps frames Avis's journey with in the failed flight of Avis's mother.⁵⁷ Phelps doesn't include Avis's mother's maiden name; she is only referred to as Mrs. Dobell or Momma—addresses that define her identity within her patriarchal roles: wife and mother.⁵⁸ In her first descriptions of Avis's parents' relationship, Phelps shares that “the great

professor had won this little lady but just in time to prevent her from running away to go upon the stage” (20). Phelps then pairs Mrs. Dobell’s talent for the stage with an image of a majestic species of bird: “The little bride had not exactly run away. Yet there was certainly a freak for the stage, intercepted somewhere. She was a restless, glittering, inefficient thing, like a hummingbird turned radical” (21). Phelps links the hummingbird’s rare ability to fly backwards and upside down with Avis’s mother’s movement or “restless[ness];” the bright colored feathers of the hummingbird also correlate to her mother’s natural, or “glittering,” beauty. In another passage, Phelps writes, “If the professor’s little wife were a hummingbird, she was a very tender and true one: she loved the great hand that had lured her from the fields on which the wild dew lay, and sipped his grave domestic honey with happy, unturned look” (21). This image of the content hummingbird “sipp[ing]” honey signals that Mrs. Dobell embraces her domestic life wholeheartedly. Similar to the way a hummingbird hovers with complete focus on its target, Mrs. Dobell’s affection for her husband blinds her to the loss of freedom or sacrifice that results from her marriage. The irony of Phelps’s hummingbird image also reflects another vantage point to patriarchal oppression; some women are content to fly within the cage and never challenge the status quo they have been given.

When she is an adult, Avis asks her father, just once, whether or not her mother was really talented. Hegel Dobell responds, “She had, beyond doubt, the histrionic gift. Under proper conditions she might have become famous.” Avis then inquires, ‘Why, then, should she never have cultivated such a gift?’ to which her father responds, “Because, she married me” (25). This exchange emphasizes the correlation between marriage and patriarchal control and that her mother was a caged bird that never pursued her talent for

acting because her husband did not encourage her to do so. Avis's inability to question her father prior to adulthood also demonstrates how patriarchal control suppresses resistance to its figures of authority. Even though Avis senses the entrapment of her mother at a young age, it takes years before she is able to express her criticism by directly addressing the subject with her father.

Avis's decision to sell the Sphinx painting as a result of monetary pressures in her marriage is another failed flight in the novel. Avis doesn't share her decision to sell the painting with Ostrander since he "wouldn't understand" (205). The tragedy of Avis's decision to sell lies in her motivation: "She knew nothing, except that she was grieved and shamed, and vaguely in need of money. She flew to the studio, struck the great sphinx dumb with the uplifted finger of a child, and sent it desperately from her before the cool of her frenzy fell" (205). Instead of showing the painting at an art show or collecting royalties for herself, Avis sells her creation out of desperation brought on by her husband's financial failures. As a flight that operates under the wrong conditions, in this case as a commodity of exchange within a capitalist system regulated by men, Avis's selling of the painting is a loss and a motherly sacrifice. When Frederick Maynard, Avis's drawing master, comes to tell her the news, he shares that the painting was so popular that it was "caught up the second day out" before expressing his admiration to and disbelief of Avis's feat: "Engaged—bought—sold—paid for. The sphinx sold before Goupil [a publisher] had held it forty-eight hours" (205). Maynard's dramatic account of the painting's fate highlights the rarity and value of Avis's talent as a painter.

Towards the end of the novel, when Coy tells Avis someone else purchased the Sphinx, Avis winces: "And of course, you've heard," said Coy absently, "that Stratford

bought your sphinx last winter?” Coy spoke lightly; but her own voice sounded to her as if she had said, ‘He bought your soul.’ She rather wished she had said nothing about the sphinx” (248). Even though the selling of the Sphinx allows Avis to provide for her family, she never regains the spark of her creative imagination in its absence.

FLIGHTS OF FUTURITY

Like the complexity that motherhood entails, Phelps’s flights of futurity—flights that involve the mother-daughter relationship—paradoxically intertwine loss and gain into a singular experience of relationality. Phelps not only sheds light on the burden that motherhood can place on a woman who has her own ambition, but also depicts the tenderness and delight of motherhood as well.

Taking a feminist historical approach, pioneering scholars initially read Avis through an autobiographical lens. In the first biography about Phelps, Barnett begins a thread that becomes dominant in conversations about the novel: “Miss Phelps seems to have had both herself and her mother in mind when she created the character of her heroine.”⁵⁹ Kessler, Kelly, and Stansell offer variations on this theme, reading Avis as an extension of Phelps’s life and desires. Kelly situates Avis within a larger canon of strong female characters, seeing her as an autobiographical reflection of Phelps since both women are similar ages, share a talent, and eschew domestic tasks.⁶⁰ In a slightly different vein, Stansell reads Avis as a representation of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps ideal, a character who gives insight into Phelps’s fantasies and struggles to produce art during a time when single women were not encouraged to be artists.⁶¹

By following in her mother’s footsteps to become a writer, Phelps enacts a flight of futurity that begins in one generation and carries into another. As Phelps admits in her

autobiography, “I said it was impossible to be her daughter and not to write” (15). In her chapter titled “Birds,” Arsić traces the significance of Henry David Thoreau’s affinity for birds to his inhabitation of his deceased brother John’s bird notebook, where Henry added his own entries without signaling any announcement of the change in author.⁶² Instead of embarking on a new path in the hopes of discovering new species of birds, Thoreau returns to sites his brother John has already visited, enacting what Arsić reads as a migration, “inhabiting John’s perceptions” to “become the bird” that “John had a habit of becoming.”⁶³ This type of migration, a becoming between one sibling into another that transgresses temporality, applies not only to Phelps’s decision to take her mother’s name but also to her decision to become a writer. For Thoreau and Phelps, language provides the medium for their creative migration. Phelps’s mother wrote under the pseudonym “H. Trusta,” an anagram of Stuart, for a three-year period, 1851-1853. As Kessler points out, Phelps documents the influence of her mother in her autobiography: “At eight years a child cannot be expected to know her mother intimately, and it is hard for me always to distinguish between the effect produced upon me by her literary success as I have since understood it, and [the effect] left by her own truly extraordinary personality upon the annals of the nursery.”⁶⁴

In *The Story of Avis*, Phelps depicts Avis’s mother’s passing as a flight of futurity that intertwines death with the bird’s flight and sunlight to picture the mother-daughter relationship as infinite. When Avis visits her mother during her illness, Phelps parallels the physical limits of life and their earthly mother-daughter relationship with the light of the day: “The light had broadened when she climbed upon the high, old-fashioned bed, and pulled aside the clothes to get in upon her mother’s arm. Someone objected to this; but

someone else said, ‘Let the child alone.’ The color in the east unfolded, and hung against the windows like a wing, she thought, as she lay down, and curled against her mother’s heart” (25). In this symbolic doubling, Avis climbs into bed to “get in upon her mother’s arm” to “curl against her mother’s heart”; her mother’s physical position parallels that of a mother bird lifting a wing to protect its chick. As Avis settles in, she perceives a parallel image in the dying light as the “color in the east unfold[s]” and “[hangs] against the windows like a wing.” Phelps expresses Avis’s closeness with her mother with this doubled wing image, emphasizing the security, comfort, and safety that Avis feels in her care.

Phelps reinforces the significance of the bird image as the scene continues. Once Avis has snuggled up close to her mother, she expresses her concern and desire to share her drawing with her:

‘Mama,’ began the child, ‘I am sorry you are sick. Shan’t I bring you a little picture that I drew last night?’ But her mother answered only, ‘There, my daughter! Mother loves her; there!’ ‘It’s a picture of a bird, mama, with trees. I thought you’d like to see it. And—O mamma! The wing!—see the wing the sun has made upon the sky! It looks as if it meant to wrap us, wrap us, wrap us in. (26)

By creating another doubling, this time through Avis’s interpretation of the wing of the sky, Phelps layers this climactic human moment with the life of the bird. Avis wants to share her drawing of the bird while simultaneously envisioning the wing of light “the sun [makes] in the sky.” Perhaps as a means of countering her mother’s illness and limitations, Avis projects her emotional needs onto the environment, imagining that the wing of light has the ability to “wrap us, wrap us, wrap us in.” Avis reflects her fear and vulnerability by repeating the phrase three times; it is as if Avis believes she can ward off her mother’s illness with her magic chanting.

Unfortunately, Avis's mother dies, just as the "sun-burst broke full against her face" (26). Phelps interjects this intense emotional moment with yet another bird image with an allusion to the Bible: "Under the shadow of His wing thou shalt abide" (25-26). In the notes to the novel, Kessler explains that the Bible verse is a variation of Psalms 17:8 which states, "hide me under the shadow of thy wings" and 91:1 which states, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." With this allusion, Phelps parallels Avis's mother with God as a protector who "hides" those in need "under the shadow" of their "wings."

As another flight of futurity, Avis's relationship with her daughter, Wait, channels hope on a macroscopic level with the possibility of societal improvement and at the level of the unseen with the passing of creative talent from one generation to another. As her name suggests, Wait signifies the value of patience for young women who reap the benefits won by women that have come before them. After Ostrander has died, Avis spends time with Wait, which helps her confront the loss of her own dreams or the "story she would never read" while also recognizing that her daughter has the potential to have a better life than she has had:

For her, she had her child. It would be easier for her daughter to be alive, and be a woman, than it had been for her; so much as this, she understood; more than this she felt herself too spent to question. She folded her arms about the little girl, and laid her cheek upon her hair, and closed her eyes. She had the child, she had the child!" (246-247)

Phelps's repetition of "she had the child" associates childbirth as a second chance, or future flight, for Avis through Wait. In the midst of her fatigue, Avis feels calm knowing that Wait will find it "easier...to be alive." Phelps highlights Avis's contentment with this revelation with her motherly gestures.⁶⁵

In the final scene of the novel, the storytelling shared by Avis and Wait presents another flight of futurity. Although Wait doesn't understand what she is hearing, she pleads with Avis to read her the story of the Grail: "Mamma, I cannot read this story till I am old enough; but it is a pretty story, and I want to hear it. The man has a yellow saddle, and his horse is red. Read me what he had a red horse for, and where he went to; read me why the saddle is yellow; read me—read me—read me till there is no more to read" (249). I agree with Kessler's interpretation of this scene as Phelps's feminization of the Grail Legend that compares Avis to Lancelot, Wait to Galahad, and the Grail to an emblem of "woman's spiritual achievement and self-development," but I want to add to this reading by arguing that Phelps understood storytelling as a mode of political power. Wait's repetitive request to "read me" suggests that Phelps viewed language or storytelling as one of the most productive modes of patriarchal resistance. By channeling the classical legend through the feminine—Wait as she attentively deciphers her own meaning of the story—Phelps suggests that stories offer a different type of flight that is internalized, powerful, yet unpredictable.

I shift from the nineteenth century to the contemporary moment to provide another context for understanding the currents of power that course within Phelps's mother-daughter scene. In an opinion piece for the *The New York Times*, contemporary novelist Elena Ferrante argues that storytelling is a feminist method of reclaiming power from the dominant patriarchal narratives:

Telling stories really is a kind of power, and not an insignificant one. Stories give shape to experience, sometimes by accommodating traditional literary forms, sometimes by turning them upside down, sometimes by reorganizing them. Stories draw readers into their web, and engage them by putting them to work, body and soul, so that they can transform the black thread of writing into people, ideas, feelings, actions, cities, worlds, humanity, life. Storytelling, in other words, gives

us the power to bring order to the chaos of the real under our own sign, and in this it isn't very far from political power.⁶⁶

Ferrante argues that the power of storytelling resides in a writer's capacity to pull readers into another world or "web" comprised of an array of human experiences. As readers transform the "black thread of writing" into elements of their daily lives, the story travels from the imaginary to the political. By including a description of Avis's reading of the Grail legend to Wait at the end of the novel, Phelps emphasizes the importance of rewriting and retelling the masculine myths through the feminine as a means of creating a different story and society for women in the future. In order to change the conditions of flight in the present and the future, a young girl must first recognize and understand the elements of women's oppression in the past.

In "A Florida Water-Color" (1876), an opinion piece for *The Independent*, Phelps paints an idyllic scene of the color and bird wildlife of the Florida landscape. Arguing against the sport of shooting wildlife, Phelps details a variety of Florida birds as a means of seeing birds as creatures worthy of life. Phelps reveals her admiration for the rose curlew's striking beauty in the wild: "Once, twice I see the great rose curlew, the most beautiful bird in Florida, curving his splendid neck to look at us—blush-red against the blush-red, a creature born of the glowing sky and water, the child of the hour."⁶⁷

In *The Story of Avis*, the rose-curlew appears in the final moments of Avis and Ostrander's time together, prior to and then during the exact moment of Ostrander's death. After Avis treks through the Florida landscape, she finally finds Ostrander lying on the ground where she kneels to be with him (241). In his final moments, Ostrander asks Avis to kiss his breath away before saying her name, "Avis!" As Avis moves to "lift her face," perhaps to fulfill his request, she sees "the rose-curlew hung overhead, palpitating with joy"

(241). Since this moment marks Ostrander's last breath, Phelps makes it difficult to determine whether or not Avis and Ostrander actually share a final kiss. As Phelps shifts the focus from the human to the animal and then back to the human by describing the physicality of the bird's movements, the rose-curlew interrupts the culmination of this romantic heteronormative kiss. With a body "palpitating with joy," the rose-curlew hints at the physical reverberation of human laughter, or perhaps what Hélène Cixous describes as feminine laughter that has the power to "smash everything," "shatter the framework of institutions," and blow up the "truth" of patriarchal law.⁶⁸ Ostrander's death and the rose-curlew's joy signal yet another flight of futurity for Avis. Free from the burden of marital responsibilities, Avis takes to the sky again, but this time with Wait to mark the distance towards the line of the horizon as singularly feminine.

CHAPTER THREE

Ecologies of the Wild in Hannah Crafts's *The Bondwoman's Narrative*

The still still night on the dusty roads, and over the quiet woods over the gardens
and the feilds [sic] I lifted the window and looked out with a feeling akin to regret.
—Hannah Crafts, *The Bondwoman's Narrative*

In this passage from *The Bondwoman's Narrative* (unpublished in era, written between 1853 and 1861), Hannah admires the quiet of the landscape while she considers her childhood experiences of enslavement on the Lindendale plantation. Crafts parallels the repetition of the “still” night and “quiet” woods with Hannah’s return to the past to suggest that the landscape has the power to inspire retrospection. While Crafts interweaves this and other romantic reflections into Hannah’s experiences throughout the novel, she also portrays the materiality of nature as active and transformative. Constructing a theoretical framework that combines concerns from fields such as ecology, feminist theory, and black studies, I define “the wild” as a dynamic space of exchange and possibility. By focusing on two enslaved women’s materialist experiences on a plantation and its environs—Rose’s interaction with the wild of the linden tree and Hannah’s flights into the wild of the forest—I argue that Crafts characterizes black female experience as interconnected to and shaped by its environment.

In the contemporary field of ecocriticism, Timothy Morton’s emphasis on the “environment” exemplifies an ecological approach that departs from previous romantic and humanist notions of nature. In *Ecology Without Nature* (2007), Morton argues that the term “environment” offers a collective approach in contrast to the more Romantic term “nature”: “The idea of the environment is more or less a way of considering groups and collectives—humans surrounded by nature, or in continuity with other beings such as animals and

plants. It is about being-with.”¹ By recognizing the environment as a space fully inhabited and seeing the human as a participant within these spaces, Morton signals the value of this shift towards more egalitarian thinking.² Morton also emphasizes that we need to read the environment as a strategy for gaining a deeper understanding of social dynamics: “To write about ecology is to write about society.”³ Although this claim suggests inclusivity with regard to subjects such as ethnicity, class, and gender, the field of ecocriticism has been slow to address the environmental racism of America’s history.

While the complex relationship between blackness and environmental materiality has not been fully addressed in the past, recent interventions in the fields of ecocriticism and Black Studies suggest a pivot towards more balanced critical ground. Contemporary ecocritics have begun to criticize the use of the term “Anthropocene” for its inattention to ethnicity, demanding that conversations about America’s environmental history discuss the manner in which the environment has been a site of oppression of people of color.⁴ From slavery’s reliance on the environment as site of material production to the inept governmental emergency response to African Americans affected by Katrina in the city of New Orleans in 2015, the United States has a history of environmental inequality concerning people of color’s experience of the land.⁵ Nicholas Mirzoeff illuminates the crux of this problem by asking: “What kind of ‘man’ is meant when we say Anthropocene?”⁶ In *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (2018), Kathryn Yusoff criticizes the field of geology for its failure to “identify its own histories of colonial earth-writing” and “name the masters of broken earths” as a strategy for making amends to the geology’s racist history.⁷ Each of these charges signals that the relationship between ethnicity and the environment must be addressed by ecocriticism.

Scholars are beginning to explore alternative paradigms in ecocriticism in order to account for this history of environmental racism. Britt Rusert asserts that the ontology of blackness offers rich possibilities for a different approach to these concerns: “Ecocriticism incorporates race on identitarian terms. A different kind of engagement, one that proceeds from blackness itself, might ultimately move accounts of race and environment beyond the horizon of identity politics.”⁸ Building on this assertion, I approach black women’s experience in this novel to show how the environment provides ecological encounters that create various pathways for enslaved women’s resistance against slaveholder’s control and surveillance.

For my examination of Crafts’s portrayal of the environment in *The Bondswoman’s Narrative*, I use Jane Bennett’s generative concept of what is considered wild. In *Thoreau’s Nature: Ethics, Politics, and the Wild* (2002), Bennett defines wildness as “that eccentric and decentering potential within any object of experience.”⁹ In the environment, there is potential for an experience of wildness that is diverse and transformative. Bennett also points out that “Wildness is a function of the unique specificity, the sheer and singular thereness, of every object of encounter.”¹⁰ This concept of the wild emphasizes its potential for interpreting encounters between humans and the environment. Placing significance on the “object[s]” of experience and the encounters that occur between humans and material forces, Bennett directs us towards a vision of an environment teeming with interactions that are unique and unpredictable. While Bennett’s concept provides us with an approach that shifts the emphasis from the human to the complex potential of the environment, it does not address inherent complexities that arise when we consider how an individual’s experience of the environment is altered by factors such as gender or

ethnicity—aspects of identity that often lead to forms of oppression within a patriarchal system that privileges whiteness. With my concept of “the wild,” I gesture towards the complex, dynamic relations that arise between environmental spaces and black female experience.¹¹

The “wild” points not only to an uncultivated landscape but also that which falls outside an established boundary—a modality of the beyond.¹² Katherine McKittrick’s study of the intersections between black women and geography offers theoretical strategies for considering how enslaved women might have used the wild as a modality of experience. In *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (2006), McKittrick asserts that “Black matters are special matters.”¹³ Building from Édouard Glissant and Sylvia Winter, McKittrick draws a connection between the landscape and black women’s experience, arguing for a different formulation of knowledge: “Black women’s histories, lives, and spaces must be understood as enmeshing with traditional geographic arrangements in order to identify a different way of knowing and writing the social world and to expand how the production of space is achieved across terrains of domination.”¹⁴ In this framework, space and geography become sites where new understandings and histories for black women’s experience can be written. McKittrick views the critical study of the materiality of a geographical landscape as a strategy for rewriting the black subject: “The material landscape itself, as it is produced by the black subject and mapped as unimaginably black, must be rewritten into black, and arguably human, existence on different terms.”¹⁵ As a novel that focuses on stories about enslaved women’s lives across different terrains that include an array of materiality, *The Bondwoman’s Narrative*

provides a cartography to create counter-histories of the black female subject in the antebellum period.

To understand how black female bodies engage with materiality in environments in and beyond plantation spaces, I draw attention to Monique Allewaert's *Ariel's Ecology* (2013), a study that centers on ecomaterialist personhood in the American tropics.¹⁶ Allewaert examines how entanglements between African-American bodies and the environment create alternative constructions of identity. In this framework, the body operates as the site where personhood is negotiated: "The body, which I conceive as an organization of matter and parts and also fantasies about this organization of matter and parts, is the *prima facie* site through which personhood is produced and negotiated as well as where the overlapping economic, biological, and social systems that compose place are produced and negotiated" (17). As Allewaert suggests, both the environment and the body are dynamic spaces of potentiality and connection. These ecological connections generate alternative political personhoods or modalities for navigating an oppressive system. In her examination of African resistance in the swamps of the tropics, Allewaert contends that ecology was "an animate force" with which African agents entangled in their revolution against Anglo-Europeans (45). For example, by aligning their bodies with the curves of palm trees in the midst of an attack against the white troops, maroons translated the flora into a structure for warfare (45). Some enslaved women also learned how to use fluid from an orco plant to induce an abortion as a means of reproductive resistance (44). Using this dissertation's developing definition of femality as a frame, this chapter focuses on how the experience of black women in the antebellum plantation zone depicts complex interfaces with and negotiations with the environment that translate into modalities of resistance.

In *The Bondwoman's Narrative*, the first African-American novel written by a female fugitive slave, Hannah Crafts centers her narrative viewpoint on Hannah, an enslaved woman who typically works in the slaveholder's home on the plantation, but the novel also includes a variety of other stories that focus on enslaved women's experiences.¹⁷ The novel opens with details about Hannah's life as a house slave on the Lindendale plantation. Crafts then frames the novel with Hannah's retelling of stories that center on the hauntings of the portraits in the manor and on the linden tree. During her time at Lindendale, Hannah has a close relationship with her white mistress whose hidden black identity is eventually revealed.¹⁸ Mr. Trappe, the villain of the novel, arrives at Lindendale to blackmail Hannah's mistress since he knows about her secret identity. Without better alternatives, Hannah and her mistress decide to run away before being captured by Trappe. After her mistress dies during a confrontation with Trappe, Hannah is sold to a slave trader. During the journey to the next plantation, the slave trader loses control of the horses and dies in an accident, leaving Hannah to be discovered by the Henry family. Mrs. Henry eventually sells Hannah to the Wheeler family. After Mrs. Wheeler demotes Hannah to the status of a field slave and approves of a nonconsensual marriage between Hannah and an enslaved man who works in the field, Hannah decides to escape by disguising herself as a man and stealing useful items for her journey.¹⁹ She reaches freedom in New Jersey where she lives a quiet life after reuniting with her mother, marrying a loving husband, and settling down in a cottage.

This chapter moves to the wild of the linden and the wild of the forest to reveal how enslaved women negotiate the power of material forces to produce alternative strategies of ecological resistance. In the first section, I discuss how Rose, an older

enslaved woman, dies and transmutes into the wild of the linden tree to depict a materialist experience characterized by both trauma and resistance. Working from Allewaert's definition of the "plantation zone," I discuss how the slaveholder Sir Clifford initially uses the linden as a site for torture and violence against Rose. Then I discuss how Rose operates as a paranatural force in the wild of the linden tree. In contrast, Hannah has a variety of materialist encounters during her journeys into the wild of the forest. During her first journey with her mistress, Hannah experiences terror, safety, and an alternate temporality. By strategically decoding signs in the environment for survival, Hannah enacts what Allewaert describes as "knowledge of the ground." In her second journey, motivated by her own desire for safety and freedom, Hannah devises a plan to escape the Wheeler plantation unnoticed. The wild of the forest is a space of solitude and sociality for Hannah. When alone, she finds contentment during a momentary experience of comfort. Later in her journey, Hannah discovers the benefits of sociality after meeting two other fugitive slaves, Jacob and his sister. At the conclusion of the novel, Hannah ultimately decides to forgo the freedom of the wild of the forest for the possibility of freedom in the North.

THE WILD OF THE LINDEN

Although slaveholders used the land as a site of oppression, enslaved people were still successful in creating their own relationship with the natural world.²⁰ In a history of enslaved people's experiences in the antebellum South, Frederick Knight identifies the diverse range of experiences that nature offered for enslaved communities: "Their autobiographies, folklore, music, and oral histories are filled with ideas about the natural world. Surviving sources tell us that enslaved people marked time through nature, worshipped within the context of nature, found momentary refuge in nature as a means to

escape punishment, and extracted healing energies from nature.”²¹ The land that bordered the plantation could provide a space for social interactions, protection, and escape.²² Some enslaved people even practiced marronage by escaping into swamplands and setting up their own society complete with its own system of authority and networks.²³ During the 1780s, the maroon communities of Belleisle Island settled in the swamps of the Savannah River. Although its complete size is still unknown, we know that the maroon community was made up of houses, huts, canoes, and cultivated crops.²⁴ Influenced by the hybridity of African religious beliefs, enslaved communities also saw the natural world as a sacred space for conversions and religious visions.²⁵ These various strategies of resistance and renewal demonstrate that enslaved communities developed relationships with the natural world that were complex and varied.

In order to understand the significance of Rose’s relationship with the wild of the linden in *The Bondwoman’s Narrative*, I turn to Allewaert’s concept of the “plantation zone” to understand how bodies and landscapes interact to produce alternative constructions of political subjectivity. Allewaert defines the plantation zone as a “space that is tropical or subtropical and whose economy and political structures are shaped by the plantation form.”²⁶ She also argues that the plantation zone was a site for ecological combinations: “The entanglements that proliferated in the plantation zone compromised taxonomies distinguishing the human from the animal from the vegetable from the atmospheric, revealing an assemblage of interpenetrating forces that I call an ecology.”²⁷ While Allewaert uses the concept of the plantation zone to discuss African-American forms of resistance in the tropics, I use this term to delineate the geographical terrain of the Lindendale plantation as a space where enslaved black women fostered interconnections

with their surroundings. With its emphasis on what we might think of as human-material assemblages as ecologies, this term also provides a strategy for understanding Rose's complex diffusion across and within the linden tree. As an element of the plantation zone, the linden tree is initially planted and cared for by Sir Clifford but eventually transforms into a site of ecological resistance for Rose. In this section, I examine Sir Clifford's use of the linden tree and Rose's experience with the wild of the linden to reveal how this tree operates as both a site of torture and a paranatural force of resistance.

Under Sir Clifford's control, the linden tree is a site of pain and suffering. Crafts immediately juxtaposes the tree as a feature of the landscape with Clifford's ability to distort its function for violence:

Planted by Sir Clifford, it had grown and flourished exceedingly under his management. But the stern old man was a hard master to his slaves and few in our days could be so cruel, while the linden was chosen as the scene where the tortures and punishments were inflicted. Many a time had its roots been manured with human blood. Slaves had been tied to its trunk to be whipped or sometimes gibbeted on its branches. On such occasions, Sir Clifford sitting at the windows of his drawing room, within the full sight and hearing of their agonies would drink wine, or coolly discuss the politics of the day with some acquaintance....(21)

Here Crafts reveals Clifford's paradoxical character: he has the ability to nurture the tree while also using it as a site to torture black bodies. Crafts's emphasis on Sir Clifford as the progenitor of the linden tree also foreshadows Rose's future inhabitation of the linden as a transgression against the patriarchal system of slavery. With the choice of "manure" as a verb to describe the fertilization of the tree with human blood, Crafts inverts the natural order to emphasize the inhumanity of Clifford's actions.

After he has ordered an enslaved person to be hung on the linden tree, Sir Clifford decompresses in his drawing room with a glass of wine to discuss politics, indifferent to the sounds of "agonies" that take place just beyond his window. Although Sir Clifford does

not directly turn to watch the scene of torture, he uses the sounds of suffering as ambience for his conversations. In this disturbing juxtaposition, Crafts highlights how Sir Clifford takes pleasure in his power over the enslaved people's bodies. In her classic study, *Scenes of Subjection* (1997), Saidiya Hartman explains how this inextricable relationship between the slaveholder's pleasure and the enslaved person's suffering stems from the slaveholder's view of the enslaved person as property to be enjoyed: "The relation between pleasure and the possession of slave property...can be explained in part by the fungibility of the slave—that is, the joy made possible by virtue of the replaceability and interchangeability endemic to commodity."²⁸ Priscilla Wald also notes that this juxtaposition of pleasure and pain highlights the tree's function as a site of entertainment for the slaveholder: "Sir Clifford uses the linden...as a kind of theater of cruelty in which to enact scenes of horror that are perhaps intended to deaden both the enslaved and the enslaver, albeit in drastically different ways."²⁹ Although Crafts's graphic retelling of Rose's death can be interpreted this way, Crafts undermines Sir Clifford's ability to erase Rose through violence. Rose disrupts Sir Clifford's public performance of authority by refusing to carry out his request to drown her daughter's dog. Crafts alters our understanding of subjection and resistance in this scene by including the animal in the binary relationship of master and slave.

Instead of a one-to-one dynamic, Crafts incorporates the linden tree, as an element of the wild, and the dog, as a representational body of love, to assert that resistance arises from entanglements comprised of the human, animal, and ecological. Crafts links the dog with Rose's relationship with her youngest daughter, who leaves Rose the dog after being sold to another plantation: "She had it seems a little dog, white and shaggy, with great speaking eyes, full of intelligence, and bearing a strong resemblance to those of a

child....He had been the pet and favorite of her youngest daughter, and that daughter now languished out a life of bondage, in the toiling in the rice swamps of Alabama” (21). Once her daughter is taken away from her, Rose takes her affection so far as to feed it, sleep next to it, and take it with her wherever she goes (22). The dog becomes “her treasure, and sole possession, and the only earthly thing that regarded her with fondness” (22). In the context of Rose’s transfer of her affection from her daughter to the dog, Sir Clifford’s double hanging becomes that much more disturbing. It’s not enough to punish Rose for her disobedience; he must punish both the human and animal bodies to display the far-reaching grasp of his power. However, instead of blindly carrying out Sir Clifford’s request to drown the dog, Rose “answer[s] plainly that she should not and could not obey his orders” (22). Rose’s resistance arises from her maternal instinct to protect and nurture her object of affection.

Rose also resists slave law by refusing to give up her ownership of the dog. In “My Constant Companion” (1994), John Campbell explains how an enslaved person’s ownership of a dog exhibited humanity. Pet ownership produced a legal quandary in the slave system since enslaved people could not own something when they were considered property themselves.³⁰ Campbell also argues that this mode of ownership was significant because it demonstrated enslaved people’s humanity: “By having a dog, slaves possessed what was—according to slaveholders’ belief, logic, and laws—the very best proof of their being full human.”³¹ Campbell’s examination of the human-animal relationship within the context of ownership provides insight into why Sir Clifford’s anger against Rose begins with her refusal to harm the dog. By protecting it, Rose not only publicly undermines his authority but also upholds her own humanity as an affectionate caretaker.

In the moments prior to Rose's physical death, Crafts connects Rose's verbal resistance with her transmogrification into the linden. After Crafts gives a detailed account of the degradation of both Rose's and the dog's bodies from the hanging, she recounts Rose's rejoinder to Sir Clifford's suggestion that she be taken down from the tree:

‘No,’ she said ‘it shall not be. I will hang here till I die as a curse to this house, and I will come here after I am dead to prove its bane. In sunshine and shadow, by day and by night I will brood over this tree, and weigh down its branches, and when death, or sickness, or misfortune is to befall the family ye may listen for ye will assuredly hear the creaking of its limbs’ and with one deep prolonged wail her spirit departed. (25)

Although her body succumbs to the torture, Rose nonetheless exudes unwavering strength. By inhabiting the linden, Rose enacts resistance that is ecological and material. Regardless of the inclement weather, in “sunshine and shadow,” or across different temporalities, “by day and by night,” Rose will continue to exist. As a paranormal agency that will “brood” over the tree and “weigh” down its branches, Rose counters Sir Clifford's ownership by diffusing her presence across, through, and within the linden.³² With the image of Rose “brood[ing]” over the linden, Crafts implies that Rose's presence has the capacity to multiply her emotional wrath with each year that passes after her physical death. The branches of the tree are the spaces where Rose's “weight” will be placed, an image that quantifies Rose's presence in terms of heaviness. This heaviness corresponds both to the future creaking of the branches that will signal Rose's presence and to the emotional weight of memory that Hannah experiences each time she remembers Rose's story after her departure from Lindendale.

In *The Sounds of Slavery* (2005), Shane and Graham White's discussion of the effect that the unclassifiable sounds made by enslaved people had on white people provides insight into how Rose's “prolonged wail” might have been experienced by Sir

Clifford. White and White note, “Some of the most distinctive sounds made by slaves were not easily categorized, being neither speech nor music but more howl and shout.”³³ They also explain that whites found these “strange, guttural cries” to be “unsettling,” and associated them with “primitive sounds removed from their culture.”³⁴ Rose’s “prolonged wail” also echoes Crafts’s description of the amalgamation of sounds that are emitted by Rose, the dog, and the linden tree during the storm: “Through the din and uproar of the tempest could be heard all night the wail of a woman, the howling of a dog, and the creaking of the linden branches to which the gibbet hung” (24). In this commingling of ecological, human, and animal sounds, Crafts suggests that Rose channels the force of the weather and the pain of her beloved to shift into a new paramateriality as the linden.

To understand the effect of the relationship between sound and embodiment on Rose’s transmutation, I turn to Ashon Crawley’s reading of Harriet Jacob’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). Jacobs’s soundscape of resistance in the garret offers an interesting comparison to the “deep prolonged wail” that rises during Rose’s final moments of life. Conceptualizing Harriet Jacobs’s entrapment in the garret as a scream, Crawley provides a strategy for understanding Rose’s final breath as an irreducible element of personhood: “The breath is essentially foreign, irreducibly disagreeable to enslavement....The scream emits—sonically, phonically—to presence the anti-breath, that which remains literally outside this system. The bodying forth of the scream is the refusal of the material gift—air, breath, the capacity of lungs to hold—as essential foreignness, as keeping, holding, arresting, presencing, possessing an irreducibly disagreeableness.”³⁵ The body’s capacity to transmit breath in concert with sound is an act of resistance, a movement that occurs “outside the system.” Like the confinement of Jacobs’s garret, the

noose of Clifford's gibbet is a form of violent entrapment that confines Rose's mobility to the point of death. However, Rose channels her presence through her "deep, prolonged wail": a combination of breath and sound as resistance.³⁶

Even though Rose's hanging reduces her corporeal body to lifeless flesh, she continues to exist as a paranormal agency in the linden that haunts the plantation. Crafts presents Rose's power as a form of speculative knowledge experienced by the residents of Lindendale. This subtle strategy emphasizes the various impacts of Rose's haunting on the community. Rose reclaims the linden as an element of otherness in the plantation zone by dispersing her presence across it. With this transformation, Rose becomes a spectral eco-force that is no longer human. This ecological entanglement complicates a traditional understanding of personhood by blurring the wild of the linden tree with agency.

There are a number of contemporary critical studies and concepts that offer useful ways of conceiving of Rose's spectral interface with the linden. Avery Gordon's definition of a ghost, for example, offers a possible frame for understanding Crafts's depiction of Rose's haunting at Lindendale. In *Ghostly Matters* (2008), Gordon's description of the ghost as a social figure is helpful for conceptualizing how Rose forces those who hear the creaking of the linden to remember Sir Clifford's evil murder:

The ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. The ghost or the apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way, of course. The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition.³⁷

As a social figure, Rose haunts Lindendale as a reminder of Sir Clifford's violence and as a counterforce to his authoritarian control. Gordon's discussion of how haunting moves others into a structure of feeling explains the emotional effects Rose's influence has on the inhabitants of Lindendale. Each time the linden creaks, everyone on the plantation, both enslaved people and slaveholders, is forced to remember the brutal act of violence that was perpetrated upon Rose.

Rose's haunting can also be read as a strategy of retaliation against Sir Clifford. Wald interprets Rose's inhabitation of the linden as a mode of revenge that channels the imagination by solidifying her presence into a legend of remembrance: "[Rose] gives meaning to the creaking of the linden, exacting her revenge by creating a legend that speaks to the horror of the institution of slavery and the particular cruelties that it enables."³⁸ As a ubiquitous legend among the slaves, Rose's story offers replication as another mode of retaliation against Sir Clifford. Each re-telling of the story gives afterlife to Rose as a heroine of resistance long after her physical death. Crafts highlights storytelling as a mode of transmission within a community by telling us that "the servants all knew the history of that tree" and that they had been told that a "wild and weird influence was supposed to belong to it" (21). At the conclusion of the legend, Crafts reminds her reader that the "legend of the linden" was "told in the dim duskiness of the summer or by the roaring fires of wintry nights" (25). These retellings increase "the degree of interest attached to the tree" while "the creaking of the branches filled our bosoms with supernatural dread" (25). By layering the enslaved community's experience of the sound of the creaking with the knowledge of the legend, Crafts creates a complex modality that is both discursive and material to channel representations of Rose across different domains.

While Wald interprets Rose's legend as a mode of revenge, Toni Morrison's concept of a "site of memory" suggests that the linden as a geographical location that cuts across the landscape, imagination, and history. I include McKittrick's elucidation of Morrison's concept offers insight into the relationship between Rose's paranormal agency and memory: "The site of memory thus works in tandem with deep space and landscape: two worlds, the actual and the possible, chart a way into the imagination, the past, and a different sense of place."³⁹ As a site of memory that transgresses temporalities and boundaries, the linden tree is both plant and hybrid life—a paramateriality of Rose that disrupts presence with unruly sound.⁴⁰ When the Lindendale residents hear the linden, they remember its legend and locale as a site of violence and resistance. Each time the linden disrupts everyday existence with its sounds, the residents of Lindendale must grapple with their own constructed memories of Sir Clifford's violence and Rose's refusal to accede to his authority.

Rather than existing as one body within the human form, Rose acquires paranormal agency within the linden, and this paramateriality implies that personhood can pass across space and materiality. Fred Moten's concept of the animaterial provides insight into Rose's diffusion into various states of being: "Or, we could say that what we're after is a move from the metaphysics of presence, given in the figure of the one, to the physics of presence, given in transubstantiate no-thing-ness, in consent not to be (single), in differential inseparability, in the nearness and distance of the making of a living and its spooky, animaterial actions."⁴¹ With a shift from "metaphysics" to "physics," Moten undermines the value of a singular presence by arguing for the possibility of the "spooky" and "animaterial" an alternative, plural form of presence. In "Blackness and Nothingness"

(2013), Moten responds to the tenet of Afro-pessimism that equates blackness with nothingness by suggesting that nothingness might paradoxically provide the possibility of somethingness. He suggests that this nothingness enacts “a mobility of place” or “the fugitive field of unowning,” to forge blackness within a different ontological mode of being, what he describes as the paraontological.⁴² By transforming Rose into the ecological force of the linden, which traffics within the animaterial, Crafts blurs thingliness with female blackness to enact a paraontological mode of resistance against Sir Clifford’s cruel treatment of her physical self. While he was able to take her physical life from her through violence, he cannot eliminate her personhood as a paramaterial force inside the linden.

Crafts’s description of the incident at the party reveals how Rose haunts the Lindendale premises by diffusing her power through material and emotional effects. Before the event, Hannah charts the weather, noticing the increasing force of the wind in the sounds of the linden’s branches: “Then the linden lost its huge branches and swayed and creaked distractedly, and we all knew that was said to forbode calamity to the family (20). Mrs. Bry, Sir Clifford’s house manager, expresses dismay and fear in response to the linden tree’s interruption of the party while Hannah remains quiet. When the celebrations for Sir Clifford and his mistress begin, the volume of the linden tree’s creaking overpowering the party music:

We loved the music, we loved the show and splendor, we loved to watch the twinkling feet and the graceful motions of the dancers, but beyond them and over them, and through the mingled sounds of joyous music and rain and wind I saw the haughty countenance of Sir Clifford’s pictured semblance, and heard the ominous creaking of the linden tree. At length there was a pause in the music; a recess in the dance. ‘Whence is that frightful noise?’ inquired one of the guests. ‘It is made by the decayed branches of an old tree at the end of the house’ replied my master. ‘I will order it cut down to-morrow.’ (29)

In contrast to the earlier identification of Sir Clifford with the tree as a site of torture, Crafts now associates him with the “ominous creaking of the linden tree.” This reversal characterizes Sir Clifford as a lifeless and static fixture while Rose becomes the dynamic movement of the tree’s branches. Although the guests “love” the music, they cannot ignore the sound of Rose’s ecological presence as it passes “beyond” and “over” them to intermingle with the party music. In his introduction to *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (2013), Jack Halberstam works from Fred Moten’s and Stefano Harney’s project to argue that dissonant sound transports us into the wild: “Listening to cacophony and noise tells us that there is a beyond to the structures we inhabit and that inhabit us.”⁴³ For Crafts, ecological sound—here Rose’s creaking in the branches—captures the wild of the linden and reminds the partygoers that their enjoyment cannot be fully separated from the violence that has occurred on the plantation.

Sir Clifford’s matter-of-fact description of the source of the sound, the “decayed branches of an old tree at the end of the house,” also reveals his attempt to deny the power of Rose’s haunting with reason. After Sir Clifford threatens to cut down the tree the following day, everyone hears a loud “crash,” as the portrait of Sir Clifford becomes “loosened from its fastenings” and falls to the floor (30). This incident implies that Rose’s presence suffuses past boundaries and in space to haunt the plantation in various modes of disruption.

Although Rose gains paranormal agency through her merging with the linden, Crafts implies that materiality has limits. The final mention of the tree occurs during a conversation between Hannah and Lizzy that centers on a discussion of how Lindendale has fared after Hannah’s departure. At the end of their talk, Hannah finds out that “the

linden and its creaking branches had bowed to the axe, and that great changes had been wrought inside the house as well as out” (199). This information suggests that Rose’s paranormal presence has been eliminated by the removal of the tree. Without the branches, Rose can no longer haunt the plantation grounds. It is possible that the enslaved men and women continue to pass on the legend of Rose through generations, but the strength of a narrative may weaken across time and distance. While this suggests a foreclosure, the presence of the linden tree can also be read beyond the narrative frame by considering how it travels as a symbolic structure of violence across different temporalities.

In *Citizen* (2014), Claudia Rankine titles a section of the poem “December 4, 2004/Jena Six,” a reference to the six African-American teenage boys who were initially harshly charged with involuntary manslaughter after beating up another white student at school.⁴⁴ In August, prior to this confrontation, a different black boy had decided to sit beneath “the white tree” on their school’s campus, only to see, on the following day, three nooses hanging from the tree. In a fluid, unstructured style, Rankine reimagines this scene to envision the tree as a structure of violence against the black boys who were charged with involuntary manslaughter:

As the boys walked across grass a darkening wave as dusk folded into night
walking toward a dawn sun punching through the blackness as they noosed the rope
looped around the overhanging branches of their tree surprising themselves at the
center of the school yard thinking this is how they will learn the ropes did the
hardness in the history books cross the hardness in their eyes all the eyes with that
look without give did they give that look to the lift and fall of the leaves above
them?”⁴⁵

This story from modern day Louisiana demonstrates how a part of the environment, a tree, can create intersections among whiteness, space, and power to operate as a structure of violence. At Jena high school, white students claimed ownership of the tree by standing

there each day, enforcing an underlying boundary of exclusion for black students. When a black student transgressed this boundary, white students countered his actions with terror, tapping into America's lynching past and transforming the tree into a structure of whiteness by hanging nooses from its branches. This story provides an example of what Christina Sharpe describes as living in the wake, where "the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present."⁴⁶ Although the linden tree does not operate as a site for lynching in the novel, its connection to Rose's death signifies its ability to be used for violence against blacks. When we think of the linden from *The Bondswoman's Narrative* in this historical framework across time, it is an early marker of how the use of an element of the wild, a tree, can function as a structure of white violence—a precursor to the racial confrontation in Jena, Louisiana, as well as other future actions, symbolic or actual, that follow the period of the novel.

McKittrick's geographical approach to the relationship between racial violence and a black sense of place provides another strategy for understanding how the linden tree gestures toward future moments of terror in black history. With her definition of "plantation futures," McKittrick reads the past as an influence on the future: "a conceptualization of time-space that tracks the plantation toward the prison and the impoverished and destroyed city sectors, and consequently, brings into sharp focus the ways the plantation is an ongoing locus of antiblack violence and death that can no longer analytically sustain this violence."⁴⁷ McKittrick links the image of the plantation to the image of the prison to assert that contemporary black life in America must be examined in light of our racist history. By paralleling the plantation and prison as structures of

confinement, oppression, and antiblackness, McKittrick shows how racial violence in the past blurs into geographic thought across time to create a negative black sense of place.

The symbolism of trees in African-American literature exceeds the scope of this chapter, but it is productive to consider how Crafts's detailed description of Rose's hanging and embodiment within the linden tree anticipates future entanglements between trees, both literal and symbolic, and acts of violence and empowerment in African-American life and literature.⁴⁸ A contemporary reader cannot read Rose's story without thinking of the tree as a symbol for the numerous lynchings that took place in a disturbing wave of violence towards the end of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century.⁴⁹ Although there are not many records of lynching during the period of slavery, Crafts nonetheless most likely heard stories about public hangings of enslaved people as examples of white racist violence against blacks, as slaveholders lynched enslaved people who engaged in public resistance by plotting to kill their masters, raping mistresses, or planning rebellions.⁵⁰

On the other hand, African-American writers also use tree imagery to offer up strategies of remembrance and empowerment. In Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem "The Haunted Oak" (1900), the oak tree is the narrator retelling the story of a young black man who has been murdered on its limbs. The oak tree explains that the bough from which the man was hung has rotted and will never produce leaves again—physical markers that imply the spirit of the young black man lives on within the oak. In Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), a pear tree is a representation of Janie's sexuality and potentiality as a young woman: "Janie saw her life like a great tree in leaf with the things suffered, things enjoyed, things done and undone. Dawn and doom was in the

branches.”⁵¹ Paul D reaches freedom in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987) by listening to the Cherokee’s suggestion: “Follow the tree flowers....As they go, you go. You will be where you want to be when they are gone.”⁵²

Crafts’s portrayal of Rose’s hanging and subsequent haunting of Lindendale reveals how a tree, as an element of the wild, can be used by both white slaveholders and enslaved women during the antebellum period. Although her agency within its branches is finite, the linden channels Rose as a paranatural force of disruption on the grounds of Lindendale.

FLIGHT(S) INTO THE WILD OF THE FOREST

Gender was often a determining factor for whether or not an enslaved person would choose to try to escape the plantation. Of those that risked their lives for the possibility of freedom, only nineteen percent were women.⁵³ In contrast to men, women were less likely to run away because they did not have the same mobility on the plantation or knowledge of the wilderness (89-90). Women’s work duties limited their access to land beyond the plantation as well as their ability to form networks. They were also bound by their duty to their children as mothers, choosing to stay on the plantation instead of leaving them behind (89). Violence might also have been a factor enslaved women considered since slaveholders would often whip female runaways more harshly than men (89). If an enslaved woman chose to escape despite these odds, she was still faced with the struggle of learning how to survive alone in the wilderness (91). By considering the complexities of gender oppression that enslaved women faced, we gain greater appreciation for Crafts’s decision to tell the stories of Hannah’s flights into the wild of the forest. Toward the beginning of Hannah’s first journey with her mistress, Crafts interrupts the narrative to

emphasize the rarity of women travelling into the wild of the forest: “Every one must be aware that in the southern states a person traveling at night, especially a female, would be certain to excite observation” (53). In this section, I examine how Hannah, during her journeys into the wild of the forest, discovers ecological agency through her materialist experiences.

My choice of flight to describe Hannah’s journeys is both textual and theoretical. After Hannah’s mistress unveils Trappe’s threat of blackmail, Hannah reasons that escape is the only option: “I saw that her only chance was in flight, flight immediate and precipitate.” Hannah then shares this revelation: “You must fly from this house, from this place, from this country, fly immediately—tonight—or stay” (49). Hannah’s repetitive references to her mistress’s need to “fly” from the plantation reflect her concern and urgency. Here, the act of flight describes the literal bodily movement of their departure from the plantations grounds that they must make in order for Hannah and her mistress to reach safety. Halberstam’s summary of Moten and Harney’s conceptualization of fugitivity extends this image of flight into a broader context concerning blackness and resistance: “Fugitivity is being separate from settling. It is a being in motion that has learned that...there are spaces and modalities that exist separate from the logical, the logistical, the housed, and the positioned.”⁵⁴ He also writes that fugitivity is “flight” and “motion.”⁵⁵ In her first escape from Lindendale, Hannah and her mistress must leave because her mistress’s secret black identity is soon to be revealed. Hannah opts to fly with her mistress out of loyalty and a newfound notion of sisterhood that the women share (49). When the mistress expresses doubt about her decision to flee with Hannah, Hannah refuses to listen, adamantly responding that she would never let her travel alone.

Hannah and her mistress would have encountered a variety of terrain during their flight. Sylviane Diouf's description of the land beyond the Big House where a slaveholder and his family resided provides insightful details about the geography of antebellum America: "Behind the Big House, the cabins and the fields were woods, bayous, marshes, swamps, posocins (palustrine wetlands), and creeks, some of which belonged to the farms and plantations; land still undeveloped that provided game, firewood, and timber and that could be cleared, dried, and exploited" (5). Enslaved communities and slaveholders often used these borderlands for different purposes.

In her first flight, with her mistress, Hannah demonstrates an ability to take on different roles that survival in the wild of forest requires. Crafts contrasts Hannah's mistress, raised as white, with Hannah, raised as a house slave, to suggest that enslaved people possessed a distinctive knowledge of the land. When in the wild of the forest together, Hannah displays more knowledge of the land and more physical strength than her mistress. In her discussion of resistance in the American tropics, Allewaert translates Che Guevara's assertion that revolution requires "a perfect knowledge of the ground" into a strategy for understanding the distinct knowledge that African-Americans used in their ecological resistance (44).⁵⁶ We see Hannah's "knowledge of the ground" in a variety of ways throughout both of her journeys into the wild of the forest. Very early in this first journey, Hannah's superior stamina and ecological awareness are established: "We went on for several hours and were greatly fatigued. Towards morning, I knew the time by the stars and the fresh breezes. My mistress declared that she could go no further, and that she must rest" (54). Hannah, after gauging the time of day from the stars and the wind, realizes that they must press on in order to reach the boat in time for their departure: "But my

mistress we are not near the river. We must be there by morning to meet the boat. Lean on me if you are weary. I am much stronger” (54). Hannah, aware that they haven’t reached the river, offers physical aid to her mistress because she feels strong enough to take on some of her mistress’s extra weight.

At another point in their journey, Hannah uses her knowledge of the ground to transform the undergrowth of the trees into a cushioned seat for her mistress to rest on: “There was a thick wood nearby, dense with undergrowth, and thither I led my mistress, prepared for her a mossy seat, wrapped my own cloak around her; then seating myself behind her I drew her head to my bosom, and bade her sleep” (55). Although Hannah would have had to console her mistress in her role as an enslaved house servant on the plantation, here her motherly affection translates into a gesture of leadership in the wild of the forest. Showing an awareness of her mistress’s physical exhaustion, Hannah directs her to the mossy seat so that she can rest and be more prepared for the remainder of their journey.

Now I move to a discussion of another, more significant encounter that Hannah has in the wild of the forest. After she and her mistress have walked for some time, they discover an empty cabin. In the midst of a small clearing, Hannah and her mistress “cautiously” advance and “cautiously enter” on a path that is covered with overgrown weeds (67). Upon arrival, Hannah examines the belongings of the room to determine whether or not it is still inhabited. She catalogues the brokenness of the bench, iron pot, and crockery and surmises that a “forrester” might have been there (67). Hannah sees old clothes, but is too afraid to examine them, worried that they might be connected to “some deed of crime” (67). After determining that no one is living in the cabin, they decide to

shelter there until they can regain their strength: “We could gather our sustenance from the forest, we could quench our thirst at a neighboring spring, and at least we should be free” (67).

The young women’s time in the cabin is tenuous and affected by the violence of the past. After they have been in the cabin for some time, Hannah’s sense that it has been “the theatre of some fearful crime” is confirmed when she sees a “dark deep stain on the ground” and hair on the end of a hatchet that has been matted with blood (68). They also find the “remains of a human skeleton” that had been disinterred by dogs and vultures (68). All of these disturbing elements evoke fear in the women as they remain in the cabin. Later in the novel, their suspicions are confirmed when they learn that a “beautiful girl was once murdered here” and now haunts the grounds (71).

Elizabeth’s Freeman’s discussion of the relationship between time and the violence of history illuminates how the women’s experience in the cabin is inextricably linked with the past. Working from Jacques Derrida’s reading of *Specters of Marx*, Freeman writes, “The present is always split, but split by prior violence and future possibility rather than simply by the nature of signification.”⁵⁷ This “binding” of history, as she describes it, creates a link between one’s experience of the present with those in the past and acts as a “detour” for one’s “forward-moving agency.”⁵⁸ By intertwining the young women’s experience in the cabin with the murder of the young girl in the past, Crafts enacts a feminist binding of history to suggest that the effects and consequences of violence travel across time. Crafts also suggests that individuals can experience this binding differently since Hannah’s mistress begins to experience “gloomy apprehensions” or hallucinations in the wild of the forest after this encounter (68). As time goes on, Hannah’s mistress

descends into madness. By linking the origin of this instability with the past murder of the young girl, Crafts implies that one's binding with history can manifest on both cognitive and emotional levels. Although Hannah and her mistress attempt to escape the oppression of the plantation zone by creating a space of shelter and safety in the wild of the forest, the elements of violence they encounter reveal the impossibility of this strategy.

During her stay at the cabin, Hannah also has a poignant experience of temporality. Almost immediately after settling into the cabin, Hannah slips into an alternate mode of time that she portrays as a series of environmental, materialist transformations: "And there we remained many days: how many I cannot tell. But the fruits and berries that were hard and green when we arrived there became juicy and mellow and finally departed before we left. The flowers were just budding, opened, ripened, and dropped their seeds, and the birds that were busily employed all day long, singing and building their nests, hatched and matured their offspring" (68). She loses track of the days but knows that time is passing by the changes in the lifecycles of fruits, berries, flowers, and bird life. Indeed, Hannah describes each stage of the flower's lifecycle to quantify her bodily experience of time. Crafts also conceptualizes the loss of regulatory time as a contrast between the building of the birds' nest with the image of a nest filled with offspring.

By considering how planters—plantation owners and overseers—conceive of time from the structure of labor on the plantation, we gain a different perspective of Hannah's experience of an alternate temporality. Stephanie Camp explains how slaveholders used time as a method of control: "Time measured movement, and it regulated work. By the antebellum period, time had become an important element in planters' farming methods...."⁵⁹ Throughout the day, they accounted for every moment of their enslaved

workers' schedules, including breaks and meals, to create an overarching feeling of control and regulation (22). At nighttime, they enforced curfews, patrols, and night watches as strategies to control black movement (24-25). As a bondwoman, Hannah would have most likely had her days organized by daily work assignments that she would have to complete by a certain time of the day (28). By "[losing] time" within this alternate modality where she tracks the ripening of fruit, the blossoming of flowers, and the lifeworld of birds, Hannah experiences a transient respite that counters her previous experience of plantation time.

After two men who are out in the woods on an expedition discover the young women, their flight into the wild of the forest ends (71). Hannah's mistress cannot handle the physical and emotional challenges of their journey and eventually becomes mentally unstable. Instead of concealing her enslaved status, Hannah tells the truth in the hope that the men will "deal tenderly with her [mistress]" (71). Unfortunately, her mistress eventually dies during her confrontation with Mr. Trappe, and Hannah does not journey into the wild of forest again until she decides to escape from the Wheeler plantation. After being demoted to field slave status and threatened by the possibility of sexual violence, Hannah chooses to transgress the boundaries of the Wheeler plantation and reenter the wild of the forest in the hope of making it to the North, also known as "the Promise Land" of freedom.

Before moving to a discussion of Hannah's second, solo flight into the wild of the forest, I want to discuss the significance of the threat of sexual violence that prompts her flight from the Wheeler plantation. In the context of sexuality and slavery studies, Crafts's depiction of the complex network of power within the system of slavery provides insight

into how enslaved people were often pitted against each other, as well as the various ways that enslaved women were subject to violence.⁶⁰ During Hannah's time at the Wheeler plantation, Maria undermines her by plotting to get her position. Maria lies to Mrs. Wheeler, the white wife of Hannah's slaveholder, by telling her that Hannah has divulged secrets of Mrs. Wheeler's past to others on the plantation. Mrs. Wheeler believes Maria and decides to punish Hannah for her "disloyalty" through physical labor and sexual violence:

You can weep now...now that your baseness has been discovered, but it will do you no good, my resolution is unalterably fixed. You shall depart from the house, and go into the fields to work. Those brutalized creatures in the cabins are fit companions for one so vile. You can herd with them. Bill, who comes here sometimes has seen and admires you. In fact he asked you of Mr. Wheeler for his wife, and his wife you shall be. (210)

Mrs. Wheeler, seeking vengeance for her wounded pride, capitalizes on her position of power by condemning Hannah—an enslaved woman relegated to the lowest social status in the slavery system—not only to harsh physical labor in the fields, but also, by approving of a nonconsensual marriage to Bill, an enslaved man on the plantation, to a potential experience of sexual violence. Instead of protecting Hannah, Mrs. Wheeler wields her power to increase Hannah's pain and trauma. Historian Stephanie Jones-Rogers explains how white women played a role in oppressing black women: "Some [white women] further traumatized enslaved women by committing acts of sexual violence on them in an attempt to make these women submit to further violation. And others sanctioned and ordered enslaved people to have sex with each other against their will."⁶¹

The overseer of labor on the Wheeler plantation and Bill also contribute to Hannah's oppression within the system of slavery. Hannah gives details about Bill's unsettling attraction towards her and the overseer's view of her as an object of exchange:

“Bill kept hanging around, and would occasionally stop working to look at me. The overseer observed this and beckoned him to approach. ‘You seem interested in Hannah’ he remarked. ‘Now take her to your cabin, she has, I believed, finished her task.’ Bill’s eyes sparkled with delight, and I was too weak and weary, too dispirited and overcome to offer resistance” (214). By frequently standing near Hannah and gazing at her during the day, Bill publicly expresses his desire for her. When the overseer commands Bill to “take her to your cabin,” he reveals his view of Hannah as a sexual object of exchange. By doling Hannah out to Bill as a reward, the overseer reinforces his authority and dominance. Crafts also implies that the cumulative power created by this patriarchal transaction between the overseer and Bill overwhelms Hannah, making it impossible for her to fight back in this scene. Although Hannah is forced to visit Bill’s cabin, she manages to escape before being harmed.

David Doddington’s work on sexuality and manhood offers historical context and insight into Bill’s role as an oppressor of Hannah. In “Manhood, Sex, and Power in Antebellum Slave Communities” (2018), Doddington explains that most research on enslaved men has focused on countering the construction of black men as “emasculated victims” or “bestial rapists” by highlighting more positive traits of black manhood. Doddington acknowledges that enslaved men were trapped in an institution that legitimized sexual abuse, but he also emphasizes the necessity of recognizing the complexities involved with slaves’ intimacy:

Sexual coercion within the slave quarters cannot be explained solely as a consequence of emasculation or oppression; enslaved men were not hypersexual “bucks” unable to control their sex drive, but neither were they all victimized through an institutionalized emasculatory regime. Some enslaved men were understood, and understood themselves, as being the beneficiaries of a form of masculine privilege in the intimate realm, using sexual dominance to construct a

homosocial hierarchy in which they played themselves above other men, sometimes at the expense of enslaved women.⁶²

In this framework, Bill acts on his male privilege by openly expressing his attraction to Hannah, by encroaching on her space, and by verbally sharing his desire with the overseer, knowing what this declaration will entail for her.⁶³ Although he and Hannah are both enslaved within same system of slavery, Bill remains higher than Hannah in terms of agency and position. Instead of resisting this unequal paradigm of sexual abuse, Bill reinforces it by expressing his attraction to Hannah.

Crafts inverts the dominant topos that positions man as an adventurer with skillful knowledge of the land by constructing a black female heroine who ventures into and successfully survives the environment. In contrast to her earlier flight with her mistress, Hannah's plan involves disguising herself as a young man; stealing a candle, some matches, scissors, and other necessary items; and then stealing away unnoticed from the plantation (216).⁶⁴ Formally, Crafts also departs from a diachronic description of Hannah's actions by sharing these significant transgressions after they have already been completed. At the onset of her journey, Hannah displays her mastery and determination to survive: "I had neither map, nor chart, nor compass, but I could be guided at night by the North Star, and keep the sun to my back through the day. Then God would be with me, Christ would be with me, good angels I hoped would ever be near me and with these comforting assurances I fell asleep" (218). Hannah is determined to make do by navigating signs from the natural world and relying on God for protection and comfort. Bryan Sinche argues that Hannah's relationship to the land stems from her deep religious belief: "Her second wilderness journey, which may be read as an escape to freedom, is also an affirmation of her belief in Christian morality and a surrender to God's judgment of her life."⁶⁵ Hannah

also relies on a disciplined strategy of “keep[ing] the sun” at her back each day as a means of moving in the right direction. Later in her escape, Hannah strategically negotiates the landscape by finding a space for safety and restoration: “Presently I heard the murmur of water, and soon beheld at a little distance the sparkling waves of a rivulet. It was broad but shallow. I entered it, waded down the current for probably half a mile, crossed over, and was in safety” (219). Once she hears the sound of moving water, she follows it, knowing that it will create a natural barrier between her and whoever might attempt to track her. Moreover, Hannah appreciates the dark wood as a space of comforting solitude: “I was in the midst of a deep thick wood, nocturnal shadows surrounded me, and from appearances there was not a human habitation for many miles. Yet I had become so accustomed to darkness and solitude that it occasioned an agreeable feeling rather than otherwise” (220). Crafts’s depiction of Hannah as a young, black woman who is capable of hiding herself in the wood and “nocturnal shadows” undermines the conventional construct of a woman as weak or incapable of survival. Hannah also experiences the contentment that solitary freedom in the wild of the forest can bring.

During her escape, Hannah observes and encounters animal life that makes her reconsider the value of her flight for freedom. Hannah describes how her entrance into the wild of the forest offers a comparison with the animals: “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests. I stopped not till overcome with fatigue and complete exhaustion. I had traversed fields, leaped fences, and passed for some distance the boundaries of Mr. Wheeler’s estate...” (217). In this juxtaposition, Hannah contrasts her status as a fugitive who is running in search of freedom and a new home with the foxes and birds who have their own dwellings in the wild in “holes” and “nests.” While the foxes and

birds rest in safe spaces, Hannah runs for her life, crossing great distances on her journey. In *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), Frederick Douglass makes a similar observation by recognizing the birds as representations of freedom denied to him as an enslaved person: “Those birds, perched on yon swinging boughs, in friendly conclave, sounding forth their merry notes in seeming worship of the rising sun, though liable to the sportsman’s fowling-piece, are still my superiors. They live free, though they may die slaves. They fly where they list by day, and retire in freedom at night. But what is freedom to me, or I to it?”⁶⁶ While Crafts nods to this distinction with her succinct reference to the homes of the foxes and birds, Douglass extends this comparison into a philosophical question of freedom. He sees the birds’ freedom of song and flight as markers of their status above him. Melvin Dixon’s assertion that birds inspire freedom for fugitive slaves sheds light on both of these encounters: “The nearby woods contained enough birds and roaming animals to provide slaves with geographical and naturalistic references for freedom.”⁶⁷ On the morning of the second day of her escape, Hannah notes, “The birds were singing sweetly, and everything wore an aspect of life and joy” (218). When Hannah hears the sounds of the birds, she is uplifted and regains hope in the possibility of her goal.⁶⁸ In her first pangs of hunger, Hannah follows her instincts to live off the land, drinking the milk of a full-uddered cow she comes across and eating wild berries she had picked for breakfast (218).

While Hannah discovers her ability to survive on her own during her solitary experience in the wild of the forest, her encounter with Jacob and his sister, who are also fugitive slaves, teaches her the value of community. Hannah first sees the pair together in the forest and immediately notices that Jacob is taking care of his sister, who is battling a fever and slipping in and out of a state of delusion (221). Although Hannah and Jacob are

not able to save Jacob's sister, they comfort her as much as possible. Jacob seeks out a better shelter for them while Hannah "touches her chest and heart," leading her in prayer during the final moments of life (225-226). Over the course of their journey together, Hannah shows an awareness of the affectionate bond that she and Jacob develop: "He learned to love me, however, as a younger brother, and his society and gentle care greatly relieved the difficulties of our toilsome journey" (230). Hannah's relationship with Jacob gives her strength and support during a challenging point in her journey. As they travel great distances, "[scaling] mountains" and "[crossing] rivers," they learn how to work together as a team: Jacob guards the shelter while Hannah surveys the land and determines their next moves across the landscape (230-231).

The wild of the forest provides Hannah with sociality and freedom that is short-lived and threatened by various forms of violence. Jacob's and his sister's deaths reinforce the constant threat of danger that the freedom in the wild of the forest entails. Jacob's sister dies from a disease she contracts when handling infected garments found in a deserted house, while Jacob is shot by the owner of a boat he attempts to take for their journey (227, 231). When Hannah fortuitously reunites with Aunt Hetty, she begins to consider what freedom in the North might mean for her. As a representative of white conservatism, Aunt Hetty sees the wild of the forest as a space with "wanderer[s]" who "seek shelter in dens and caves of the earth" (236). Aunt Hetty also encourages Hannah to forgo the dangers of the wild and instead travel by steamboat, dressed as a woman, with letters, to find refuge in New Jersey (236). By accepting Aunt Hetty's knowledge and limited viewpoint, Hannah reveals an inability to see beyond her conservative white viewpoint, which classifies the wild of the forest as a space that lacks civilization and order. Although Hannah experiences

the wild of the forest as a space of community which grants her a temporary experience of freedom, she cuts her flight short. At the novel's end, discussed in the final section of this chapter, Hannah chooses to live in a "neat little cottage," removed and safe from the wild of the forest (244).

The dénouement of the final chapter reveals the conspicuous limits of freedom for ex-slaves like Hannah. After her tearful departure from Aunt Hetty, Hannah travels safely on a steamboat to begin a new life in the free state of New Jersey. En route to her destination, she eavesdrops on two fellow passengers' conversation and discovers that Trappe has been murdered (242). While Crafts signals that Trappe's murder is an act of retributive justice, she leaves out crucial scenes of Hannah's development from enslaved to free woman. The novel does not depict what happens to Hannah at the conclusion of the steamboat journey, nor what happens at the start of her life of freedom. These silences reveal the limits of the novel's idea of freedom by undermining the reality of the final scene. Without the details of how Hannah manages to grapple with her newfound sense of freedom and ownership, we enter in the final section of the novel disturbed by what's missing from Hannah's narrative—unsettled by the quiet undercurrents that flow beneath the glossy, static images of Hannah's closing vision of freedom in the North.

HAUNTED PLANTING(S)

Although Crafts provides a picture of happiness at the end of her novel, the realities of antebellum society haunt its frame. The conclusion clouds any lucid conception of what freedom might actually mean for slaves who managed to escape to the North. As Hartman points out, newfound freedom was "precarious" since "exploitation, domination, and subjection inhabit[ed] the vehicle of rights."⁶⁹ This, in turn, led to ex-slaves'

experience of what Hartman refers to as the “double bind of freedom”: “being freed from slavery and free of resources, emancipated and subordinated, self-possessed and indebted, equal and inferior, liberated and encumbered, sovereign and dominated, citizen and subject.”⁷⁰ Any free rights that ex-slaves gained were still bound by both their experience of enslavement and the limits of their freedom during this time. Hartman’s explanation of the double bind provides insight into the difficult emotional and legal challenges that ex-slaves faced when beginning their new lives. How does an individual move from chattel into subject status? Is the category of citizenship really an ideal when its origin is inextricably linked to the violence and subjection of another? In this section, I address the complexities of Crafts’s ending by examining how outside forces of antebellum America haunt Hannah’s vision of freedom. I begin with a discussion of Hannah’s neighbors’ garden, first, as a remainder of the wild of the forest, before examining the significance of Hannah’s ownership of the “neat little cottage” from a variety of perspectives (244).

Charlotte and her husband’s gardens and orchards are cultivated images that act as vestiges of the beauty and violence that the wild of the forest represents. In the final scene of the novel, Crafts provides a detailed description of Hannah’s view of her friends’ cottage: “From the window where I sit, a tiny white cottage half-shaded in the summer by rose-vines and honeysuckle appears at the foot of a sloping green. In front there is such an exquisite flower-garden, and behind such a dainty orchard of fruits that it does one good to think of it. It is theirs” (246). The specificity of this scene suggests that Hannah sits at this spot each day to admire the beauty of the “rose-vines,” “honeysuckle,” and “sloping green.” After her description of her neighbors’ gardens and orchards, she emphatically asserts, “It is theirs.”

Hannah's reference to Charlotte and her husband's garden also recalls some of her initial impressions of the Henry plantation earlier in the novel. Hannah notes that she goes out to explore the Henry plantation in May, when the "first roses were blowing" (125). As Hannah walks the grounds, she observes connections between the home space and flowers: "Then every room seems a wonder in itself, with its old-fashioned fire place, and little windows, surrounded by lattice work with the luxuriant growth of honey-suckle and jasmine pressing through it..." (126). By repeating the imagery of the roses and honeysuckle in this final scene, Crafts blurs Hannah's freedom with her enslavement in the past to create a vision of freedom that is paradoxical, a symbol of what Hartman refers to as the "double bind." From a positive viewpoint, Charlotte's and her husband's cultivation of the garden reflects a sense of ownership and pride: since a garden's beauty depends on labor and attentive care, the luxuriant blooms of the garden imply that they are responsible for its beauty. In this context, the garden is an image of personal development. As Knight suggests, "In tending to the natural world, black people simultaneously tended to their own selves."⁷¹

If we consider the significance of Charlotte's and her husband's garden in light of what they were given on the Henry plantation, however, we can see another aspect of its value. On the plantation, enslaved people were often given plots of land behind their dwellings. These gardens were used to grow crops to supplement their meager diet and might also contribute to an enslaved person's ability to earn cash by selling surplus produce.⁷² However, enslaved people had to work their gardens at night with insufficient tools and seeds that were either stolen from or swapped with others.⁷³ In this context, the image of the garden's beauty on a summer day reveal Charlotte and her husband's ability

to thrive beyond the confines of the slave system, but its connection to slavery's shadows undermines its positive import.

As common features of a plantation, gardens were produced by the labor of enslaved people for the consumption of beauty by white slaveholders and families.⁷⁴ In *Gardenland* (2018), Jennifer Atkinson's examination of Thomas Jefferson's cultivation practices at Monticello reveals the multi-layered symbolism of the power that the garden expressed: "In the case of the plantation, the landscape announced racial and class hierarchy, the planter's wealth and power, connections to Old World luxury and taste, and of course the master's control over both nature and the enslaved people."⁷⁵ In this frame, the neighbors' garden can be read as a cultivation of the wild of the forest that re-enacts this plantation logic of order and consumption. Safe in her cottage, Hannah can admire the beauty of her neighbors' garden, but cannot escape the taint of the history of enslavement which the flowers preserve.

Hannah defines her success by her dwelling, her profession as a teacher, her reunion with her mother, and her place within a community. In the opening of the final chapter, Hannah thinks that her "life of freedom" is everything she had imagined it would be:

There is a hush on my spirit these days, a deep repose, a blest and holy quietude. I found a life of freedom all my fancy had pictured it to be. I found the friends of the slave in the free state just as good as kind and hospitable as I had always heard they were. I dwell now in a neat little Cottage, and keep a school for colored children. It is well attended, and I enjoy myself almost as well imparting knowledge to others, as I did in obtaining it when a child myself. (244)

Hannah's vision of happiness does not include a life in the wild of the forest; instead she resides "in a neat little cottage" where she enjoys "a deep repose" and "a blest and holy quietude."⁷⁶ In contrast to the terror and hunger she faced at times in the wild of the forest,

Hannah feels serenity, joy, and happiness. In *Closer to Freedom* (2004), Camp argues that slaveholders strategically regulated the geography of the plantation to “contain” slaves’ movement by control.⁷⁷ Camp also clarifies how this strategy resulted in an experience of place both metaphorical and literal levels. In this light, we can read Crafts’s description of Hannah’s ability to “dwell” in her own cottage is an authoritative declaration of ownership that reinforces her acquisition of space in opposition to the regulated geography of the plantation. With “dwell,” Crafts also connects Hannah’s inhabitation of space with temporality, emphasizing her residence in the cottage as long-lasting. Hannah enjoys her work as a teacher, finding joy in the experience of “imparting knowledge to others,” a selflessness that reflects her role within the larger context of the community.

Home Fronts (1997), Lora Romero’s investigation of power’s movement within and beyond domestic spaces, can be used to develop our understanding of how Hannah’s conception of home intersects with the political domain. Romero argues that the “politics of culture reside in local formulations—and in the social and historical locations of those formulations” instead of in any essentialized formulation.⁷⁸ Crafts’s images of home and marriage, conventions of sentimental domestic fiction written by white women in the antebellum era. As William Andrews asserts, Crafts’s ending parallels the “kind of emotional, social, and economic security” that the heroines of white “woman’s fiction” usually experienced.⁷⁹ But Hannah’s experience of racial oppression recasts the significance of the cottage and marriage from the perspective of African-American experience. Hannah’s “neat little cottage” can be read as what Claudia Tate describes as a “meaningful symbol of civic equality.”⁸⁰ By portraying Hannah within a domestic space of marital harmony and home ownership, Crafts counters the racist narrative of the

antebellum era by giving her heroine the safety and security that was denied to her during her enslavement.

Hannah's "neat little cottage" is also a space that supports and fosters her desire for self-development. Gaston Bachelard's discussion on the spatial implications of a body's dwelling inside a house provides a hopeful frame for understanding the significance of Hannah's cottage. In his classic *Poetics of Space* (1958), Bachelard asserts that the house is "our corner of the world," "our first universe," and a "real cosmos in every sense of the world."⁸¹ Working from a phenomenological approach, Bachelard conceptualizes the "house image" as the "topography of our intimate being" since the house provides a space for the mind to daydream and exist within past, present, and future temporalities of thinking.⁸² However, it is difficult to imagine that Hannah, as a newly freed ex-slave, would have access to the expansiveness that Bachelard's concept of the house implies without confronting her past experience of slavery.⁸³

In *Necro Citizenship* (2001), Russ Castronovo's discussion of Frederick Douglass's concept of antifreedom, offers a counter-image to hold up against Crafts's vision of freedom. Tracing Douglass's diction on the subject of freedom through each of his narratives, Castronovo reveals that Douglass "thinks against freedom" by unraveling it from its political "tethers" and housing it within the body.⁸⁴ Castronovo explains that "freedom is to be construed by all that surrounds it rather than being instantly divined by its meaning."⁸⁵ While Douglass empties out the conventional meaning of freedom to redefine it in his own terms, Crafts offers a more conservative viewpoint by depicting Hannah's "life of freedom [as] all her fancy had pictured it to be" (244). The limits of

Crafts's portrayal of freedom doesn't erase the fact that it is Hannah's vision or that Crafts chooses to end her novel with Hannah's happiness.

To understand how America's racist history has affected the realm of home ownership across time, I shift from the nineteenth century to the present to consider Sarah Broom's contemporary memoir *The Yellow House* (2019). The youngest of twelve children, Broom weaves the complex threads of her identity through what she names "the yellow house," her childhood home located in New Orleans East. In 1961, this section of the city was touted as a beacon of development and promise. Headlines described New Orleans East as the "Biggest Thing in Years" and the "City Within a City Rising in the South."⁸⁶ When her childhood neighborhood was initially planned, developers predicted New Orleans would reach "a million residents by 1970."⁸⁷ Broom then tells us that none of "the projections" for New Orleans and her section of the city "would ever come true."⁸⁸ The yellow house replicates this pattern of false promise. For Broom, the yellow house represents complex aspects of her African-American identity: the loss of her father, the shame of her poverty, the family she must come to know again, her mother's beginnings, her family's secrets, her childhood. After Katrina, the city designates the yellow house as unsafe for living and sends the family a form letter in the mailbox detailing the date and time of its demolition.

When we consider Hannah's "neat little cottage" alongside Broom's autobiographical experience of the yellow house in New Orleans East, we can trace the history of racism across these structures of home—spaces inhabited in order to build life worlds. Like the shape of the linden that appears as a "white tree" to haunt our contemporary moments of racial tensions like those that occurred in Jena, Louisiana, the

racism of antebellum America resurfaces in the false promises of urban development like those packaged in the marketing of the yellow house that was sold to the Broom family in the 1960s. This modern example of racism fills in the gaps of reality that are missing from Hannah's portrayal of ownership and freedom.

Although these inequalities in what it means to be a "citizen" stain the fabric of African-American life, they do not encapsulate its meaning. In "Plantation Futures," McKittrick works from Sylvia Wynter's ideas in "Novel and History, Plot and Plantation" (1971) to argue for a reading of the plantation that addresses both the violence of slavery and the hope produced by creative forms of knowledge. McKittrick explains that plantation futures travel in two directions: "First, where the basic system is left untouched and we are left to defend and justify it and, second, where the awareness of the workings of the system are engendered in a (creative and geographic) plot-life and, at the same time, challenge this long-standing logic."⁸⁹ Building on Wynter's argument, McKittrick uses "plot-life" as a metaphor for the plots of novels as a creative rendering of plantation life and plot as a geographic section of land used by enslaved people to grow crops for their own sustenance. McKittrick explains how creative fiction gives meaning to the black subject beyond the contextual violence of the plantation: "The figure of the black subject—within slave and postslave geographies, in life and in death—is indigenous, is planted, within the context of a violence that cannot wholly define future human agency."⁹⁰ When we consider *The Bondwoman's Narrative* from this perspective, the novel becomes a space that cultivates Crafts's feminist plantings, stories such as Rose's and Hannah's, that depict the resilience and significance of black women's experience. With ears poised to listen for the sounds of

creaking branches, we can move forward in our present, ready and willing to learn from the voices of those that haunt us from the past.

EPILOGUE

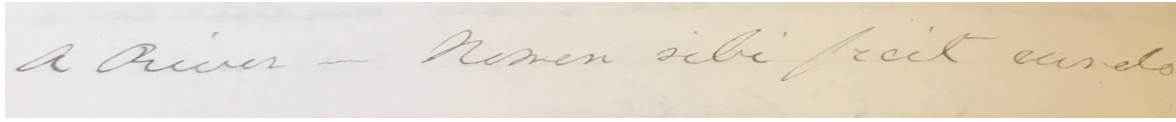


Figure 2. Fuller's Journal, Courtesy of Margaret Fuller Archive

"A River—Nomen sibi fecit eundo"¹

In this unpublished fragment in her journal, Margaret Fuller juxtaposes the image of a river with the Latin phrase "Nomen sibi fecit eundo" ("it made a name for itself by going").² Fuller compares the movements of the river's currents to sequential development that occurs across time. This pairing of the image of the river and the Latin phrase creates a surprising connection between human concerns and the materiality of moving water. While we usually think of making a name or reputation as a human action, Fuller undercuts this superior notion of human agency by suggesting that a river shares an equivalent power. What would it mean for the material environment to be viewed as a co-participant in life with human existence? How does our view of personhood change when we begin to perceive and embrace the material entanglements of our bodies and their surroundings?

Working with nineteenth-century concerns from contemporary critical perspectives associated with new materialism in this dissertation, I have explored answers to these and other questions by studying the relationship between the body and its environment. Envisioning both the body and its surroundings as sites capable of transformations and renewal, I argue for an open, non-hierarchical approach for understanding the body's relation to its surroundings. Inspired by Karen Barad's theoretical paradigm, I use this strategy to envision bodies and environments as intra-active entities capable of endless becomings.³ One merit of this approach is the prospect of examining the body's interaction with other beings in the environment. Another advantage stems from a desire to define the

body in ways that account for the interaction between the discursive and the material.⁴

Taking into account the dynamism of the body itself and the potentiality of its surroundings, we discover alternative viewpoints for understanding the nuances and complexities of power's influence on the body.⁵

Using the concept of femality as a strategy for examining women's writing in the nineteenth century, this dissertation explores a wide range of materialist experiences to reveal how human-material interactions alter our understanding of personhood. In *The Hermaphrodite*, Laurence and Rösli offer encounters with materiality within spaces of performance. In artful expressions of poetry, drama, and visual art, Laurence discovers ecstatic connections of intimacy through the materiality of his intersex body. Dressed as Juliet and as a female friend of Berto, Laurence also has materialist encounters with fashion that are significant, yet temporary, experiences of womanhood. On the other hand, Rösli, as a ballerina, portrays the dynamism of the environment through the movement of dance. With each visit to see Rösli perform, Laurence experiences a vision of fluidity that contrasts with his inability to embrace his intersex body. In *The Story of Avis*, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps conceptualizes patriarchal resistance as various images of shared flight between female and bird bodies. Phelps's recognition of the bird as a worthy creature of life, beauty, and mystery implies there is much to be gained from human-animal collaborations. In *The Bondwoman's Narrative*, Crafts's portrayal of Rose and Hannah's materialist relationships with the wild of the linden and the forest demonstrates how ecologies that involve interactions between black women and the environment produce alternative forms of resistance against the oppressive system of slavery. For Rose, the linden is a site of oppression until her spectral interface with it in her final moments before

death; in its branches, she travels as a paranormal force of ecological resistance that haunts the Lindendale plantation. For Hannah, the wild of the forest provides her with opportunities to demonstrate her knowledge of nature, experience an alternate temporality, and decipher which type of freedom she wants for herself.

By portraying the nuances and complexities of the body in its surroundings, these nineteenth-century women writers widen the scope of possibility for personhood. In contrast to seeing identity as static or closed, these writers envision a personhood that is open, engaged, and interactive with the material world. In this context, interactions between the human and the non-human, life and inanimate matter, become channels of possibility and resistance. Although systems of power can influence the body in complex ways, materiality, of both the body and reality, offers the potential of surprising connections and exchanges. From a feminist standpoint, the female characters of this study also offer a portrayal of womanhood that involves a relationship with the environment that is based on experience, interaction, and exchange. Manning's description of the body as a site of interconnection with its environment is useful for understanding the body's contribution to this concept of womanhood: "A body... is the complexity of a multiplicity of the phasings that co-constitutes it, a society in motion, a resonant materiality, a metastable field."⁶ This dissertation studies motions—of the body and of the material forces that surround it—to offer a view of womanhood that is plural and in process.

By opening the introduction of this study with Fuller's description of an infant's development inside the womb and this epilogue with Fuller's proverb about a river, I hope to show how movement and the possibility of transformation are fundamental qualities of not only the human body but also material forces. In this final turn, I discuss how Fuller's

encounter with materiality in an everyday moment enacts an experience of worlding. In this passage from her journal written around 1839, Fuller writes about taking a drink from a hot beverage on a cold day:

I held in my hand the cup. It was full of hot liquid. The air was cold; I delayed to drink and its vital heat, its soul curled upwards in delicatest wreaths. I looked delighted on their beauty, but while I waited, the essence of the draught was wasted on the cold air; it would not wait for one, it longed too much to utter itself,—and when my lip was ready, only a flat, worthless sediment remained, of what had been.⁷

Here Fuller transforms the mundane into a poetic encounter of touch: between her hand's embrace of the cup, the temperature of the "hot liquid," and its contrast with the chilly air. As she holds the cup in her hand, she notes its temperature, from the feeling of her hand against the cup and the evaporation of the beverage's "vital heat" into the cold air. Fuller poetically compares this transformation to the beverage's soul shifting into "delicate wreaths" that "curl" upward to the sky. Entranced by the swirling shapes of the hot vapor, she admires its beauty, but then the moment is over. The vapor disappears. By translating the hot liquid's transformation into a self-utterance, Fuller creates an anthropomorphic image that draws a connection between the materiality of the vapor and human respiration. This ability to see human agency in nonhuman nature enacts what Bennett describes as a counter strategy to human narcissism.⁸ The hot liquid speaks its utterance—a breath generated from a collision between hot and cold particles. When she touches her lip to the liquid, she is met with a "flat" and "worthless" taste—a remainder of its original state of heated wonder.

These utterances of the everyday contain a multitude of phenomena. Our bodies, which are comprised of countless life worlds engage in encounters with material forces that are always in process. Coole and Frost describe these interactions as "choreographies

of becoming” that include the transformation of objects, bodies, and subjectivities.⁹ If we pause to consider the microscopic movements of materiality that are taking place in Fuller’s touch of the heated cup of liquid, we can imagine the array of micro-organisms such as bacteria and fungi that make up the microbiome on Fuller’s hand or the breaking apart of hydrogen bonds of the heated water as it is released into the cold air. Once she sips the hot liquid, it travels inside her body to spur countless interactions and combinations. When we study the movements that exist between, across, and through the somatic and the material, we see the potentialities that exist within a single moment of the ordinary.

Notes for Introduction:

¹ Margaret Fuller, undated manuscript of “Unlabeled Journal,” Margaret Fuller Family papers, 1662-1970, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

² Margaret Fuller, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, in *The Essential Margaret Fuller*, ed. Jeffrey Steele (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 261. I will hereafter cite in the text.

³ Gilles Deleuze, “The Fold,” trans. by Jonathan Strauss, *Baroque Topographies: Literature/History/Philosophy* 80, Yale French Studies (1991), 231.

⁴ Erin Manning, *Always More Than One* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 3,4. Monique Allewaert uses this definition in her theoretical framework for her study of maroon resistance in the American tropics. *Ariel’s Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 10.

⁵ For more on new materialism, see Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, eds., *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, eds., *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*, (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2012); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). For more on new materialism and feminist theory, see Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, eds., *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007); Victoria Pitts-Taylor, *Mattering: Feminism, Science, and Materialism* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

⁶ Coole and Frost, *New Materialisms*, 10.

⁷ Coole and Frost, *New Materialisms*, 10.

⁸ Alaimo and Hekman, *Material Feminisms*, 7.

⁹ Jeffrey Steele, *Transfiguring America: Myth, Mythology, and Mourning in Margaret Fuller’s Writing* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 131.

¹⁰ Anonymous, “FEMALITY,” *The Pathfinder*, Mar 11, 1843, 35, American Periodicals.

¹¹ Margaret Fuller, “The Great Lawsuit: Man versus Men. Woman versus Women,” *The Norton Anthology of American Literature Vol. B: 1820-1865* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), 770.

¹² See Deborah Manson, “The Trance of the Ecstatica: Margaret Fuller, Magnetism, and the Transcendent Female Body,” *Literature and Medicine* 25, no. 2 (2006): 298-324. See Laura Saltz, “The Magnetism of a Photograph: Daguerreotype and Margaret Fuller’s Conceptions of Gender and Sexuality,” *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 56, no. 2 (2010): 106-134.

¹³ Fuller, “Leila,” in *Essential*, 57, 54.

¹⁴ Fuller, “Self-Definitions, 1835-42,” in *Essential*, 13.

¹⁵ Margaret Fuller, 1810-1850. Undated autograph journal: “Mythology,” Margaret Fuller Family Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, 90, 91.

¹⁶ Fuller, “Mythology.” Linnaeus is known as the “Father of Taxonomy.” Fuller might have been referencing his renowned *Species Plantarum*, which was published in 1753.

¹⁷ Horace, *Odes* 1.12.45, Oxford Classical Text, eds. Edward Wickham and H.W. Garrod (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), 2.

- ¹⁸ Rachel Blumenthal argues, “Fuller finds inspiration in her self-diagnosed ‘ailments.’ Linking nervous illness with artistry and brilliance, Fuller revalues traditional categories of health and mental function in order to privilege rather than denounce women and female-centered diseases.” “Margaret Fuller’s Medical Transcendentalism,” *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 61, no. 4 (2015): 567. Michael Hurst argues that Fuller “reestablishes [the body] as a site that plays a crucial role in the acquisition of self-knowledge” by giving it a crucial role in the “pursuit of spiritual transcendence.” “Bodies in Transition: Transcendental Feminism in Margaret Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*,” *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 66, no. 4, (Winter 2010): 11. Deborah Manson posits mesmerism as a crucial influence that “enabled her to correct her distorted body, access unique spirituality, and assert her capabilities as a woman.” “The Trance of Ecstatica”: Margaret Fuller, Animal Magnetism, and the Transcendent Female Body,” *Literature and Medicine* 25, no. 2, (Fall 2006): 318.
- ¹⁹ Martha L. Berg, “‘The Impulses of Human Nature’: Margaret Fuller’s Journal from June through October 1844,” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 102, (1990): 98. JSTOR.
- ²⁰ Cynthia Davis, “Margaret Fuller, Body and Soul,” *American Literature* 71, no. 1, (1999): 45. JSTOR.
- ²¹ Margaret Fuller, “Self-Definitions 1835-1842,” in *Essential*, 12.
- ²² Fuller, “Self-Definitions,” 12.
- ²³ Various confidantes of Fuller commented on the intensity of her physical challenges. Ralph Waldo Emerson, a close friend and fellow transcendentalist, describes her as a lifetime “victim of disease and pain,” whose “pain acted like a girdle, to give tension to her powers.” Ralph Waldo Emerson, in *Fuller in Her Own Time: A Biographical Chronicle of Her Life, Drawn from Recollections, Interviews, and Memoirs by Family, Friends, and Associates*, ed. Joel Myerson (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2008), 148. Fuller’s younger brother, Richard, perceived a cause-and-effect relationship between Fuller’s intellectual strain for her Conversations and the “torturing headaches” that put her in a such a “nervous agony” that she often ended up screaming. Richard Frederick Fuller, in *Fuller in Her Own Time*, 190.
- ²⁴ Hélène Cixous, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 96.
- ²⁵ Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 7.
- ²⁶ Levine, *Forms*, 7.
- ²⁷ Victoria Pitts-Taylor, *Mattering: Feminism, Science, and Materialism* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 4.
- ²⁸ Stacy Alaimo, “Trans-Corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature” in *Material Feminisms*, 238.
- ²⁹ Sara Ahmed, “Orientations Matter,” in *New Materialisms*, 235.
- ³⁰ Lauren Berlant, “The Female Woman: Fanny Fern and the Form of Sentiment,” in *American Literary History* 3, no. 3 (Autumn 1991): 441. JSTOR.
- ³¹ Dorri Beam, “Fuller, Feminism, Pantheism” in *Margaret Fuller and Her Circles*, eds. Brigitte Bailey, Kathryn P. Viens, and Conrad Edick Wright (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2013), 63.

³² Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), xvi.

³³ M. F. Jacobson, "Where We Stand: US Empire at Street Level and in the Archive" in *American Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (2013): 269. Project MUSE.

³⁴ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York and London: New York University, 2009), 9.

³⁵ See Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) and *Black and Blur (consent not to be a single being)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

³⁶ Historian Linda Kerber argues that the rhetoric of the "domestic sphere" entrapped women by designating the feminine as a space of domesticity in contrast to the masculine political realm. "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (June 1988): 9-39. In her seminal essay, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," Barbara Welter asserts that being a woman meant privileging four key virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. This patriarchal construct of womanhood relegated women to the domestic sphere while privileging virtues that focused on morality instead of intellect. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1966): 152. JSTOR.

³⁷ Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1977), 13. Nineteenth-century scholars have heavily debated the value of women's domestic novels. Douglas argues that the "feminization" of novels translated into a repetition of male structures of power and influenced women to be artificial and selfish. Whereas Jane Tompkins countered Douglas to argue that sentimental novels are "remarkable for [their] intellectual complexity, ambition, and resourcefulness" and "offer a critique of American society" that is worthy of being studied (*Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986], 124). Laurent Berlant responds to the Douglas-Tompkins debate by describing sentimental ideology as "a structure of consent in which domestically atomized women found in the consumption of popular texts the experience of intimate collective identity, a feminine counterpublic sphere whose values remained fundamentally private." Berlant expands this thesis to critique mass-mediated culture for its promulgation of the female complaint, to argue that "women live for love, and love is the gift that keeps on taking" (40). *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

³⁸ Berlant, *Female Complaint*, 11, 13, 9.

³⁹ Amy Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity," in *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 583.

⁴⁰ Lara Romero, *Homefronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 5.

⁴¹ Justine Murrison, *The Politics of Anxiety in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2.

⁴² Rosenberg Qtd. in Murrison, *Politics of Anxiety*, 2.

- ⁴³ Promad K. Nayar, *Posthumanism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 71.
- ⁴⁴ In her classic feminist speech to a white audience in Akron, Ohio, Sojourner Truth centers her argument on her physicality. Truth not only argues for equality between the sexes but also emphasizes the connection between her physical strength and the land she has labored upon: “I have as much muscle as a man, and can do as much work as any man. I have plowed and reaped and husked and chopped and mowed, and can any man do more than that?” Truth references her body in her argument for equal rights. “Two Speeches,” in *The Essential Feminist Reader*, ed. Estelle B. Freedman (New York: The Modern Library, 2007), 64.
- ⁴⁵ Stephanie M.H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women & Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 62.
- ⁴⁶ Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 63.
- ⁴⁷ Tamar Heller and Patricia Moran, eds., *Scenes of the Apple: Food and the Female Body in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Women's Writing* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003); Jennifer Putzi, *Identifying Marks: Race, Gender, and the Marked Body in Nineteenth-Century America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 4; Daphne A. Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006).
- ⁴⁸ Allison Piepmeier, *Out in Public: Configurations of Women's Bodies in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 9.
- ⁴⁹ Piepmeier, *Out in Public*, 9.
- ⁵⁰ Allewaert, *Ariel's Ecology*, 30.
- ⁵¹ Colleen Glenney Boggs, *Animalia Americana: Animal Representations and Biopolitical Subjectivity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 20.
- ⁵² Boggs, *Animalia Americana*, 11.
- ⁵³ Branca Arsić, *Bird Relics: Grief and Vitalism in Thoreau* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 20.
- ⁵⁴ Arsić, *Bird Relics*, 21.
- ⁵⁵ Christopher Breu, “Why Materialisms Matter,” *symplokē* 24, no. 1-2, Materialisms (2016):17. JSTOR.
- ⁵⁶ In *Undomesticated Ground* (2000), Stacy Alaimo charts a history of feminist theory's “flight from nature” as a strategy for disentangling the concept of “woman” from “nature” (2). She responds to this history by arguing that various women writers of nineteenth century rearticulate nature as a “space of feminine possibility” despite its burdened history (23). Stacy Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).
- ⁵⁷ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 181.
- ⁵⁸ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, 170.
- ⁵⁹ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 61.
- ⁶⁰ Allewaert, *Ariel's Ecology*, 18.
- ⁶¹ Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 121.

⁶² Katherine Hayles emphasizes embodiment's relationship to a broader definition of thought: "Embodiment makes clear that thought is a much broader cognitive function depending on its specificities on the embodied form enacting it." *How We Became Posthuman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), xiv.

⁶³ Cristin Ellis, *Antebellum Posthuman: Race and Materiality in Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New York: Fordham University, 2018), 12.

⁶⁴ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Malden: Polity Press, 2013), 49, 50.

⁶⁵ Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 17.

⁶⁶ Morton, *Ecology*, 14.

⁶⁷ Kathleen Kirby, "Thinking Through the Boundary: The Politics of Location, Subjects, and Space," *boundary 2* 20, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 175.

⁶⁸ McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xi.

⁶⁹ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 21.

⁷⁰ Sharpe explains how wake work is interconnected to the contemporary blackness in America: "I'm interested in ways of seeing and imagining responses to terror in the varied and various ways that our Black lives are lived under occupation; ways that attest to the modalities of Black life lived in, as, under, and despite Black death. And I want to think about what this imagining calls forth, to think through what it calls on "us" to do, think, feel in the wake of slavery—which is to say in an ongoing present of subjection and resistance; which is to say wake work, wake theory" (*In the Wake*, 20).

⁷¹ Elizabeth Grosz, *The Incorporeal: Ontology, Ethics, and The Limits of Materialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 3.

⁷² In *Time Travels* (2005), Elizabeth Grosz explains how Deleuze's concept of the "outside" refers to forces that lie beyond systematic thinking and offer possibility of different type of thinking: "In this context, Deleuze insists that, when it is a matter of forces at work, forces that are natural and cultural indistinguishably, that confront each other and play out their relations, these forces may be understood to constitute an Outside, that which is beyond systematicity, which is composed of forces, and which must be acknowledged as such. This outside, which is not the exterior of a subject or a culture, that is, a subject's or culture's own representation of its limit, an image or projection of an outside, is the force that disrupts, intervenes, breaks down expectation and to generate invention and innovation, to enable the emergence or eruption of subjectivity or culture. The outside is the (successful or victorious) series of forces that impinge on structures, plans, expectations of the living: this outside appears to us in the forms of events, natural and social, and events generate for us the problems that our inventiveness, above all our culture's ingenuity, attempts to address or resolve" (*Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* [Durham: Duke University Press, 2005], 48).

⁷³ Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 261.

⁷⁴ Grosz, *The Incorporeal*, 261.

Notes for Chapter 1:

¹ Julia Ward Howe, "The Last Dance," in *Passion-Flowers* (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 154), 107. HathiTrust.

² Howe, *Reminiscences*, 207.

³ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.

⁴ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 32.

⁵ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 187.

⁶ See Monika Elbert's "(S)exchanges: Julia Ward Howe's *The Hermaphrodite* and the Gender Dialectics of Transcendentalism" for a discussion of Howe's feminism and exploration of gender within the context of Transcendentalism. *Toward a Female Genealogy of Female Transcendentalism*, eds. Jana L. Argersinger and Phyllis Cole (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2014). See Jane Van Slembrouck's "Envisioning Physical Difference in *The Hermaphrodite*" for an insightful contextualization of Howe's characterization and discussion of the significance of Laurence as an intersex protagonist. *Modern Philology* 114, no. 3 (2017): 726-746.

⁷ Renée Bergland and Gary Williams, eds., introduction to *Philosophies of Sex: Critical Essays on The Hermaphrodite* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2012), 2.

⁸ Gary Williams casts Laurence as a site for Howe's "contemplation of her own psychological androgyny" ("Speaking With the Voices of Others: Julia Ward Howe's Laurence," in *The Hermaphrodite* [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012], xxvi). Reading Howe's studies on polarity as a source of influence for her construction of Laurence, Laura Saltz argues that he "embodies a polar philosophy of gender in which masculine and feminine traits are present in all humans in different balances and syntheses" ("Rather Both Than Neither," in *Philosophies of Sex: Critical Essays on The Hermaphrodite*, eds. Renée Bergland and Gary Williams [Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2012], 73). Marianne Noble contends the central theme of the text to be about a hermaphrodite who "explores the feelings of anxiety and alienation that result from possessing both a female body and a supposedly masculine commitment to one's own subjectivity" ("From Self-Erasure to Self-Possession: The Development of Julia Ward Howe's Feminist Consciousness," in *Philosophies of Sex*, 57).

⁹ Lauren Berlant, "Intimacy: A Special Issue," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998): 284.

¹⁰ Berlant, "Intimacy," 284.

¹¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 173.

¹² Eve K. Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 14, 15.

¹³ Adrienne Rich aptly draws a line between the act of revision and women's ability to survive: "Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" ("When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," *College English* 34, no. 1 [1972]: 18).

¹⁴ Carolyn Heilbrun, "What Was Penelope Unweaving?" in *Hamlet's Mother and Other Women* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 109.

¹⁵ Elaine Showalter, *The Civil Wars of Julia Ward Howe* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016), 108. We also know that at one point, Howe considered using the pen name, "Sybil Glauko," for her writing. Inspired by a nickname given to her by a friend, "Glaukopis," the potential pen name is the Greek word meaning bright-eyed that Homer uses to describe Athena in his epic.

¹⁶ Julia Ward Howe, *The Hermaphrodite* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 12. I will hereafter cite in the text.

¹⁷ Roland Barthes, *Image, Sound, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 188.

¹⁸ See Noble for a discussion of the poem's relation to Laurence's inability to have intimate relationships (*Philosophies of Sex*, 47-71).

¹⁹ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 77.

²⁰ Freeman also contends that in each scene of queer performance, the body functions as "an embodied temporal map, a fleshly warehouse for contingent forms of being and belonging, a closet full of gendered possibilities" (*Time Binds*, 70-71).

²¹ Elizabeth Freeman, "Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations," *New Literary History* 31, no. 4, 727.

²² Freeman, *Time Binds*, 71.

²³ Judith Halberstam, "Keeping Time with Lesbians on Ecstasy," *Women & Music – A Journal of Gender and Culture* 11, (2007): 53.

²⁴ Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 3.

²⁵ Joanne Entwistle, "Fashion and the Fleishy Body: Dress as Embodied Practice," *Fashion Theory* 4, no. 3, (August 2000): 325.

²⁶ Joyce Warren argues that Howe's reading of George Sands' novels might have inspired her to delve into cross-gender thinking: "Sand's writing, as well as her cross dressing and gender-bending behavior, was exciting and liberating for Howe...Influenced, perhaps, by her knowledge of Sand's cross-dressing, Howe wrote in *The Hermaphrodite* of the extent to which the restrictions of mind and behavior that encumber women are exacerbated by the tangible restrictions of women's dress" ("Howe's Hermaphrodite and Alcott's 'Mephistopheles': Unpublished Cross-Gender Thinking" in *Philosophies of Sex*, 117).

²⁷ For a close reading of Laurence's performance of Juliet and the aftermath with Ronald that follows, see Bethany Schneider's "The Consummate Hermaphrodite," in *Philosophies of Sex*, 138-156.

²⁸ Carrie Noland, *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 206.

²⁹ Cristina Giorcelli and Paula Rabinowitz, eds., *Fashioning the Nineteenth Century: Habits of Being* 3 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 19. ProQuest Ebook Central.

³⁰ Cristina Giorcelli and Paula Rabinowitz, eds., *Exchanging Clothes: Habits of Being II* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 6.

³¹ Julia Ward Howe, *Sex And Education: A Reply to Dr. E. H. Clarke's "Sex In Education."* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1874), 27-28. HathiTrust.

³² Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge Classics, 1993), 86.

³³ Sally R. Munt, *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 2. ProQuest Ebook Central.

³⁴ Valerie Steele, "The Corset: Fashion and Eroticism," *Fashion Theory* 3, no. 4 (Nov 1999): 463.

- ³⁵ Laura E. Richards and Maud Howe Elliott, *Julia Ward Howe: 1819-1910* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925), 20.
- ³⁶ Howe, *Reminiscences*, 17.
- ³⁷ Howe, *Reminiscences*, 17.
- ³⁸ Richards and Elliott, *Julia Ward Howe*, 19.
- ³⁹ Richards and Elliott, *Julia Ward Howe*, 17.
- ⁴⁰ Gillian Siddall and Ellen Waterman, eds., *Negotiated Moments: Improvisation, Sound, and Subjectivity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 3.
- ⁴¹ Richard Dyer, *Pastiche* (London: Routledge, 2007), 8. Howe recalls seeing Diva Malibran as a significant event in her childhood: "I had been twice taken to the opera during the Garcia performances, when I was scarcely more than seven years of age, and had seen and heard the Diva Malibran, then known as Signoria Carcia, in the roles of Cenerentola (Cinderella) and Rosina in the 'Barbiere di Seviglia'" (*Reminiscences*, 15).
- ⁴² Dyer, *Pastiche*, 21.
- ⁴³ Although I agree with Sheila Liming's assertion that Laurence "is broken by the 'truth' of his sex" in this moment, I also read the audience's response as a metaphorical rejection of his ambiguous body (332). "Romancing the Interstitial: Howe, Balzac, and Nineteenth-Century Legacies of Sexual Indeterminacy," in *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 72, no. 3, (December 2017).
- ⁴⁴ Showalter, *The Civil Wars*, 8.
- ⁴⁵ Howe, *Reminiscences*, 103.
- ⁴⁶ Howe, *Reminiscences*, 105.
- ⁴⁷ Margaret Fuller, who Julia Ward Howe admired and eventually shared a friendship with, published a piece about Fanny Elssler in *The Dial* and was one of the early supporters of the ballet. By writing about Elssler, Fuller gave much needed attention to ballet as an early art form that some critics attacked on the grounds of immorality. Fuller could have also inspired Howe to pursue the ballet as a source for inspiration: "The charms of M'lle. Elssler are of a naïve sportive character, it is the young girl, sparkling with life and joy, new to all the varied impulses of the heart, half coquettish, more than half conscious of her captivations, that she delights us. She was bewitching in the arch Cracovienne, and in the impassioned feeling of life in her beautiful Spanish dances. The castanets seem invented by that ardent people to count the pulses of a life of ecstasy, to keep time with the movements of an existence incapable of a dull and heavy moment. Blossoming orange groves, perfumed breezes, and melting moonlight fill the thoughts, and the scene seems to have no darker background" (65). "Entertainments of the Past Winter," *The Dial: A Magazine for Literature, Philosophy, and Religion* (1840-1844) III, no. 1, (July 1842): 65. ProQuest.
- ⁴⁸ Gary Williams points out that Howe probably began writing *The Hermaphrodite* in the "winter of 1846-47, about three years after Julia Ward's marriage to Samuel Gridley Howe and after the births of her first two (of six) children" ("Speaking" in *The Hermaphrodite*, x).
- ⁴⁹ Gary Williams, *Hungry Heart: The Literary Emergence of Julia Ward Howe* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 88.
- ⁵⁰ Noble, "From Self-Erasure to Self-Possession," in *Philosophies of Sex*, 65.

- ⁵¹ Robert Azzarello, *Queer Environmentalism: Ecology, Evolution, and Sexuality in American Literature* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), 5.
- ⁵² Azzarello, *Queer Environmentalism*, 5.
- ⁵³ Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, eds., *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 5.
- ⁵⁴ Karen Barad, "Nature's Queer Performativity," *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 19, no. 2, (Spring/Summer 2011): 124.
- ⁵⁵ Qtd. in Jill Dolan's *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 6.
- ⁵⁶ Dana Mills, *Dance and Politics: Moving Beyond Boundaries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 18.
- ⁵⁷ Carol Lee, *Ballet in Western Culture: A History of Its Origins and Evolution* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), 138.
- ⁵⁸ Lee, *Ballet*, 139.
- ⁵⁹ Lee, *Ballet*, 139.
- ⁶⁰ Noble, "From Self-Erasure to Self-Possession," in *Philosophies of Sex*, 58.
- ⁶¹ Noble, "From Self-Erasure to Self-Possession," in *Philosophies of Sex*, 58.
- ⁶² John Keats, "Ode on Melancholy," *The Poetry Foundation*, 27 February 2018. <http://poetryfoundation.org>.
- ⁶³ Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, eds., *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 10.
- ⁶⁴ Berlant, "Intimacy," 5.
- ⁶⁵ Renée Bergland, "Cold Stone: Sex and Sculpture in *The Hermaphrodite*," in *Philosophies of Sex*, 158.
- ⁶⁶ Bergland, "Cold Stone," 158.
- ⁶⁷ Bergland, "Cold Stone," 164.
- ⁶⁸ See Karen Sanchez-Eppler's "Indeterminate Sex and Text: The Manuscript Status of The Hermaphrodite" for a reading of the final scene as representation of "unsettling bothness" (44). See Saltz for a discussion of the final scene in terms of Laurence's polarity ("Rather Both Than Neither," in *Philosophies of Sex*, 91). Bergland discusses the significance of the ending within the context of the unfinished manuscript ("Cold Stone," in *Philosophies of Sex*, 184).
- ⁶⁹ Warren, "Howe's Hermaphrodite," in *Philosophies of Sex*, 118.
- ⁷⁰ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 89.
- ⁷¹ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (London: Routledge, 1952), 63, Qtd. in Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 100.

Notes for Chapter Two:

- ¹ Pudge, like a young Avis, doesn't conform to the patriarchal construct for femininity since she cares "a straw for dolls, or doll-houses, or patchwork, or rolling hoop, or stringing beads, or kissing defenseless kittens, like most girl babies" (369). Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, "Baby-Birds: A Story for Baby-Women," *The Youth's Companion* (1827-1929) 42, 47 (Nov 1869), 369, American Periodicals.
- ² Donna Haraway, *Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 111.

³ Mary Angela Barnett emphasizes that “Avis” is symbolic but limits the potential of the connection by reading Avis’s link with the birds on the basis that both women and birds are skilled at concealment (*Elizabeth Stuart Phelps* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1939], 80). Both Christine Stansell and Lori Kelly read Avis as a Diana figure whose freedom is closely tied to the fields and beaches of the New England setting. Stansell, “Elizabeth Stuart Phelps: A Study in Female Rebellion,” *The Massachusetts Review* 13, no. ½ (Winter-Spring 1972): 248. Kelly, *The Life and Works of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Victorian Feminist Writer* (New York: Whitston Publishing Company, 1983), 100. While there is merit to Diana as a feminist representation of strength and power in the landscape, one cannot ignore Diana’s, and by extension, Avis’s, association with creatures of the natural world. Jack Wilson simultaneously opens and forecloses the significance the birds might have for Avis by ending on this claim: “As for Avis, the bird-like, naturally free artist, she was, it seems, encaged prior to her beginning” (“Competing Narratives in Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’ *The Story of Avis*,” *American Literary Realism 1870-1890* 26, no. 1 [Fall, 1993]: 74).

⁴ Fiona Probyn-Ramsey, “Anthropocentrism” in *Critical Terms for Animal Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 47.

⁵ Barnett, *Elizabeth Stuart Phelps*, 82.

⁶ Tim Morton, *Dark Ecology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 27.

⁷ Mary Allen, *Animals in American Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 10.

⁸ Allen, *Animals in American Literature*, 10.

⁹ Jennifer Mason, *Civilized Creatures: Urban Animals, Sentimental Culture, and American Literature, 1850-1900* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 1.

¹⁰ Boggs, *Animalia Americana*, 20.

¹¹ Justine Murison, *The Politics of Anxiety in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2.

¹² Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xxiii.

¹³ Branca Arsić, *Bird Relics: Grief and Vitalism in Thoreau* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 156, 162.

¹⁴ Haraway, *Staying With the Trouble*, 58.

¹⁵ Haraway, *Staying With the Trouble*, 97.

¹⁶ Agustín Fuentes and Natalie Porter, “Kinship,” in *Critical Terms for Animal Studies*, ed. Lori Gruen (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 185.

¹⁷ Rosi Bradotti, *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 22, 25.

¹⁸ Carolyn Kessler, introduction to *The Story of Avis* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), xiii.

¹⁹ Marisol De La Cadena and Mario Blaser, eds., *A World of Many Worlds* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 4.

²⁰ Cadena and Blaser, *A World of Many Worlds*, 4.

²¹ Jakob von Uexküll, *Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans: With A Theory of Meaning* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 43. ProQuest Ebook Central.

- ²² Brett Buchanan, *Onto-Ethologies: The Animal Environments of Uexküll, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Deleuze* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008), 24. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- ²³ Lori Kelly, *The Life and Works of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Victorian Feminist Writer* (New York: Whitston Publishing Company, 1983), 100.
- ²⁴ Phelps, *The Story of Avis*, 30-32. Following this citation, I will hereafter cite in the text.
- ²⁵ Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, 94.
- ²⁶ Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, 94.
- ²⁷ Morton, *Dark Ecology*, 7.
- ²⁸ Morton, *Dark Ecology*, 7.
- ²⁹ "Blue Jay," Plate 102, by John J. Audubon, *Birds of America* online, <https://www.audubon.org/birds-of-america/blue-jay>.
- ³⁰ Mary Oliver, *Upstream: Selected Essays* (New York: Penguin Press, 2016), 127-132.
- ³¹ Oliver, *Upstream*, 128.
- ³² Oliver, *Upstream*, 132.
- ³³ Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward to Theodore Roosevelt, telegram, 28 February 1902, Theodore Roosevelt Papers. Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University, <https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o37136>.
- ³⁴ Theodore Roosevelt to Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward, 4 April 1902, Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University, <https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o181650>.
- ³⁵ Cora Diamond, "The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy," in *Philosophy and Animal Life*, eds. Stanley Cavell et. al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 74.
- ³⁶ For more on the rise of vivisections in the late nineteenth century, see Rachel Mundy, *Animal Musicalities: Birds, Beasts, and Evolutionary Listening* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2018).
- ³⁷ Emily VanDette, "Elizabeth Stuart Phelps," Unbound Project. May 23, 2017. <https://unboundproject.org/elizabethstuartphelps/>.
- ³⁸ Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward, "Spirits in Prison," in *The Independent...Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 52, no. 2677 (March 22, 1900), 695. American Periodicals.
- ³⁹ Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward, "For Anti-Vivisection," *The Independent...Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 61, no. 30, (August 16, 1906), American Periodicals.
- ⁴⁰ Phelps, *Songs of the Silent World* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1891), 97. HathiTrust.
- ⁴¹ Phelps, "The True Woman," *The Story of Avis*, 271. I will hereafter cite in the text.
- ⁴² In the notes to the novel, Kessler offers a different reading of the Sphinx by arguing that it symbolizes "rebirth, royal power, and benevolent guardianship" (*The Story of Avis*, 256).
- ⁴³ Qtd. in George V Griffith, "An Epistolary Friendship: The Letters of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps to George Eliot," *Legacy* 18, no.1, (2001): 95.
- ⁴⁴ Phelps, *Chapters*, 250.

⁴⁵ In *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845), Margaret Fuller enacts a similar strategy by linking greatness as an aspect of womanhood across time. Although some women might not find the space within their historical moment to thrive, it doesn't mean that future women can't benefit from and connect to their revolutionary actions of the past: "They [great women of the past] had much to mourn, and their great impulses did not find due scope. But with time enough, space enough, their kindred appear on the scene. Across the ages, forms lean, trying to touch the hem of their retreating robes" (Fuller, *Essential*, 267).

⁴⁶ Kessler argues that Phelps saw Avis as a representation of the Sphinx: "Phelps would pose, but not solve, this riddle. If the Sphinx is Avis's portrait of the dumb riddle of womanhood, then Avis herself is Phelps's Sphinx" (*Elizabeth Stuart Phelps*, 89).

⁴⁷ Anne Marie-Slaughter, "Why Women Still Can't Have it All," *The Atlantic*. July/August 2012, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/07/why-women-still-cant-have-it-all/309020/>.

⁴⁸ Marie-Slaughter, "Why Women Still Can't Have it All."

⁴⁹ Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2, (Summer 1966): 152.

⁵⁰ Kessler, introduction, xv.

⁵¹ Kelly, *The Life*, 83.

⁵² Kelly, *The Life*, vii.

⁵³ Phelps, *Chapters*, 12. Hereafter I will cite in the text.

⁵⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, "aviary," accessed May 10, 2019, <https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/view/Entry/13740?redirectedFrom=aviary#eid>.

⁵⁵ Kessler, notes to pages 15-26, *The Story of Avis*, 252. Consider the opening of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), which features an encaged parrot squawking at Mr. Pontellier: "A green and yellow parrot, which hung in a cage outside the door, kept repeating over and over: 'Allez vous-en! Allez vous-en! Sapristi! That's all right!'" (1). Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (New York: Avon Books, 1972). First published 1899 by Herbert S. Stone & Co.

⁵⁶ Nick Sousanis, *Unflattening* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 36-37.

⁵⁷ Kessler reads the novel as Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's homage to her mother's drawing talents, which Phelps might have seen as limited by her female gender in a patriarchal society: "In one sense, then, Avis is the story of the chance that her mother might have had, the story of a symbolically expressed wish of the daughter for her mother" ("A Literary Legacy: Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Mother and Daughter," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 5, no. 3, [Autumn 1980]: 31).

⁵⁸ Interestingly, Barnett tells us that Phelps chooses to go by the name of her mother's name, Elizabeth Stuart, after her mother died (*Elizabeth*, 16).

⁵⁹ Barnett, *Elizabeth*, 80.

⁶⁰ Kelly, *The Life*, 99.

⁶¹ Stansell, "A Study," 241.

⁶² Arsić, *Bird Relics*, 150.

⁶³ Arsić, *Bird Relics*, 151.

⁶⁴ Phelps, *Chapters*, 11, Qtd. in Kessler, "A Literary Legacy," 28.

⁶⁵ In her autobiography, Phelps uses natural metaphors to describe a similar sentiment when comparing the difficulty of her mother's life to her own: "Her nature was drawn

against the grain of her times and of her circumstances; and where our feet find easy walking, hers were hedged" (*Chapters*, 13).

⁶⁶ Elena Ferrante, "Elena Ferrante: A Power of Our Own," *New York Times*.

www.nytimes.org. May 17, 2019.

⁶⁷ Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, "A Florida Water-Color," *The Independent...Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* 28, (January 1876): 1. *American Periodicals*.

⁶⁸ Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs* 1, no.4 (Summer 1976): 888.

Notes for Chapter Three:

¹ Tim Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 17.

² Donna Haraway's assertion that "staying with the trouble" requires "unexpected collaborations and combinations" offers another vision for this notion of "being-with" (*Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* [Durham: Duke University Press, 2016], 4).

³ Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, 17.

⁴ Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin offer the following definition for Anthropocene: "Combining the Greek words for 'humans' and 'recent time', scientists have named this new period of time the Anthropocene. It describes when *Homo sapiens* became a geological superpower, setting Earth on a new path in its long development. The Anthropocene is a turning point in the history of humanity, the history of life, and the history of the Earth itself. It is new chapter in the chronicle of life and a new chapter of the human story" (*The Human Planet: How We Created the Anthropocene* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018], 5).

⁵ Paul Vergès, "Racial Capitalocene," in *Futures of Black Radicalism*, ed. Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin (London: Verso, 2017): 72. Vergès asserts that we now know that ethnicity is the most significant and intentional factor for the government's determination for placing toxic waste facilities in the U.S.—nearby communities of color.

⁶ Nicholas Mirzoeff, "It's Not the Anthropocene, It's the White Supremacy Scene; or, The Geological Color Line" in *After Extinction*, ed. Richard Grusin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 123, 124.

⁷ Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 2.

⁸ Britt M. Rusert, "Black Nature: The Question of Race in the Age of Ecology," in *Polygraph: An International Journal of Culture and Politics*, no. 22: *Ecology and Ideology* (2010): 161.

⁹ Jane Bennett, *Thoreau's Nature: Ethics, Politics, and the Wild* (Lanhan: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), xxii.

¹⁰ Bennett, *Thoreau's Nature*, xxii.

¹¹ My thinking of the wild draws on the work of Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The*

Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013).

¹² My definition of the wild builds and departs from Fred Moten and Stefan's project *The Undercommons*. In the introduction titled, "The Wild Beyond," Jack Halberstam offers a reading of the film created for Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* as a means of summarizing Moten and Harney's beckoning to the wild: "[They] want to gesture to another place, a wild place that is not simply the left over space that limns real and regulated zones of polite society; rather it is a wild place that continuously produces its own regulated wildness" (Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 7).

¹³ Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2006), xii.

¹⁴ McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xiv.

¹⁵ McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xv.

¹⁶ Allewaert also clarifies the value for using "person" in lieu of subjectivity: "One advantage of the term person is that it applies to a range of entities that were neither subject nor citizens. In this sense, the term allows the inclusion of those outside of the official political life of the Age of Revolution while not rehabilitating them to normative political terms and positions. What's more the term person can describe an entity on the verge of entering a political community as well as an entity that is inside of a political community" (*Ariel's Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013], 10).

¹⁷ *The Bondwoman's Narrative* was published before scholars could authenticate its authorship. In 2013, Scholar Gregg Hecimovich confirmed that it was indeed written by a former enslaved woman named Hannah Bond. Searching for Bond's identity through a meandering line through court and property records and archival research, Hecimovich traced the writer Hannah Crafts to Hannah Bond, an enslaved woman who lived on the North Carolina plantation owned by John Wheeler in 2013. Bought in 2001 by Henry Louis Gates Jr. in an antiquarian catalog, *The Bondwoman's Narrative* was previously listed as a "301-page handwritten manuscript purportedly written by a female fugitive slave." Gates purchased the manuscript for \$8,500 and procured its publication by Warner Books in 2002. Julie Bosman, "Professor Says He Has Solved a Mystery Over a Slave's Novel," *The New York Times*, Media, September 18, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/19/books/professor-says-he-has-solved-a-mystery-over-a-slaves-novel.html>.

¹⁸ Hannah's mistress was raised by her father believing that her mother was dead only to find out later than she had been a part of a baby switching. When her father's wife had a stillbirth, the nurse placed Hannah's mistress in her bed, and she was then raised as a white child. However, Mr. Trappe had knowledge of the family's secret and sought to make a profit by blackmailing her. As Gates tells us in the introduction, this baby-switching convention is one of the earliest examples in African American literature (liv).

¹⁹ In the preface to the novel, Gregg Hecimovich explains the significance of Hannah Bond's choice of the pen name, Crafts: "Bond adopted the name 'Crafts' both to honor Ellen Craft, a celebrated fugitive slave who pioneered cross-dressing as a route to freedom, and to honor Horace Craft and his family, who risked punishment by shielding her on their modest twenty-acre farm" (*The Bondwoman's Narrative*, xix).

²⁰ Diana Glave and Mark Stoll provide a metaphorical image of slaves' labor by arguing that the landscape of "plantations, villages, small farms, and cowpens in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia," was "lifted from the forests and swamps literally on the backs of slaves" (*To Love the Wind and the Rain: African Americans and Environmental History* [Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005], 11).

²¹ Frederick C. Knight, *Working the Diaspora: The Impact of African Labor on the Anglo-American World, 1650-1850* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 133. ProQuest Ebook Central.

²² Stephanie M.H. Camp explains, "Despite planters' tremendous effort, enslaved women and men routinely 'slip[ped]' away to attend illicit parties where such sensual pleasures as eating, dancing, drinking, and dressing were among the main amusements" (*Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women & Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004], 61).

²³ Sylviane Diouf explains how maroon communities chose spaces in the wild for their secret communities: "Past the borderlands, further away from the seat of white power, maroon communities, sometimes several dozen individuals, settled in secluded zones of the hinterland. They chose spaces where topography offered good cover, vantage points for sentries, closeness to a source of clean water, and adequate soil to grow crops. Not only did these places have to be hard to reach, but they had to provide easy access to the plantations and towns where some items continued to be traded or stolen" (*Slavery's Exiles: The Story of American Maroons* [New York: New York University Press, 2014], 10).

²⁴ Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles*, 192.

²⁵ Knight, *Working the Diaspora*, 144.

²⁶ Allewaert, *Ariel's Ecology*, 30.

²⁷ Allewaert, *Ariel's Ecology*, 30.

²⁸ Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 21.

²⁹ Priscilla Wald, "hannah crafts," in *In Search of Hannah Crafts: Critical Essays on The Bondswoman's Narrative*. eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Hollis Robbins (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 221.

³⁰ John Campbell, "A Constant Companion" in *Working Towards Freedom: Slave Society and Domestic Economy in the American South* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1994), 56.

³¹ Campbell, *Working Towards Freedom*, 56.

³² Crafts's decision to transform the linden tree into a space of agency for Rose might have been inspired by her knowledge of the hanging of Nat Turner. Although we do not know if she knew of Nat Turner's hanging, it was quite a public event in 1831. According to Michael Hatt, the body of Nat Turner was skinned and his flesh rendered into grease. In his discussion of memorials and lynching, Hatt offers an argument for why whites went to such great lengths to mutilate the black body: "the lynching victim does not just have to be killed; the body has to be subject to a magical transformation. It is not enough that the victim die—turned as it were from person to dead person; the transition must be to a body that exhibits no sign of personhood at all. Black agency must not be just arrested, but erased altogether." Although Crafts might not have known about these disturbing postmortem details, she might have constructed Rose as a response to Turner's death; by

depicting Rose as capable of living beyond the torture of her physicality, beyond her skin through the linden, Crafts undermines the power of white violence through ecological agency. “Sculpting and Lynching: The Making and Unmaking of the Black Citizen in Late Nineteenth-Century America.” *Oxford Art Journal* 24, no. 1 (January 2001): 20.

³³ Shane White, and Graham White, *The Sounds of Slavery: Discovering African American History Through Songs, Sermons, and Speech* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), xvii.

³⁴ White and White, *Sounds*, xvii.

³⁵ Ashon Crawley, “Harriet Jacobs Gets a Hearing,” *Current Musicology*, no. 93 (Spring 2012): 43.

³⁶ This conceptualization of Rose’s wail also gestures towards Fred Moten’s analysis of Aunt Hester’s scream as a paraobject in Frederick Douglass’s narrative. Moten describes Aunt Hester’s scream within the frame of black performance which offers another viewpoint for understanding Rose’s “prolonged wail”: “There occurs in such performances a revaluation or reconstruction of value, one disruptive of the oppositions of speech and writing, and spirit and matter. It moves by way of the (phono-photo-porno-) graphic disruption the shriek carries out. This movement cuts and augments the primal. If we return again and again to a certain passion, a passionate response to passionate utterance, horn-voice-horn over percussion, a protest, an objection, it is because it is more than another violent scene of subjection too terrible to pass on; it is the ongoing performance, the prefigurative scene of a (re) appropriation—the deconstruction and reconstruction, the improvisational recording and revaluation—of value, of the theory of value, or of the theories of value” (*In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003], 14).

³⁷ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2008), 8.

³⁸ Wald, “hannah crafts,” 224.

³⁹ McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, 32-33.

⁴⁰ Russ Castronovo describes the linden tree as a “supernatural mnemonic,” a site where slaves that were punished on its limbs can “haunt the big house and its occupants” (*In Search of Hannah Crafts*, 201).

⁴¹ Fred Moten, *Stolen Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 244.

⁴² Fred Moten, “Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism of the Flesh),” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 4, (Fall 2013): 742.

⁴³ Jack Halberstam, introduction to *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013), 7.

⁴⁴ For more details about the Jena 6, see NPR Staff, “Race, Violence...Justice? Looking Back at the Jena 6,” NPR, www.npr.org, August 30, 2011; Mary Foster, “Five Years Later, Jena 6 Moves on,” NBC News, www.nbcnews.com, August 25, 2011.

⁴⁵ Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014), 99.

⁴⁶ Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 9.

⁴⁷ Katherine McKittrick, “Plantation Futures.” *Small Axe* 17, no. 3, (November 2014): 2-3.

⁴⁸ In Montgomery, Alabama, the first lynching memorial was opened on April 2018 and pays homage to victims of lynching that have taken place in various counties across America. For further reading, see Campbell Robertson’s “A Lynching Memorial is

Opening. The Country has never seen anything like it” *New York Times*, www.nytimes.com, April 25, 2018.

⁴⁹ For further discussion on lynching in nineteenth-century America, see Ida Wells-Barnett, *The Light of Truth: Writings of an Anti-Lynching Crusader*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Penguin Books, 2014); Trudier Harris, *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

⁵⁰ Ersula J. Ore, *Lynching: Violence, Rhetoric, and American Identity* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2019), 25. ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁵¹ Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (New York: Harper Perennial Classics, 2006), 8.

⁵² Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 105.

⁵³ Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles*, 89. I hereafter cite in the text.

⁵⁴ Halberstam, *The Undercommons*, 11.

⁵⁵ Halberstam, *The Undercommons*, 11.

⁵⁶ Stephanie Camp discusses the “black landscape” as a similar strategy. She defines it as an “expression of geographic intelligence” that refers to the ways “enslaved people knew the land, to the modes by which they made sense of and imagined their surroundings” (“Escaping Through a Black Landscape,” in *Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscapes of North American Slavery*, eds. Clifton Ellis and Rebecca Ginsburg, [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010], 56).

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 10.

⁵⁸ Freeman, *Time Binds*, 10.

⁵⁹ Stephanie M.H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women & Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 2004), 20. Hereafter I will cite in the text.

⁶⁰ Jim Downs explains the problems scholars face when discussing sexuality of the past: “One problem that flummoxes both historians of sexuality and of slavery is the paucity of sources. Scholars of sexuality struggled to find archival references that detail the sexual and romantic lives of people from the past, often working against political, religious, social and economic forces that prevented details from entering into the historical record in the first place. Scholars of slavery, despite the avalanche of books, articles, and dissertations that have been written in the last half century, struggle to excavate details about the history of enslavement, or at the very least, make sense of surviving evidence” (189). Downs also emphasizes the role that fiction plays in filling some of the gaps previously overlooked: “Novelists, poets, artists, and filmmakers have circumvented the problems of the archive and produced some of the most compelling, daring, and insightful work on the history of slavery and sexuality in the last few decades” (191). “Manhood, Sex, and Power in Antebellum Slave Communities,” in *Sexuality and Slavery: Reclaiming Intimate Histories in the Americas*, eds. Daina Ramey Berry, and Leslie M. Harris (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018), 189, 191. ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁶¹ Stephanie Jones-Rogers, “Rethinking Sexual Violence and the Marketplace of Slavery: White Women, the Slave Market, and Enslaved People’s Sexualized Bodies in the Nineteenth-Century South,” in *Sexuality and Slavery*, 119.

⁶² David Doddington, “Manhood, Sex, and Power in Antebellum Slave Communities,” in *Sexuality and Slavery*, 154.

⁶³ It’s also important to recognize that black men were also victims of sexual violence in a variety of ways within the system of slavery. Toni Morrison’s depiction of Paul D’s experience on the chain gang in *Beloved* provides a disturbing example of another aspect of slavery’s atrocities in the realm of sexuality (*Beloved*, 101).

⁶⁴ In the introduction, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. notes, “The costuming, or cross-dressing, of the character Ellen as a boy foreshadows Hannah’s own method of escape and echoes the method of escape used in real life by the enslaved couple Ellen and William Craft in December 1848. The sensational story of Ellen’s use of a disguise as a white male was first reported in Frederick Douglass’s newspaper, *The North Star*, on July 20, 1849. William Wells Brown’s novel, *Clotel* (1853), employed this device, and William Still, in his book, *The Underground Railroad* (1872), reports similar use of “male attire” by female slaves Clarissa Davis (in 1854) and Anna Maria Weems (alias Joe Wright) in 1855” (*The Bondwoman’s Narrative*, lv).

⁶⁵ Bryan Sinche, “Godly Rebellion in The Bondwoman’s Narrative” in *Search of Hannah Crafts: Critical Essays on The Bondwoman’s Narrative*. eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Hollis Robbins (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 179.

⁶⁶ Frederick Douglass, *The Heroic Slave: A Cultural and Critical Edition*, eds. Robert Levine, John Stauffer, and John R. McKivigan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 5.

⁶⁷ Melvin Dixon, *Ride Out the Wilderness: Geography and Identity in Afro-American Literature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 17.

⁶⁸ During his captivity on a steamboat that was taking him South, Solmon Northrop also finds inspiration in birds’ song: “The sun shone out warmly; the birds were singing in the trees. The happy birds—I envied them. I wished for wings like them, that I might cleave the air to where my birdsongs waited vainly for their father’s coming, in the cooler region of the North” (*Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northrup, A Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library, 2011], 49). ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁶⁹ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 117.

⁷⁰ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 117.

⁷¹ Knight, *Working the Diaspora*, 149. See also Alice Walker’s “In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens” (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983, p.231-244) for another interpretation of the significance of the garden within African-American feminist tradition.

⁷² Jennifer Wren Atkinson, *Gardenland: Nature, Fantasy, and Everyday Practice* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018), 27.

⁷³ Atkinson, *Gardenland*, 27.

⁷⁴ Camp writes, “Great houses (on plantations)...were carefully sited on their estates among formal gardens and parks that conspicuously displayed ornamental, nonfunctional use of land” (*Closer to Freedom*, 4).

⁷⁵ Atkinson, *Gardenland*, 27.

⁷⁶ William Gleason contextualizes Crafts's ending by discussing how Crafts adopts the ending of Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* for her own purposes. Gleason writes, "Of all the ways *Bleak House* matters to *The Bondswoman's Narrative* this is perhaps the most important. Like Esther, Hannah Crafts ends her tale not as housekeeper but as homeowner, happily ensconced in an independent cottage, loving husband by her side." Gleason also asserts that both Crafts and Douglass found inspiration in the "powerful image of black home-ownership" (*In Search of Hannah Crafts*, 167).

⁷⁷ Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, 16.

⁷⁸ Lora Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (Durham: Duke University Press), 6.

⁷⁹ William Andrews, "Hannah Crafts's Sense of an Ending," in *In Search of Hannah Crafts*, 39.

⁸⁰ Qtd. in Romero, *Home Fronts*, 27.

⁸¹ Gaston Bachelard, *Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places* (Boston: Beacon Press books, 1994).4. First published in French under the title *La poétique de l'espace* 1958 by Presses Universitaires de France.

⁸² Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, xxxvi.

⁸³ In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison uses the haunting of the house, designated as 124, by Sethe's first daughter, Beloved, as a complex metaphor for depicting ex-slaves struggle to make a new life beyond their experience of slavery.

⁸⁴ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 61.

⁸⁵ Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, 61.

⁸⁶ Sarah Broom, *The Yellow House* (New York: Grove Press, 2019), 55.

⁸⁷ Broom, *The Yellow House*, 54.

⁸⁸ Broom, *The Yellow House*, 55.

⁸⁹ McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," *small axe* 17, no. 42 (Nov. 2013): 11. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/10.1215/07990537-2378892>.

⁹⁰ McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," 11.

Notes for the Epilogue:

¹ Margaret Fuller, 1810-1850. Mostly Extracts: undated autograph manuscript journal, Fuller Family Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

² I have chosen to use "it" as a pronoun for the river, but the line translates as indefinite subject, he/she/ or it. This line appears on the epitaph of Jean Chardin (1643-1713), a French jeweler and traveller best known for his travel books *The Travels of Sir John Chardin*. This line might have been taken from a French book titled, *Devises Heroïques et Morales*, where it appears at the beginning of a chapter, as a proverb that frames an image of a landscape.

³ I offer a longer discussion of Karen Barad's concept of agential realism in the introduction.

⁴ Stacey Alaimo and Susan Hekman, eds., "Introduction Emerging Models of Materiality For Feminist Theory," in *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 7.

⁵ Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms" in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 32.

Coole and Frost explain how Foucault's work has influenced the methodology of critical materialism: "The matter whose materialization Foucault describes is malleable, socially produced, and inscribed with its histories; paradoxically, it is obliged to acquire (additional, redirected) agentic capacities as an aspect of its subjection."

⁶ Erin Manning, *Always More Than One: Individuation's Dance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 19.

⁷ Margaret Fuller, 1810-1850. Journal Excerpts: manuscript transcripts, undated (Vol. 22), Fuller's family papers, Houghton Library, Harvard Library, 7.

⁸ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), xvi.

⁹ Coole and Frost, *New Materialisms*, 10.