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ORGANIC ANGELS
INNOCENCE, CONVERSION, AND CONSUMPTION IN THE ANTEBELLUM AMERICAN
NOVEL

A Dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of English
The University of Mississippi

by

LAURA J. SCHROCK

August 2015

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ABSTRACT

Midcentury American novelists variously reworked the traditional conversion narrative to reflect a marked cultural shift in attitude towards human "nature," newly conceived as innocent and inclined to salvation. This liberalized aesthetic of conversion takes shape through the trope of the "organic angel," a developmental female figure whose journey from childhood innocence to saintly womanhood merges the processes of sexual maturation and Protestant conversion. Because she purifies self-interested desire by redirecting it towards spiritual ends, the organic angel provides a symbolic reconciliation of the young nation's budding imperial capitalism with its millennial expectations.

While traditional emphasis on a maternal ethos at work in sentimental fiction has obscured the thematic and generic traction of this nonmaternal female saint, my project traces her structural impact across a surprisingly diverse range of authors and works—Sylvester Judd's *Margaret*, Maria Cummins' *The Lamplighter*, Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*, Melville's *Pierre*, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*. At once a remarkably flexible and legibly constraining trope, the organic angel determines the relationship between narrative form and nationalist commitment; her relative efficacy as an agent of conversion measures authorial confidence in a pre-Civil war era vision of a unified, prosperous, and evangelical nation.

DEDICATION

To my father

For teaching me how to close read the most important texts

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1. INTRODUCTION: NATURALIZED RELIGION AND LITERARY FORM

What became of the sinners? [...] What became of the angry God?

— Perry Miller, *Nature's Nation*

Had but the tale a warbling Teller

All the boys would come—

Orpheus' sermon captivated,

It did not condemn.

—Emily Dickinson

Love is this world's great redeemer and reformer;
and [...] all beautiful women are her selectest emissaries.

—Herman Melville, *Pierre*

By 1850, over ninety percent of white American adults could read, and critics ambivalently conceded the triumph of the novel as the defining literary genre of the century.¹ The cultural rise of the novel in the United States intersected with a conspicuous decline, not in religiosity, but in adherence to Calvinist orthodoxy. The decentralized spirituality of Transcendentalists like Emerson and Thoreau comprised merely the esoteric, outermost ripple of this sea-change in antebellum theology, a radical reorientation of American Protestantism toward natural phenomena, including pre-socialized human nature, as a transparent ground of divine expression. Transcendentalists rarely attempted to veer from nonfictional forms,² but the popular version of naturalized theology widely suffused religiously-inflected activities across

¹ See Michael Gilmore, *American Romanticism*, p. 4 and Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers*, p. 44.

² See Lawrence Buell, *New England Literary Culture*, p. 47 and Myra Jehlen, *American Incarnation*, p. 124.

denominational lines, including and especially the composition of novels. This dissertation takes as its premise an inherent tension between a thoroughgoing version of naturalized theology and the literary form of sustained fictional prose narrative. It comprises the first systematic treatment of the dialectic between a theology of natural innocence and the orthodox Christian narrative of conversion, as it informs the shape of sentimental novels in the 1850s.³

Through its identification of a trope that bridges theology and literary form in 1850s sentimental novels, this project contributes to our understanding of the evolution of the American novel and the cross-fertilization of religion and literature in the antebellum era. I have termed this trope the "organic angel," and because I examine its function in the works of male, female, black, white, popular and canonical authors, my work participates in breaking down the divisions traditionally applied to 1850s fiction and adds to our reconstruction of a cultural moment whose concerns preoccupied novelists across class, race, and gender lines. And finally, because the trope of the organic angel derives from a representational sacralization of the female body, its excavation brings to light a fresh perspective on the interrelationship between constructions of gender, materialism, and evangelicalism in midcentury America.

³ See *The Cambridge Introduction to the Nineteenth-Century American Novel* for a definition of the novel as "a fictional prose narrative of substantial length" (1). By applying the term "sentimental" to the novels I examine, I intend to suggest neither a domestic setting nor female authorship but a formal preoccupation with reconciling human inclinations and divine will through material intermediaries. "Sentiment" in these novels serves (or purports to serve) as a natural bridge between human and divine love, rather than as an outcome of conversion. Although I maintain use of the term "sentimental," my formal concerns draw on the work of Susan K. Harris who objects to the terms "sentimental," "women's," and "domestic" as applied to "the dominant novelistic sub-genre of the 1850s" because the terms tend to confine critical discourse to treatments of content rather than rigorous formal analysis (20).

Early nineteenth century America saw a mainstream shift in thinking about human nature and, by extension, the character of Christian conversion. The Puritans had inherited by way of Calvinism the conviction that human beings were innately depraved and so from birth instinctively hostile to God. The state of "natural" persons within orthodox Calvinism thus consisted of an unrelieved congenital predisposition toward sin.⁴ The impact of this debasing vision of human inclinations or the human "heart" persisted well into the early 19th century, shaping the childhood and young adult experience of many authors who would come to maturity in the 1850s. Sylvester Judd and Harriet Beecher Stowe, for instance, two key authors in this study, both articulated the influence of Calvinist doctrines upon their formative years in terms of traumatic estrangement from natural affections. In an 1837 apology for his conversion to Unitarianism, Judd lamented the orthodox catechesis that hatred for and resentment of God comprise "the *first*, spontaneous, natural feelings of our hearts" (qtd. in Hall 87, author's emphasis). Judd's positive pre-conversion resonance with the beauty of natural phenomena had prompted him, as a youth, to reflect that "[his] own nature was cursed, and that the earth had been cursed"; as a result, he worked to detach himself from this instinctive delight in beauty (qtd. in Hall 17). As Herbert Ross Brown notes, "Before the impact of the romantic revolution upon New England, natural phenomena had been commonly regarded as setting up a barrier between God and man" (334).⁵

⁴ Jonathan Edwards used the term "natural" interchangeably with "carnal," "unsanctified," and "unconverted." All "natural men," according to Edwards, "are held in the hand of God over the pit of hell." See "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," pp. 93, 95, and "Treatise," p. 156.

⁵ This popular concept developed out of Edwards' strenuous reiteration of the "radical difference between nature and grace," Reynolds, *Faith*, p. 3. Although Edwards argued for the goodness of creation and established a contemplative tradition within Calvinism that celebrated divine and earthly beauty, he insisted that intuitive

Because Calvinism posited an unmitigated unlikeness between the character of God and that of human beings in their "natural state," the traditional conversion experience entailed an arbitrary and comprehensive supplanting of human nature by supernatural grace. This paradigm of conversion placed souls entirely at the mercy of an invasive divine initiative. As Stowe would reminisce in her 1859 novel *The Minister's Wooing*, "the views of human existence" propounded by Edwardsian Calvinism involved "the human race, without exception, coming into existence 'under God's wrath and curse,' with a nature so fatally disordered, that [...] men were infallibly certain to do nothing to Divine acceptance until regenerated by the supernatural aid of God's Spirit" (335).

Even prior to Edwards, Puritan theologian Cotton Mather had insisted that human beings could not so much as cooperate in the process of spiritual rebirth once irresistibly catalyzed by the Holy Spirit; the concept of involuntary participation smacked too much of mitigating the "unbridgeable" gap between nature and divinity that only a divine procedure could close (Mandelker 42). Sylvester Judd remarked on the impact of these abstract tenets upon his childhood spiritual consciousness: "Religion [...] as a subject of feeling deeply interested my heart [but] [...] It was a fundamental article of my belief, that I could not become religious until I was made so by an extraneous and special operation" (qtd. in Hall 16). The friction occasioned by this "extraneous and special operation" could provoke a tremendous crisis: Lyman Beecher, Congregationalist minister and father of Harriet Beecher Stowe, preached a conversion experience at once "violent and immediate [...] because it assumed the confrontation of two enemies, God's grace and man's sinful nature, and the absolute conquest of the latter by the

attraction to beauty on the part of "natural" persons in no way corresponded with "divine light" and might, in fact, signify interference by the devil. See "A Divine and Supernatural Light," p. 109-110.

former" (Douglas 6). With an inconceivably "other" and infinitely angry God across an impassable gulf, salvation-seekers of Judd and Stowe's generation could only agonize and uncertainly await for the dispossession of their "natural heart."

But already that generation's childhoods corresponded with a slow, intransigent turn away from a conversion paradigm predicated on painful crisis. As Ann Douglas notes, "More and more religious thinkers and activists of the generation succeeding Lyman Beecher's sidestepped or redefined the traditional conversion experience" (134). Congregationalism, the American denominational branch of Calvinism, lost its status as established religion across all of New England by 1833, and the doctrinal grip of innate depravity began to inexorably loosen (Howe 164). In 1741 Jonathan Edwards penned his reverberating discourse, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," in which he made the startling appeal, "you *children* that are unconverted, don't you know that you are going down to hell, to bear the dreadful wrath of that God that is now angry with you every day, and every night?" (104, author's emphasis). Just over a century later, his liberal Congregationalist successor Horace Bushnell would counsel that a child "is not to be told that he must have a new heart" (14); rather, "the child is to grow up a Christian" ("Views" 6). The contrast between Edwards' and Bushnell's perspective on the pre-socialized child captures the era's shift into thinking about human nature as innately innocent and instinctively drawn to the good and to God.

Bushnell and other liberal antebellum Protestants undercut the need for a conversion crisis by positing a fundamental compatibility between nature, including "the natural heart," and divine grace. The rapid fragmentation of denominational authority in the early part of the century contributed to a widespread welcome of Continental Romantic philosophy, imported with

Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection*.⁶ As church authority and clerical influence lost ground and scientific hypotheses conversely gained authority and influence in the early 19th century, the beauty of visible nature seemed increasingly to present a more reliable ground for the encounter between the self and the divine than did either disputed religious doctrines or unpredictable onslaughts of the Holy Spirit.

This prospect occasioned the theological fury that erupted in Protestant circles in the mid-1830s over the concept of miracles, which appeared to violate the stability of visible nature so essential to a spirituality mediated by the biological world's predictability. By contrast, the constant and organic invitation of so-called natural miracles of biology—that is, of natural beauty—typified an "unconscious" resonance of all selves with Christianity in its pure form. While up until the late 1820's the majority of Unitarians, the most liberal contemporary Protestant sect, still "adhered to the 'Supernaturalist position' with regard to miracles," the tides began to change at the end of the decade (Gura, "American" 99); the emergent generation of Unitarians were willing to envision Christian conversion as an expansion, a renewal, or a releasing of the self, but never as itself the source of a break in interiority or violation of spontaneous impulse.

My purpose here is not to trace out the theological niceties of antebellum Protestantism but to establish the importance of a far-reaching theological tension, encapsulated by

⁶ James Frederick notes that "fragmentation of sects and the attending dissension and often acrimonious debate [...] were specially characteristic of the first half of the nineteenth century," *The Darkened Sky*, p. xi. In *New England Literary Culture*, Lawrence Buell argues that Coleridge's range of influence from Congregationalist Horace Bushnell to Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson "testifies [...] to the importance of theological erosion and European Romanticism as cultural influences that created a similar sort of literary ferment throughout New England," p.51.

Unitarianism, to the structure of the sentimental novel.⁷ In *What Hath God Wrought*, historian David Howe notes that while the "Unitarian denomination [...] never penetrated much beyond New England and a few other outposts," their arguments "against Calvinist determinism [...] resonated broadly with the attitudes of the growing urban middle class and the ethos of self-improvement." These arguments "had a cumulative effect, across the nineteenth century, in greatly diminishing the influence of Calvin's theology within American Christianity" (616-617) and disseminating what I call "sentimental theology."

Because sentimental theology rejected Calvinism but remained Christocentric, it occupied a middle ground between the orthodox crisis-oriented narrative of reconciliation between God and human beings, as mediated by Christ's crucifixion, and the Transcendentalist marginalization of this foundational Christian story in favor of an atemporal, ahistorical spiritual unfolding. Transcendentalists—with one exception all either professing or former Unitarians (Howe 619)—distinguished themselves from mainline Unitarianism by embracing religious experience as a transcendent mythical whole, unaltered by supernatural intervention at a particular historical moment.⁸ This distinction in large part determined the Transcendental

⁷ Lawrence Buell argues that "after the 1850s theological concerns dwindle almost to a vanishing point in the work of younger authors," *New England*, p. 53. It is important, however, to treat the work of fiction writers maturing in the 1850s as theologically serious. John Ernest's advice in *Resistance and Reformation*, although applied only to African American 19th-century texts, resonates with antebellum sentimental fiction generally: "Understanding the visions of divine order that serve as the foundation of [these] texts [...] requires one to accept that these authors had and took seriously religious beliefs," pp. 5-6.

⁸ The Transcendentalists' rejection of a supernatural interruption of natural laws, including time, accounts for their dismissal of miracles even when Unitarian theologians were still insisting on their importance. In *Science and Religion in America*, Herbert Hovenkamp notes that the Transcendentalists "vehemently" claimed that "miracles were not part of the permanent values of Christianity but merely a mythical mechanism," p. 86.

literary aesthetic, whose primary features Lawrence Buell identifies as "inchoate structure, prodigal imagery, wit, paradox, symbolism, aphoristic statement, paratactic syntax, and a manifesto-like tone" (*Literary* 18)—in effect, everything but narrative.⁹

Because midcentury Unitarian theology—and, more broadly, sentimental theology—mapped the Christian narrative of conversion and reconciliation onto the Transcendentalist principle of concurrent identity between natural and divine life, it posed a singularly productive and problematic challenge to narrative form. Gregg Crane notes a paradoxical core structure in the sentimental novel in that "it values permanence and stasis as signs of transcendent value, but is full of movement and transformation" (112). I argue that sentimental novelists in the 1850s addressed this tension between stasis, or natural innocence, and transformation, or Christian conversion, by structuring their narratives around the maturation of central female characters who experience conversion as a natural part of their growing up process. These heroines, in effect, grow into grace from a preexisting innocent nature; the development of their natural affections—and bodies—provides stepping stones to sainthood. Furthermore, after these girls become young women, their attractiveness in turn "naturally" draws other characters, especially male characters, into conversion. The term I have developed for describing these female figures is "organic angels," because their spiritual magnetism is organic in that it originates in their pre-conversion nature, including their natural bodies.

⁹ In *American Incarnation*, Myra Jehlen explores the anti-narrative tendency of Emerson's spiritual vision in particular. Remarking that "if pictures are rare in Emerson's writing, stories are rarer still," Jehlen explains how if "man" and "nature" prove "adequate to the whole of their shared world, they would be identical and there would be no story." Conversely, "if one were thus commensurate with everything he would absorb the other and again there would be no story," p. 124. Jehlen demonstrates this "identical wholeness" as the de-narrativizing property of Emerson's philosophy, p. 125.

The trope of the organic angel thus encapsulated the 19th century movement toward an organic rather than supernatural relationship encounter with divinity. Antebellum sentimental authors valued the organic angel for her ability to harness the natural desires inspired by physical beauty for moral and spiritual ends; she created, in other words, a 'rung' human beings could seize as they climbed toward salvation. In *The Minister's Wooing*, Stowe used the term "rungless ladder" to describe the gulf she saw Puritanism positing between the helpless, unredeemed human soul below and an angry God above. In the words of Edwards, "you have no interest in any mediator, and nothing to lay hold of to save yourself" ("Sinners" 98). The organic angel, by contrast, served as an object of desire toward which human beings would naturally gravitate and so stood as a mediator of divine grace through physical means—a role that the Puritan forefathers would have found blasphemous.

While proposing a connection between representations of womanhood and spiritual influence is nothing new, the trope of the organic angel comes into focus outside the lens of the traditional scholarly approach to this connection through issues of domesticity—women's filial and household roles. Since Barbara Welter published her 1966 seminal article, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," scholars have thoroughly explored the relationship between the sacral power of women and the ideals of domesticity as constructed by sentimental novels, often more narrowly termed in this context "domestic" or "women's" novels. Welter described the "four cardinal virtues" of "True Womanhood" as "piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity," adding, "together [...] they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife—woman" (152). A long critical tradition builds on this characterization of female representation and its implied conservative function of empowering women spiritually in order to suppress them politically by cordoning them off as queens of the domestic sphere. In her pivotal justification of domestic fiction, "The

Other American Renaissance," Jane Tompkins argued for a paradoxically liberating function of submission for sentimental heroines who by pleasing "husband or father" obtain "an access of divine power": "By making themselves into the vehicles of God's will, these female characters become nothing in themselves but all-powerful in relation to the world" (43). Generally critical studies on sentimental novels have built on the Welter-Tompkins model of exploring a generic "female influence" and its connection to spiritual submission in domestic settings.¹⁰

In her influential 1985 study of American domestic literature, historian Mary P. Ryan both refined and extended this tendency by reconceiving the "cult of domesticity" as the "empire of the mother": according to Ryan, "the true woman was the perfect candidate for the role of child nurturer [...] She was loving, giving, moral, pure, and consigned to the hearth" (56). By consolidating all kinds of spiritualized female influence under the banner of the "empire of the mother," Ryan obscures a powerful, distinctively nonmaternal strain of feminine power that took shape across sentimental novels in the 1850s, as typified by the organic angel.¹¹ In her article on prophetic virgin figures in the works of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Kimberly VanEsveld Adams remarks that "[w]hen scholars separate the term 'maternal' from actual motherhood and apply it

¹⁰ In Monika M. Elbert's introduction to the edited collection *Separate Spheres No More*, she traces the qualifications scholars have gradually made to Welter's monolithic characterization of the female personality and role in sentimental literature. See pp. 8-16. In *Beneath the American Renaissance*, David S. Reynolds contends that "numerous character types" of women in fiction "proliferated and diversified to such a degree that by the 1850s there was a great complexity in perceptions of women's roles," p. 340.

¹¹ In *Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-Century America*, Nancy M. Theriot reiterates Ryan's comprehensive conflation of antebellum representations of womanhood and motherhood, calling motherhood "the major script of true womanhood between 1830 and 1860," and "the major cultural metaphor for femininity," pp. 16 and 18.

to almost all gentle, nurturing behavior shown by characters, [the] authorial critique of numerous mother-figures is obscured" (92).

Adams' criticism can be applied broadly to scholarship on midcentury sentimental novels, which in fact seldom feature "an ideal woman" who "fulfil[s] her most hallowed and imperial role in the act of conception" (Ryan 104). Claire Chantell, in an article on the limits of motherhood in domestic literature, goes so far as to argue that "Detailed portraits of competent, capable motherhood (let alone the sanctified variety) rarely appear in most domestic fictions" (132). Indeed, none of the novels I examine configure women's spiritual power primarily in terms of ideal motherhood, what Chantell terms "sentimental maternalism" (132). Ryan herself, although she observes that "the cult of the mother's empire continued to gain converts during the 1850s" (111), argues that over the course of the same decade a number of "factors were beginning to subvert the mother's role" (102). Rather than exploring an alternate form of specifically female influence, however, Ryan concludes that "The American child took on the literary role of 'redeemer'" (103).

My project addresses the gap implied by Ryan's conceptual leap from nurturing mother to child-Messiah by following up on the figure of youthful female redemptress in the 1850s sentimental novel. In effect, my analysis picks up where Ryan leaves off—exploring a conciliatory and transformative rather than nourishing ethos of feminine influence. As Ryan demonstrates, between 1830 and 1850, the heyday of sentimental maternalism, cultural interpreters laid the groundwork of a singular organic affective bond between mother and infant that—I contend—set the stage for that bond's sidelining in 1850s sentimental novels fiction. In *Sentimental Materialism*, Lori Merish identifies the mother's central place in the sentimental economy as "literally the sentimental subject's opening on to the world" (124). The

extraordinary emphasis placed on the role of motherhood derived from the mother's putative psychosomatic or "organic" connection with her child. Bushnell, for instance, argued that "the child, after birth, is still within the matrix of parental life, and will be more or less, for many years [...] And the parental life will be flowing into him all that time, just as naturally, and by a law as truly organic, as when the sap of the trunk flows into a limb" (19). This glorification of a mother's unconscious influence over her child had a theological foundation in the antebellum shift towards a naturalized rather than supernatural form of spiritual regeneration. As Douglas points out, the painful dynamics of Calvinist conversion had "presupposed a struggle for maturity that implied distancing from the mother and conflict with the father [God]" (137); antebellum writers, by contrast, encouraged a protracted attachment with the mother, and the anticipation of its necessary eclipse, especially for sons leaving the home sphere, occasioned real anxiety (Ryan 58-9).

Because the trajectory of human development demanded an eventual emotional withdrawal from the mother, a figure mediating a different kind of feminized affect supersedes her in the sentimental novel.¹² Like the domestic mother, the organic angel diffuses divine light through physical means, but unlike with the mother, her saving influence can span a full narrative structure. The sentimental novel typically traces her development from natural child to supernaturalized woman, at which point she can effect a transformative rather than preservative (maternal) impact on her converts. Where the immanent character of the mother-child bond promotes a kind of total identification that borders on absorption,¹³ the organic angel serves as a

¹² Douglas describes the antebellum shift in theological emphasis from "paternal" to "fundamentally maternal and affective," p.124, but it is important to note that not all feminized "affect" is also "maternal."

¹³ In Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*, for example, it is the heroine's expulsion from a claustrophobic intimacy with her mother that initiates her (excruciating) spiritual and emotional individuation. The mother in this

differential that invites spiritual change. In other words, the organic angel's *otherness* accrues a mesmeric quality that can, in turn, transmute the interested gaze of potential converts from a natural to a spiritual plane. As this argument suggests, the organic angel's affect straddles the erotic and aesthetic, rather than partaking of the protective and the maternal. In her analysis of the role of virgin intercessors in Harriet Beecher's Stowe's 1861 novel *Agnes of Sorrento*, Adams employs the term "living icons" to describe their capacity for "possessing and reflecting a portion of the divine, able to draw others' minds and hearts to God" (97). The detached but emphatically sensory and sensual quality of the "living icon" characterizes what I am calling the organic angel—a figure not physically intimate, as with the mother and infant, but visually and affectively captivating.

A product of both unfallen nature and spiritual illumination, the organic angel combines the power of physical attractiveness and spiritual grace within a transformative visual field. Merish speaks of antebellum writers' "simultaneous secularization and feminization of spiritual 'grace,' its incorporation within an aesthetics of feminine presence" (62). While antebellum Christians would not have construed this conflation as secularizing, it unquestionably grounded divine illumination in feminine-specific material forms. Paul Giles explains how Puritanism "traditionally harbor[ed] a deep suspicion of the power of art and artifice" (90)—that is, of the power of sensory beauty to evoke a carnal rather than a spiritual response.¹⁴ But increasingly into the 19th century American Protestants began placing cautious confidence in the intermediary role of a "naturalized" aesthetics in redirecting the affections toward God. In Augusta Jane

context serves as a kind of anti-conversion agent; as Claire Chantell points out, the mother herself concedes that "perhaps [God] sees, Ellen, that you never would seek him while you had me to cling to," qtd. in p. 16.

¹⁴ As Colleen McDannell puts it, where Catholics "see," Protestants "read." See Giles, p. 90.

Evans' 1859 sentimental novel *Beulah*, for example, the author carefully distinguishes between an idolatrous and a purifying adoration of natural beauty: "There is such a thing as looking 'through nature up to nature's God,' notwithstanding the frightened denials of those who, shocked at the growing materialism of the age, would fain persuade this generation to walk blindfold through the superb temple a loving God has placed us in" (276). Without turning "all divinity into materialistic elements," Evans expatiates, "it may be safely proclaimed that genuine aesthetics is a mighty channel, through which the love and adoration of Almighty God enters the soul" (202). So long as aesthetic intermediaries could claim a "natural" inception, they could be venerated as a revelation of "nature's God."

As the female incarnation of divine beauty, the organic angel most fully exploited this tentative Protestant aestheticism. However it might partake of the "genuine aesthetics" of mountains and rivers, the female body clearly introduced a distinct if related affective dimension into the process of aesthetic conversion; inasmuch as her influence derived from the female body, it mobilized erotic longing in the service of spiritual transformation. In *American Madonna*, John Gatta provides a case-study of eroticized female spiritual power through his analysis of *The Minister's Wooing*. Gatta outlines Stowe's belief "that a progressive scale of affections connects the theological orders of nature and grace, that natural love is indeed sacramental" (63). As Gatta pictures it, the "regenerative inspiration" that the heroine supplies to numerous male characters in the novel figures Stowe's "faith that youthful womanhood might embody the power of eros coextensively with that of agape and communal *caritas*" (63, 67).¹⁵

¹⁵ Although Gatta continues to associate the heroine Mary's influence with maternity, he concedes that she is "clearly a lover as well as spiritual mother—and, without conscious design, she fulfills much of her latter role through the former," p. 63.

Nor was Stowe by any means a cultural anomaly in her thinking; as Protestantism gravitated toward a "theology of the feelings," the power of romantic attachment over the heart seemed a "natural" means of efficacious evangelism.

The organic angel's role as agent of eroticized conversion—rather than of conception and nurture—positions her as a specifically democratizing figure. An exclusivist intimacy inheres in the glorification of enclosed domesticity, one that midcentury sentimental novels trenchantly resist. In her analysis of Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*, for example, Chantell notes that the dynamics between mother and daughter suggest that "the sentimental mother will seduce her child away from engagement with any world beyond that of the cozy domestic enclosure" (16). Conversely, in her article on *The Lamplighter*, a sentimental text which I examine, Cindy Weinstein observes of this novel that it "produces a family based on chosen affections rather than biologically determined ones" (1023).¹⁶ As a result, the heroine "gets to belong to everyone [...] her sympathy produces a family economy where one person's gain is not another persons' loss" (1024). Where the self-mirroring bond with the biological mother closes down alternative emotional exchanges, the filial freedom of the organic angel renders her affect universally accessible.¹⁷ Put simply, not everyone can be born to a sentimental mother, but anyone can look

¹⁶ In *States of Sympathy*, Elizabeth Barnes similarly speaks of how in *The Lamplighter* "The potentially fatal effects of intensive bonding are annulled by the redistribution of familial ties," p. 91.

¹⁷ In each of the texts I examine, the heroine is either orphaned, disowned, or expatriated, with Eva of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* comprising the only exception. None of the novels features an intimate mother-daughter bond; in most cases the mother is absent or deceased. While Chantell does not focus on a specially feminine affective alterity in her analysis of *The Wide, Wide World* and *The Lamplighter*, she does point out that both novels supply the "motherless heroine with *extra-domestic, non-maternal* surrogates who oversee [their] education and bring [them] to ideal womanhood," p. 141, my emphasis.

at an organic angel. Because sentimental novels downplay filial exclusiveness, the organic angel typically ranges outside the domestic sphere, and the telos of marriage, if present, proves secondary to the expression of her generalized affective power. Overt concern with biological reproduction in these novels is furthermore virtually absent.¹⁸ These deviations from the sentimental norms of the cult of domesticity suggest that the authors of these novels were invested in breaking up the sacred circumscription of the hearth to broadly disseminate the eroticized force of the female body.

The democratic accessibility of the organic angel has a theological resonance. In *Sensational Designs*, Jane Tompkins argues that "Religious conversion as the basis for a new social order was the mainspring of the Christian evangelical movement of the mid-nineteenth century," a movement characterized by an unprecedented prioritization of "feeling" as the means and indicator of conversion (218). This "theology of the feelings" was centered on "affective response"¹⁹ rather than on supernatural election; anyone who could experience attraction to moral beauty could, therefore, be saved. And what could more effectively evoke a spiritualized adoration than the beautiful bodies of saintly women? In "The Other American Renaissance,"

¹⁸ What Nina Baym claims for particular novels by the Warner sisters, I would apply to sentimental novels in the '50s more generally: when marriages take place, they "celebrate a social as well as a personal renewal, the salvation [...] of a whole and healthy community," *Woman's Fiction*, p. 163. In this same vein of minimizing the exclusivity of the nuclear family, none of the novels I analyze features a heroine who gives birth—or indeed shows any interest in the child-bearing role—with the exception of Sylvester Judd's novel *Margaret*, in which the titular heroine's role as mother is merely one ray in the spectrum of her affective powers over an entire utopian neighborhood.

¹⁹ In *Truth's Ragged Edge*, Philip Gura describes a "theology of the feelings" as the "new religion, based [...] on affective response to Scripture," p. 267. While I have taken Gura's term "affective response" somewhat out of context, I believe this term applies more broadly, especially as interest in natural revelation—as mediated by material forms—was on the rise mid-century.

Tompkins contends that the "entire weight of Protestant Christianity and democratic nationalism stood behind" antebellum conviction in "the power of Christian love and the sacred influence of women" (48). It is precisely the intersection of Protestant Christianity and democratic nationalism in the early 19th century that generates the principle of the "sacred influence of women," which, in turn, culminates in the generous communal affect of the organic angel. In his introduction to Bushnell's liberal theology, Smith notes that Jonathan Edwards as well as Bushnell "affirmed that the *sine qua non* of spiritual life is the ability to see the divine nature expressed as beauty"; however, whereas Edwards "saw the sense of the heart as a special dispensation of grace given only to the elect," Bushnell, "saw sensibility to the divine nature as potentially universal human capacity" (20). In this sense, he suggests, "Bushnell democratized Edwards' sense of the heart" (20). Springing from the kind of naturalized theology Bushnell espoused, the organic angel reflected the antebellum period drive to realize—theoretically—the essential equality of persons and undifferentiated access to material and spiritual goods.

In this regard also the organic angel bestrides the line between Transcendentalism, which interiorized the relationship between the heart and the divine, and orthodox Calvinism, which structured communities under the patriarchal control of the church and demanded a public profession of faith. Buell writes that "Transcendentalism is, in a sense, the natural religion of democracy, by virtue of its claim that divinity in here in every human being and indeed in every particle of the universe" (*Literary* 168). Transcendental democracy, however, tended towards individualism, the principle, Howe contends, that Emerson and consociate Transcendentalists "most valued about their new spirituality" (620). Transcendental individualism "put every person directly in touch with the divine, without any need for tradition, a written scripture, or an institutional church" (620). Sentimental theology, while it maintained an emphasis on private

affective response to Scripture, likewise drastically depreciated the role of the traditional ecclesiastical structure. But in its Christocentric orientation, sentimental theology retained a communal urge lacking in thoroughgoing Transcendental naturalism, which posited an all-sufficiency to the private individual experience of depersonalized divinity.²⁰ The organic angel figures this theology's search for a democratic point of consolidation for the communal Christic body. Her own body called for a visual rather than textual hermeneutic, substituting spontaneous emotion for accurate interpretation and thereby rendering obsolete the rancorous divisions that increasingly plagued a disestablished midcentury Protestantism.²¹

The organic angel's conciliatory and communal function ramified beyond the religious sphere to include the economic and political narrative of the antebellum nation. America's myth-

²⁰ In *Separate Spheres No More*, Monika M. Elbert challenges a critical approach that "Not only does [...] not allow for an overlap between sentimentality and individualism, but [...] equates the sentimental impulse with the communal impulse," p. 10. Elbert suggests that approaching sentimentality as inherently communal "promotes a separatist politics for women," p. 10. However, Elbert's criticism comes in the context of celebrating the "non-communal and strongly individualistic experiences" of women "who actually flee from the dangers of claustrophobic and dangerous maternal and sisterly bonding," p. 10. I am arguing for the organic angel as a communal trope deriving from sentimental theology, who in many ways does represent a departure from "dangerous maternal and sisterly bonding" at the same time that she provides a point of communal consolidation for both male and female authors of sentimental fiction.

²¹ In *The Altar at Home*, Claudia Stokes makes the surprising claim that sentimental literature exhibits a highly sectarian character deriving from Methodist revivalism and therefore actively participates in the antebellum era's intense theological disputes. She concedes, however, that such texts "offer a portrait of a religious world in which a particular religious belief set"—essentially populist and universalist—"has vanquished its critics and found absorption into the mainstream, its sectarian specifics replaced by intimates of ecumenical unity" p. 6. The organic angel, as I suggest above, effects this ecumenical unity by reorienting conversion away from the textual and doctrinal and toward the visual and affective.

making process had, from the beginning, fused the political and providential. The "mission of America," as religious historian Ira L. Mandelker describes it, dictated that "Liberty had been established by deity in an empty western continent so that, freed from European traditions, it might flourish and become an inspiration to the rest of the world" (40). David Howe observes that "Almost all Americans regarded their country as an example and a harbinger of popular government to the rest of the world, and even non-church-members found millennial expectations an appropriate metaphor for this destiny" (285). In an 1852 lecture on non-resistance, Judd distilled this nationalized evangelical vision by declaring that "If you can understand what Christ's mission was, so can you understand what the proper mission of America is among the nations of the earth" (qtd. in Hall 302). This drive to incarnate heaven on earth converged in the early 19th century with an incipient industrial capitalist economy and the entrenchment of Jacksonian democracy, fostering a generalized "millennial search for God" (Morone 130). Because millennial expectations rested on the premise of America's predestination to the role of "a city upon a hill," it behooved Americans who invested in this metaphor to forge a national narrative linking origins and destiny.

In her development from natural child to supernaturalized woman, the organic angel spanned this distance between America's auspicious origins and elect destiny; in so doing, she collapsed historical conflict into a transcendent democratic body that realized heaven on earth. Paradoxically rooted in the divine through an "organic" material connection, this natural saint thus brought America's primitive origins in nature to a supernatural telos in a prosperous industrial age.²² Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr. explains how primitivism, or the nostalgia for a

²² Perry Miller, Annette Kolodny, and Myra Jehlen have established Americans' investment in their continental identity as "nature's nation," juxtaposed to the corrupting artifice of their European Old World counterparts.

primordial natural paradise, and millennialism, the pursuit of a utopian future, really comprise "opposite sides of the same coin of human aspiration for a way of life dramatically opposite in complexity and organization from the present" (72). On the one hand, the organic angel served as a celebratory accommodation to the "complexity and organization" of the historical moment, with its exponential increase in material comforts for middle-class Americans and corresponding satisfaction of instinctive desires; on the other hand, however, she highlighted a desperate desire to purify the conditions of American expansion, consumerism, and, retroactively, its very formation on a less than "empty" continent. By translating a supposed universalized human response to feminine beauty into a purified resonance with divine love, the organic angel advertised an inherent consonance of natural desire and divine will, and, by extension, the ultimate superfluity of conflict, whether spiritual, political, or economic.

This comprehensively purifying role took on a particular urgency in the 1850s. In the decades leading up to the Civil War, the United States saw, in addition to its ecclesiastical upheaval, the War of 1812, the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) over the federal government's annexation of Texas, the California Gold Rush (1848-1855), and a series of enactments on the part of Indian Removal Policy beginning in 1830. Between 1840 and 1860, approximately 4,242,000 immigrants touched ashore on North America, a trend spiked by the devastating 1845 Irish Potato Famine; the resultant huge influx of Irish immigrants touched off virulent anti-Catholic recriminations across the United States (Howe 527; 200). Decades of escalating tensions over Southern slavery peaked violently in the 1850s, making it the most volatile and defining national issue. Finally, as Michael T. Gilmore explains, the period from approximately 1815 to 1860 "marked a watershed in the history of the American economy," as it shifted from a primarily agrarian economy to an industrial capitalist one (1-2). This shift

furthermore laid the groundwork of an incipiently consumerist society that would transform Americans from producers to consumers in the decade of the 1860's and beyond (Douglas 66). These intersections climaxed in the defining problematic of the 1850s: how to reconcile America's spiritual, political, and economic imperatives—the drive to evangelize, democratize, and consume. In an era preoccupied with the spiritual efficacy of the affections, the economic and political aggressions that fueled the nation's rising prosperity threatened to belie that prosperity as a harbinger of divine blessing.

The trope of the organic angel mediates this nexus of concerns. Unspoiled by the conditions that gave rise to America's burgeoning wealth, the organic angel purified cultural products by refracting them for aesthetic consumption through her own body, making them—in theory—both democratically accessible and spiritually-oriented. Challenging a long critical tradition that opposes a feminine spiritual sphere to a masculine commercial one, Lori Merish makes the case that, while we "have learned to see an apparent *contradiction* between revivalism and materialism in antebellum America," in fact, "consumer purchases" increasingly came to serve as "visible signs of spiritual conversion" (89, author's emphasis). This evangelical economy figured women simultaneously as chief consumers of "luxury objects" and as themselves luxurious objects of consumption: like other "mediating material forms," the "bodies of refined, gracious women" exerted a purifying influence (2). This spiritualization of a consumer-oriented culture countermanded a long history of Puritan and civil warnings against the corrupting effects of material decadence (15) and implicitly consecrated America's rising prosperity. As an aesthetically pleasing but sexually inaccessible object, the organic angel promoted a paradoxical disinterested materialism—providing affective pleasure and spiritual renewal without "property" limitations.

Chapters 1 and 2 set out this landscape of a liberal Protestantism aesthetics of conversion and establish its centrality as a structural formation in the sentimental novel. At the heart of this transformative aesthetics stands the figure of the organic angel, an embodiment of an unbroken continuity between natural and Christian beauty, both moral and physical. The organic angel's capacity to experience and effect conversion stems from a dialectic of desire rather than fearful compulsion. For the authors of these female bildungsromane, the trope of the organic angel not only typifies the inherent compatibility of human nature and the divine will, it also figures America's peculiar millennial destiny as the locus of heaven on earth, where the nation's budding materialism could intersect with her divine mission to evangelize the world.

Chapter 1, devoted to Unitarian minister Sylvester Judd's novel *Margaret* (1851), examines the earliest, most optimistic, and most comprehensive portrait of the organic angel, and therefore serves as the control chapter against which my other four are measured. Of all the "natural" heroines I analyze, *Margaret* instantiates the most seamless fusion of human and divine nature and effects the most sweeping spiritual reform. A utopian prototype of the explosively popular sentimental female bildungsroman, *Margaret* sets the stage for my project's exploration of the possibilities and limits of the organic angel as a figure who embodies the reconciliation between divine and human interests, and whose representation shapes and misshapes narrative structure in the 1850s novel. Sylvester Judd labored in *Margaret* to develop a viable aesthetic of communal eros that prevented the concentration and closure of desire in sexual possessiveness. The titular heroine establishes this paradoxical ideal by founding a community on the democratically accessible beauty of art, her own body at the center of an aesthetic constellation that endlessly redirects desire toward the origin of all beauty in Christ.

In my second chapter I explore the development of the organic angel over the course of a female-authored female bildungsroman, Maria Cummins' wildly successful sentimental novel *The Lamplighter* (1854). This chapter traces the unfolding of the adult heroine's spiritual influence directly from her origins as a "wild child" of nature. In spite of the characterization of the child-heroine as both morally and physically unattractive, the magnetic power of the adult-heroine's presence proves an organic outgrowth from her pre-pubescent natural appearance and temperament. Because Gertrude's spiritual power filters through her physical features, Gertrude wins souls with the power traditionally used to win hearts, and Cummins creates fragmented and contradictory portraits of her heroine in order to confuse the source of Gertrude's spiritual influence. As physical and spiritual traits slide into each other, they throw off any direct correlation between Gertrude's magnetic spirituality and erotic body.

The sentimental novels of Judd and Cummins illustrate how, as American Protestantism moved toward a recuperation of intercessory roles, the trope of the organic angel served to catalyze an ideal coalescence of sensuality and purity. The representational success of this dynamic depended on the illusion of a dematerialized sexuality that awakens desire in order to transfer it to the spiritual realm; any recurrence to the female body *as* body threatened the dissipation of desire into mere lust. Sentimental authors accordingly adopted a variety of strategies to stave off the breakdown of the sacral body of the organic angel into a perverse rather than purifying aesthetic. Not all antebellum authors were so optimistic about America's immanent reconciliation of heaven and earth, and their experimental adaptations of the organic angel reflected their respective misgivings. The hidden corollaries of the trope surface as diverse complicating factors in mid-century novels by Hawthorne, Melville, Stowe, and Wilson.

In Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1860 novel *The Marble Faun*, which I explore in Chapter 3, the incipient feminized aesthetic of liberal Protestantism confronts an overpowering mirror image in the institutional decadence of Rome. In a real sense, Calvinism had emerged fundamentally as a rejection of medieval Christianity's material and feminized mediation between the human and divine, and *The Marble Faun* pictures a representational male American's effort to navigate between purified and idolatrous iconography. The resultant pressure splits the trope of the organic angel into competing feminine aesthetics, stripping the figure of the natural saint Hilda of her transformative powers and displacing them onto the natural seductress Miriam. *The Marble Faun*, I argue, demonstrates Hawthorne's spiritual and artistic investment in the trope of the organic angel, alongside his ultimate rejection of its conciliatory function on the eve of the Civil War.

Chapter 4 traces a similar but more devastating breakdown of the trope of the organic angel. In Melville's 1852 novel *Pierre*, a loss of faith in the benevolent divinity of liberal Protestantism and the corresponding benignity of nature comprehensively destroys the ground for spiritual purification. Like *The Marble Faun*, *Pierre* features a representational American male's quest for regeneration mediated by the affective female body; but where Hawthorne splits his organic angel into separate spiritual and sexual women, Melville depicts eroticism and agape as mutually intensifying, generating a hopeless confusion of holy and perverse desires. *Pierre* ends up spiritually transported by not one but two rival organic angels, neither of whose magnetic eroticism can effect the purification of interior motives or inherited estate. The failure of the organic angels in *Pierre* to translate Pierre's spontaneous desires to a spiritual plane allegorizes Melville's rejection of America's founding and millennial myths.

Published the same year as *Pierre*, Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom* forces the trope of the organic angel to reveal its racialized origins and racist limitations. Chapter 5 opens with an analysis of how Stowe's concept of the opaque and aesthetically inferior properties of black bodies prompted her exclusion of black females from iconographic conversion roles in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Because the author finds the white body alone capable of the transparency necessary to mediate divine lumination, Eva plays the role of organic angel while Uncle Tom serves as her racial counterpart, effecting conversions through the public debasement of his flesh. Unable to mediate divine light either through transparency or exposure, with its overtones of sexual exploitation, the young black female Topsy completes the organic angel's trajectory towards sainthood, but at the cost of further physical representation in the text.

The concluding sections of Chapter 5 contrast Stowe's vision of racialized physical essences with that of Harriet Wilson, a free born black woman and author of the 1859 black female bildungsroman *Our Nig*. The heroine of *Our Nig*, a girl of mixed race, attempts to follow the charted course of the organic angel but, blocked at every turn by the cultural articulation of her blackness, finds herself unable to either experience or effect conversion. Wilson's depiction of Frado's failed conversion implicitly highlights the costs of antebellum Protestantism's sacralization of gender and race-specific bodies as constructed by the trope of the organic angel.

I. AESTHETIC CONVERSION IN SYLVESTER JUDD'S *MARGARET*

The most theologically liberal of the six novels I examine, Judd's *Margaret* seeks to replace what its author viewed as the repugnant doctrines of orthodox Christianity with a gospel predicated on mutual attraction between humanity and divinity. The heroine Margaret's journey from innocent child of nature to messianic Christian woman reflects this liberal redaction of the dynamics of conversion. Rather than assenting to the emotional and spiritual disruption which characterized the traditional conversion experience, Margaret clings to the integrity of her natural heart, and her eventual embrace of Christianity transpires at a cognitive and linguistic level when her interior life finds its fullest expression in the language of Unitarianism.

Because Margaret's conversion entails only a process of maturation into a more perfect representation of preexisting harmony, it highlights the central tension of the sentimental bildungsroman: how to dramatize a static goodness as developmental. Judd anticipated the sentimental novel's solution to this paradox when he settled on an unfolding aesthetics as the means of generating movement at the narrative level while preserving a continuity between original and consummate forms.

The novel's concluding proliferation of beautiful forms radiates from the vision of Margaret as both preeminent author and work of public art, and points to a marginalized angle on antebellum femininity. Criticism of sentimental fiction has tended to conflate the feminine and maternal and, consequently, overlook the extent to which many literary figurations of the female

saint dilate not on her home-making or reproductive capacities but on her erotic and visionary powers. The reconstruction of conversion as an aesthetic process centered on the organic angel enables Judd to construct a full-scale argument for the viability of a national narrative premised on the immanent fulfillment of an original American innocence, even in the face of slavery, commercialism, Indian removal, and Westward expansion. Judd incorporates Native Americans into his overarching millennial scheme by positing their lost noble savagery as the original form of American innocence that finds its fullest realization in the white Unitarian utopia of Mons Christi. The production and consumption of aesthetic forms—whether as stylized recreation, sculpture, or cultivated landscape—asserts a transcendent continuity of substance unbroken by historical contingences, and thus serves to crystallize the gap between America's pre-history and her New England utopia. Democratic access to the production and consumption of aesthetic pleasures harmonizes interests across racial, economic, social, and even sexual lines, making *Margaret* the most idealistic and all-inclusive treatment of the powers of a organic angel.

Margaret first takes the stage of her titular two-volume narrative as a sacred infant, a "dimly-revealed form" hallowed by "a fantastic light": "We behold a child of eight or ten months; it has brown curly hair, dark eyes, fair conditioned features, a health-glowing cheek, and well-shaped limbs" (1:1). Margaret's features and aura anticipate those of the Jesus who, illumined by a "preternatural light," will later appear to her in a dream with eyes of "dark blue" and hair which "flowed in dark-brown curls down his neck" (1:165). "Who is it?" the narrator inquires of the infant Margaret; "It is God's own child, as all children are" (1:1).

Judd's apotheosis of the infant Margaret, and his democratic attribution of her beatific state to "all children," encapsulates a revolution in 19th century thinking about human nature. The figure of the pre-socialized child served as a battleground for the orthodox doctrine of

natural depravity and the emergent Romantic sacralization of human intuition; as Judd scholar Richard Hathaway notes, "After 1820 the nature of the child was central to any discussion of theological issues" (207). Puritanism had taken a dim view of the child's spiritual state, to say the least: Cotton Mather went so far as to warn parents that their progeny were "the Children of Death, and the *Children of Hell*, and the *Children of Wrath, by Nature*" (qtd. in Epstein 82). In case they misunderstood the implications of their bringing a child into the world, he went on to explain, "You must know, Parents, that your Children are by your means Born under the dreadful Wrath of God; and if they are not *New-Born* before they *Dy*, it had been good for them, that they had never been born at all...There is a *Corrupt Nature* in thy Children" (qtd. in 82). By contrast, Horace Bushnell, Congregationalist author of the wildly popular and controversial *Views of Christian Nurture* (1847), published two years after the first edition of *Margaret*, boldly counseled parents to "never to disturb the infant soul, which, like the needle of a compass, points unerringly and instinctively toward its maker" (Douglas 136). Bushnell charged that the "effort and expectation should be, not as is commonly assumed, that the child is to grow up in sin, to be converted after he comes to a mature age; but that he is to open onto the world as one that is spiritually renewed" (*Views* 6).

The infant Margaret not only opens "onto the world as one that is spiritually renewed," within Judd's stylized portrait of her exquisite physicality she also forecasts her role as spiritual renewer of her world, the organic angel as the millennial Christ. Her growth from "universal child" into "idealized woman" (Dedmond 64) entails the unfolding of a moral and aesthetic perfection that inheres in her "nature" from the beginning. Already "attractive" as a "child of nature," Margaret, as Hathaway points out, nevertheless "has no power to enact" (5). The

prelingual consciousness of childhood may hold perfect correspondence with divine purity, but it has no means of infusing that purity into social structures.

Like Emerson, Judd sought an adult consciousness that "retained the spirit of infancy," wherein sacred nature "illuminates" not "only the eye," but "shines into the eye and heart" as it does for "the child" (127); unlike Emerson, however, Judd's vision tended toward community and the revitalization of human institutions. Judd seeks through Margaret to elide the need for the falling away from a prelingual intimacy with nature that attends the superseding adult consciousness, but on behalf of a collective rather than individualistic integration between a divinized humanity and natural world. Margaret as organic angel will combine the integrity of the infant's absolute correspondence with uncorrupted nature with the adult's capacity to enact that purity in complex aesthetic forms as a foundation for Christian utopia.

Margaret, Hathaway contends, is "perhaps the first American novel to be so centrally concerned with inner life and with the development of a child into an adult" (16-17); the maturation process of Margaret serves as the link between the uncorrupted consciousness of the romantic divine child and the incorruptible consciousness of the female saint. Through Margaret Judd thus dramatized what for Transcendentalist nonfiction remained only a rhetorical possibility: the development of another Christ who, through her resistance to the demands of traditional religious conversion and her attendant fidelity to the claims of natural beauty, ensures both her own salvation and the reform of a whole community.

Judd's heroine proves a consummate agent of natural impulse, protected by her inability to comprehend and therefore submit to the invasive forces of traditional religious conversion. Scornful of any claim to her allegiance beyond what appeals to her intuitive desires, she imitates the obtuse and rebellious response of the "unregenerate" or natural heart in the face of spiritual

truth. But for Judd, the natural heart enlightens rather than depraves, and Margaret's childhood resistance to traditional conversion, either by the emotional inundations of revival spirit or the bleak offices of prescribed piety, represents an escape from heresy. The dramatic movement of the first episodes in Margaret's progress towards female sainthood thus transpires through a kind of inverse friction: the child Margaret struggles, not to obtain freedom from natural desires, but to resist religion's sinful mortification of natural desire. In a dramatic reversal, the crisis of traditional conversion instigated by revival proves the soul's greatest threat.

In her landmark essay, "The Other American Renaissance," Jane Tompkins registered the significance of crisis-oriented conversions on the antebellum literary consciousness; midcentury, she affirms, "the one great fact of American life [...] was the 'terrific universality' of the revival" (35). Literary historian Barbara Epstein observes that by the 1840s and '50s, the rash of revivals associated with the Second Great Awakening had abated; nevertheless, revivals continued to break out intermittently (89), and across the century "the more theologically conservative and revivalistically oriented denominations kept the earlier Calvinist emphasis on a profound, even violent, often sudden conversion experience" (Douglas 131-312). Richard Hathaway goes so far as to argue that that the "whole movement" of Unitarianism originated out of an "antipathy to revivalist conversion" (270), and Judd certainly fit this profile of reaction to the repeated spiritual crises associated with his childhood and youth. Even within the Congregationalist camp, as Bushnell illustrates, discomfort had arisen with respect to the association between divine grace and aggression: "we hold a piety of conquest rather than love" (8) he laments regarding conversions conducted by revivals, "Our very theory of religion is, that men are to grow up in evil, and be dragged into the church of God by conquest" (25).

For Bushnell, postponing a child's intercourse with the spirit of God to some indeterminate, unpredictable future date of conversion constituted an "unnatural and pernicious" mistake (15), and Judd too found "the orthodoxy of his youth" to be "*unnatural*" (Hathaway 88), a mistaken disarticulation of the supernatural and natural orders. "It was a fundamental article of my belief," he later wrote, "that I could not become religious until I was made so by a special and extraneous operation" (qtd. in Hall 16). Bushnell wrote of adherents to this literalist interpretation of conversion that "They separate the divine agency in men, from the general system to which it belongs,—they make the doctrine special in such a sense that God is himself [...] coming and going [...] while all his other operations go on by a general and systematic machinery" (126).

It is this artificial disjunction between the natural and supernatural workings of the divine spirit that threatens to unmoor Margaret from the tranquil bosom of nature. In Volume I of the novel, which traces the heroine's development from infancy through adolescence, the growing girl attends a backwoods camp-meeting-style revival, her first encounter with the powerful rhetorical and communal appeal for traditional conversion. Dropped off by her elder brother Nimrod and left in the care of one of the local ladies, Margaret finds herself besieged by the alien forces of damning oration and escalating group hysteria, only to demonstrate a preternatural invulnerability to religious coercion. Because her obstinance proves symptomatically identical with Calvinist depictions of the unconverted heart, a bewildered Margaret finds herself marginalized to the opaque status of an unregenerate.²³

²³ In the context of the rhetorical struggle to overcome the natural heart, the totalizing marker of unregeneracy tends to subsume all characteristics of the individual in question. For instance, in spite of her congenial and inquisitive nature, Margaret's neighbor, in fact a kindly woman, remarks her as a "born fool" who "will certainly die" unprepared, p. 1:71.

From the outset, both the revivalist preacher and the villagers anticipate the trajectory of the revival in terms of an irresistible invasion. The village herbalist, the Widow Wright, warns Nimrod of the immanent presence of a punitive force, saying, "I cal'late God is here [. . .] and you had better not be pokin' your fun about" (1:67). The Widow's notion that "God is here," in the context of the camp meeting suggests an abrupt entrance of the divine for the occasion of the revival, a concept which generates the revival's affecting sense of imminent judgment. As Ann Douglas points out, not only the older generation of Puritan ministers but "even latter-day revivalists [...] stressed the inexorable press, the immediate need of conversion: the crisis was now, the decision was now, time was running out, which was to be your destination, heaven or hell?" (1:140). The rhetoric from the pulpit denotes this movement of calculated momentum, as the preacher conflates the "work of grace" with wildfire: "The sacred flame [...] has spread in Virginia. Brother Enfield [...] conjectures that from eighteen hundred to two thousand souls have been converted since the middle of May. Twelve hundred experienced the work of grace in Sussex; in Amelia half as many more" (1:68). The accumulation of numerical estimates implies to the audience that, in terms of sheer mathematical probability, based on the recent patterns of the "work of grace," some, if not the majority of them, must succumb to the revival spirit. The revivalist of necessity resorts to vivid psychological evocations and mathematic predictions, rather than a reasoned appeal which must signify little in the face of divine onslaught.

As the preacher gains momentum, his conversion imagery turns increasingly violent. Those at first reluctant to ascribe the movement to divine intervention, he proclaims, "began to bemoan their own hardness of heart" when "the Lord broke in upon their own families" (1:68). To be "broke in upon" by an outside force proves the only remedy to the alienation produced between those whose "hardness of heart" darkened their vision and those who "saw it" (1:68).

The harder the heart, the preacher indicates, the more violent the experience of invasion: "Many gospel-hardened, old, orthodox sinners, have, as mighty oaks, been felled; and many high-towering sinners, as the tall cedars of Lebanon, bowed down to the dust" (1:68). The metaphor of the "mighty oaks" and "tall cedars"²⁴ highlights the role of irresistible grace in felling the natural magnificence and power of the individual person, an absolute abasement bespeaking humiliation and death through a "bow[ing] down to the dust." The preacher further reports that "As many as fifteen or twenty commonly gave up in a day under Brother Staffin's preaching, who is indeed a Samson among the Philistines. It is no strange thing now for children down to seven years of age to come in" (1:68). The fact that to "give up" and to "come in" prove commensurate turns of phrase in matters of conversion exposes the predicament each potential convert in the audience must resolve: to "give up," to surrender one's natural being to the alien force of the axe, enables one to "come in," to dissolve the alienating tension between the saved and the unsaved. If children "down to seven years of age" succumb, only those under the age of accountability, too young "to be knowing" (1:71), may escape the inexorable operation of grace. Margaret retains just such an infantile simplicity with respect to religious rhetoric but demonstrates her moral and intellectual capacity to choose; she thus ensures her castigation as unregenerate while preserving her natural integrity from the revival spirit.

In the midst of cries of "Glory! glory!" the revival's climax manifests itself as a physical and psychological assault, a kind of destructive possession that threatens to wrench Margaret from her intimate grounding in nature. Margaret's young peer Obed capitulates under the

²⁴ See Isa. 2.14 and Am. 2.9, *King James Version*. The revivalist borrows conquest imagery from the Old Testament prophets' descriptions of God's overthrow of Israel's enemies.

escalating pressure, "waving to and fro in his seat, groaning, and calling upon his mother" (1:69). His mother the Widow Wright likewise appears seized by an outside force, exclaiming "convulsively" to her son, "'Its [sic] an orful time. God has come, we are great sinners" (1:69). Like the swaying, groaning Obed and the convulsing Widow, others in the audience collapse in various forms of physical contortions, all suggestive of a distorting victimization: "Some of the congregation foamed at the mouth, others fell to the ground in spasms; the color of their faces fluctuated from white through purple to black; one appeared to be strangling and gasping for life, another became stiff, rigid, and sat up like a dead man on his seat; there were sobs, shrieks, and ejaculations" (1:69). James A. Morone in *Hellfire Nation* cites the intersection between antebellum excitement and outbreaks of bizarre behavior: one minister's revivals "featured 'jerking exercises'—an irresistible rush of the spirit that left sinners flopping uncontrollably on the ground" (124); another minister reported on attendees "crying for mercy in the most piteous accents while other were shouting most vociferously" (qtd. in 124). "A supernatural power," he added, "seemed to pervade the entire mass" (qtd. in 124).

As the "supernatural power" of Judd's fictional revival reaches new heights of aberrant expression, a contest of wills ensues over Margaret's dispossession through conversion. Nimrod, who has attended only to take advantage of the gathering for social amusement, "rushed among the people [...], seized Margaret and drew her out" (1:69); his intervention elicits the revivalist's stern rebuke: "Son of Belial! [...] thinkest thou to stop the mighty power of God? Will he deliver that child into thy hand as he did the children of Israel into the land of Chushan-rishathaim?" (1:70). The preacher's austere language and obscure Scriptural references illustrate the

foreignness of the entire drama acted upon and amongst the villagers,²⁵ even as his allusion to an exchange of captives indicates the extent to which he understands conversion as coextensive with dispossession of individual autonomy. In the face of the irresistible force of the "mighty power of God" Nimrod's efforts to preserve Margaret must prove futile, while Margaret's own will in the matter ostensibly fails even to signify.

Margaret's rooting in nature, however, allows her to stave off her own conversion. As the camp-meeting abruptly breaks off and the "exercises" close for the evening, Margaret demonstrates her unbroken intimacy with nature by taking refuge in its comforts, a striking contrast to the depictions of religious conversion's unnatural dangers. Herbert Ross Brown notes that prior to "the impact of the romantic revolution upon the religion of New England, natural phenomena had been commonly regarded as setting up a barrier between God and man" (334), and Margaret engages the natural world precisely to create a barrier between her and the older Puritan deity. She "ran off into the woods with her dog and laid down, under a tree, her head resting on the flanks of the animal, and her feet nestling in the soft moss" (1:70). Margaret's retreat to the woods, and her subsequent reclining at the foot of a tree, point to her resilient status as an un-felled individual spirit. The woods and its attendant dog and moss provide a familiarity and security that protects both the body and the natural heart from fatal uprooting by an external divinity.

²⁵ Although the villagers readily adopt the preachers' phraseology in moments of religious fervor, Judd suggests their appropriation remains an act of blind submission rather than understanding. For instance, when an older Margaret presses the Widow on the question of judgment, asking, "What have you done?" the latter replies complacently: "I cannot tell [...] only I am a great sinner; if you could hear the Parson preach you would think so too," p. 1:238.

Margaret's resistance to conversion reflects a spirit of Transcendental self-reliance, and her deflection of religious interrogation proves nearly as daring as Emerson's pronouncement, "if I am the devil's child, I will live then from the devil" (321). When a kindly woman attempts to ascertain Margaret's spiritual state and prod her toward conversion, the woman finds the girl's commitment to natural integrity startlingly unassailable. In response to the woman's prompting her whether "she didn't want to be saved," Margaret "replied that she didn't know" (1:71). Margaret's lack of knowledge, however, points to more than a missing education; it suggests the obdurate ignorance of the unregenerate heart. For, when the woman presses further, saying, "The spirit is here mightily [...] won't you come in for a share?" Margaret firmly declares, "It won't let me" (1:71). The child's ambiguous use of the pronoun "it" allows for a confusion between her spirit and the "spirit" present "mightily" to the assembly. On the one hand, Margaret's protest might seem to align her within the conventional Calvinist dichotomy between the saved and the unsaved; "it," the "Holy Spirit," "won't let" her come in, has predestined her to damnation. On the other hand, the "it" seems to denote a resistant principle within herself; her own spirit secures her against the fall into conversion, stubbornly pitting nature against the alien spirit at work vanquishing the congregation: to paraphrase Emerson, no law is sacred to her but the law of her own nature (321). When the woman warns, "You may lose your soul," Margaret continues to defend the natural integrity of her person, shocking her with the announcement, "I haven't got any" (1:71). Her rejection of traditional Christian terminology indicates her refusal to conceptualize an inherent division of her being, a discontinuity between the natural body and supernatural soul.

For Judd, as for Bushnell, true "religion is a power that works primarily in and through the imagination" (*Selected*, Smith 2), and Judd counters the revivalist's assault on Margaret's

consciousness with the projection of an *a priori* natural Savior from within her unconscious mind. Romanticism had elevated "the creative imagination as a source of quasi-divine authority" (Buell, *New England* 69), and historian Richard Rabinowitz notes the emergent strain of antebellum Protestantism whose "emphasis upon the dramatic interaction with the divinity inside consciousness" prompted a "revolt against the centuries-old disdain for the visual among pious New Englanders," a revolt which "resulted in increasing interest in the physical representations of the Godhead, particularly of Jesus" (174). Within this conceptual framework of the sacred imagination, Margaret's dream-Christ carries the weight of supernatural revelation.

After her unhappy first visit to "Meeting" at the local church, which institution systematically represses the natural desires that the revival endeavored to uproot, Margaret discovers an alternative to the dispossession of her "natural" soul when she dreams of an invitational, aesthetic Christ, "the beautiful one" (1:166). In contrast to "meeting," where the parishioners endeavored to crush Margaret's spontaneous enthusiasm for beauty by rejecting flowers as "an abomination" (305), Margaret's dream puts forth a floral Christ whose natural beauty evokes the "natural amiability" of each child-like soul (1:168). In every way the antithesis of a demanding presence, Christ's exceedingly delicate, effeminized beauty belies any doctrinal pretense of divine aggression: "The face [...] was pale but very fair, and a hidden under-tinge of color seemed to show through an almost transparent skin, as she had seen the blush of the white goosefoot shining through a dewdrop" (1:165). The figure's gauzy skin and pale complexion suggest an almost infantile fragility, while his luminous beauty models the unobtrusive, even secreted natural phenomenon of a flower blooming beneath the dew. This Jesus Christ, and with him the Apostle John, materializes from a "ball of light" that coextends with the natural sun setting in the trees, rather than descending from a heavenly sphere. Jesus' entrance and

appearance reflect Bushnell's teaching that "supernatural influences, as available as sunlight, pervade the organic networks of nature" (*Selected*, Smith 2).

By recreating Christ as a transparent, delicate figure contiguous with the most pleasing natural phenomena, Judd replaces "the ugliness and primacy of dogma" with "the consolation of aesthetics" (Douglas 150). As a struggling orthodox youth, Judd's "love of the beauty of nature clashed with his developing religious devotion" (Dedmond 21); as an adult, he determined to reconcile religious and natural appeal by rendering "the attractions of [Christ's] moral glory and beauty" (qtd. in Rabinowitz 186) in aesthetic terms. If, as Tompkins suggests, for midcentury sentimental authors "the highest function of art" was "to bring souls to Christ" (149), depicting Christ himself as work of art resonated with a broader growing confidence in the correlation between sensually pleasing and spiritually salutary influence. For by recreating Christ's attractiveness as infantile, feminine, and floral, Judd goes beyond a general promotion of the visual—he highlights the picturesque in particular as salvific. Judd's earliest biographer Arethusa Hall remarked that, "unable to see ugliness and deformity in the natural, to him the picturesque was easily attainable" (457).

Nor was Judd a cultural outlier in this propensity. Judd's description of Jesus with hair which, "parted on the crown, flowed in dark-brown curls down his neck" (1:165), suggests his familiarity with a historical document in circulation at the time, later found to be a forgery. Purportedly a physical description of "the person of Jesus Christ," it includes the following details: "His aspect is amiable and reverend; his hair flows into those beauteous shades which no united colors can match, falling into graceful curls below his ears [...] and parting on the crown of his head."²⁶ Judd encapsulated the aesthetic theory of sentimental art when he insisted that

²⁶ For the full description, adopted by Alcott in his *Conversations*, see his footnote on pp. 113-4.

"man was made to love the lovely" (qtd. in Hall 90), and, for enthusiasts of a naturalized Christianity, a picturesque Christ represented the fullest expression of divine loveliness in natural form.

The aesthetic of the picturesque not only promoted religious visuals in contradistinction to Puritan suspicion of the senses, it foreclosed aspects of devotional iconography essential to Catholic and Eastern Christian traditions—namely, representations of Christ's torture. Historian David Walker Howe has asserted the antebellum era's "growing public revulsion against the infliction of physical pain" (650), and this emerging sensibility impacted apprehension of doctrines relating to Christ's atonement for human sin via crucifixion, which, in turn, shaped the liberal ethic of art. Increasingly, the orthodox doctrine of Christ's suffering and death as pain inflicted by a Father God to sate his own wrath proved distasteful to liberal Protestants. The pacifist Noah Worcester made this point when he penned a tract titled, "The Atoning Sacrifice, A Display of Love Not Wrath" (Douglas 126). Bushnell and other theologians worked, in various ways, to "minimize, even ignore suffering" (126) as a tool of divine punishment, shifting the emphasis from Christ's agony at death to his offering as a gesture of divine welcome. As Douglas observes, the "personalized, feminized, literary Bushnellian view of the Atonement was [...] a non-crisis-oriented one, and it implied and presupposed a tranquil theory of religious development in man as well as in God" (130).

Margaret's dream-encounter with this aestheticized Savior thus proves a "meditative, pleasant communion with natural beauties" (qtd. in Rabinowitz 176), rather than a jarring confrontation with the implications of sin and justice. Not only Christ himself, but the Holy Spirit and the emblem of the cross undergo redaction into benign loci of natural beauty: the conquering force of the Holy Spirit transforms into the innocuous symbol of a "milk-white dove"

that "offered itself very familiarly" to play with a crippled child (1:169). Similarly, the disturbing symbol of the cross as site of Christ's atoning torture transfigures into an attractive "cross-tree," an image of natural growth and invitational beauty which subverts the revivalist's Old Testament metaphor of felled trees. Margaret sees it "set in the ground, where it grew like a tree, budded and bore green leaves and white flowers, and the milk white dove [...] flew and lit upon the top of it" (1:165). Rather than manifesting himself as a sufferer nailed to this cross, Christ mildly "lean[s]" on it, a distinction the author underscores by having a little child cry out happily, "He doesn't hang on the cross as he does in the Primer" (1:167). The body scarred by the hideous torture device yields to a figure whole and untouched, with a mild visage "so beautiful and so good" that children "rejoice to go near him" (1:168). In the Apostle John's words, "Welcome to Jesus!" (1:167). This liberalized Savior "is a creature of feeling, passive rather than active, invoking not displaying" (Douglas 127)—as retiring and inoffensive as a piece of picturesque art.

Margaret's attachment to the Christ of her dream, "my own Beautiful One" (1:310) as she will later call him, exemplifies Emerson's "conviction that Christianity was founded on human nature, not on the Bible," that Christianity, in fact, coextends with consciousness (Richardson 292). Paradoxically, then, the perfection of this consciousness subsists in the most unselfconscious stages of human development—infancy and early childhood—when instinctual attractions and repulsions guide responses to the world. Rather than have his heroine diminish in her moral perfection as she grows, however, Judd illustrates through Margaret the spontaneous response to beauty as the perpetual regeneration of infantile simplicity. Thus in another dream, alongside the figure of Christ, Margaret dreams of "four beautiful female figures," whom she recognizes as "Faith, Hope, Love, and their sister, who was yet of their own creation, Beauty"

(1:224). Judd's inclusion of a fourth figure in the traditional trinity of cardinal virtues indicates the crux of his theological redaction; receptivity to beauty, coequally natural and moral, constitutes the path of spiritual regeneration. Rather than submitting to the will of God as fundamentally antagonistic to the heart, the aspiring Christian need only embrace the original and instinctual pursuit of pleasure in beauty.

Judd's effort to recast true Christianity in terms of integrity to nature yields the novel's primary structural quandary: how to dramatize Christian conversion as a seamless process rather than a disruptive event. This formal dilemma registers what Gregg Crane has identified as "one of the central paradoxes of the sentimental novel": its valorization of "permanence and stasis as signs of transcendent values" alongside a preoccupation with "movement and transformation" (112). In "trying to reconcile the usually static vision of innocence with his concern for progress" (Hathaway 4), Judd turns to language as the organic site for an unfolding Christian conversion uncompromised by the unnatural crisis of supernatural intervention. As Margaret advances from child to youth, she retains her uncorrupted "natural innocence" but in the context of enlarging mental capacities; her conversion, therefore, entails a maturation into "Christian innocence,"²⁷ marked by her assent to the rational and Christocentric language of Unitarian theology.

After Margaret's refusal to convert to the local orthodoxy, the community designates her as unregenerate, a "wicked Indian" (1:309) with the unbending pride of the "natural heart" (1:302). An isolated youth, she finds herself yearning for a language that will render the divinity within her nature fully intelligible, but the only religious language she knows consists of the townsfolk's falsely discriminating theological categories. For Judd as for Unitarians generally, "the categories of seventeenth-century Covenant theology were largely fictive" (Buell, *New*

²⁷ These terms are borrowed from Hathaway, p. 5.

England 273), and he rejected the language that separated nature from grace and "split households" and communities "between the regenerate and unregenerate, or along sectarian lines" (Mandelker 17). When Mr. Evelyn, the novel's Unitarian spokesperson and Margaret's future husband, inquires why she does not "speak with the people" of the village to "discover the nature of their emotions and thoughts," Margaret condemns their speech about God as "unintelligible" (1:308). Because their "theological distinctions do not conform to anything that exists in nature" (1:309), neither the townspeople's interior life nor the divine infusion of that life can find expression.

Rather, for the orthodox townsfolk, religious language takes the form of antagonism, between God and humanity, between desire and speech, and between the elect and the damned: "There seems to be something *above* the people," Margaret complains, "something over their heads, what they talk to, and seem to be visited by occasionally [...] making them solemn and stiff like a cold wind" (1:308, author's emphasis). As in the case of the camp meeting revival, Judd stresses the unnatural physical deportment that results from the gap between the divine and human interposed by a language that "all runs of sins and sinners, the fall and recovery, justification and election, trinity and depravity, hell and damnation" (1:309). The practical outworking of these abstract distinctions comprises an interior disruption of the natural outflow from religious desire to religious language; lacking the language to articulate "their emotions and thoughts" in a religious context, the people turn "solemn and stiff" from the artificial disjunction between nature and divinity. Their very bodies evince the disconnect in the life-giving continuity of desire and speech. The village orthodoxy has nothing to offer Margaret by way of expressing her maturing interior unity with divine nature.

Although the child Margaret's affinity with nature manifested itself in a language of simple, concrete enjoyment of the physical world, as a youth she finds herself lacking the terminology to articulate and thereby fully experience an emergent reflective relationship with nature: "I used to sit here in my merry childhood and think all was mine, the earth and the sky. I ate my bread and cider, and fed the ants and flies. Through me innumerable things went forth [...] and my jocund heart kindled the twilight" (1:313). These "innumerable" physical facts and entities entered her bodily experience without suffering retention through reflection; she therefore encountered the world as an uninterrupted flow of corporeal sensation, stimulating correspondent emotion rather than complex reflection. In adolescence, however, she no longer enjoys this simple correspondence between her somatic experience of the physical world and her interior response: "In the same moment that I am worried I am at rest. How is this?" she demands, "Are we divided like sheep? has each feeling its fold?" (1:314). Margaret's anatomization of her psychological states signals cognitive development, an unfolding complexity situated within a larger uncompromised simplicity of innocence.

The problem of providing Margaret with a language at once original and incomplete proved a central challenge to Judd's project of rendering innocence in a developmental form. In reference to affording the maturing Margaret "a species of erudition," he averred, "The management of this part of the tale, it need not be said, was one of the most difficult problems the author had to encounter" (1:iv-v). As a solution, Judd turned to the language of classical mythology, which, though once a historical religious language, now lay open to reappropriation as a transcendent language unattached to the particularities of its communal context. In the absence of a religious nomenclature that discloses the union of nature with the divine, and her

own place within that integral "whole," Margaret thus develops a partial, private system of naming that betokens the concomitance of natural beauty and godhead.

A proficiency in academic Latin and ancient mythology enable Margaret to participate in a seamless community of her own making, grafted out of history onto her local New England landscape: "I have," she explains to Mr. Evelyn, "many and improving visitations, and much select company. I told you of Egeria; then there is Diana's Walk in the woods, and close upon the edge of the water you see some graceful white birches; those are the Nine Muses. Brother Chilion is our Apollo" (1:314-15). She goes on to enumerate her "pretty Pantheon" (1:316), a miscellany of mythological figures associated with various features of her home territory, including "Mons Bacchi" or "Bacchus's Hill" (1:315) as the designation for the village's West District, known locally as "the Head or Indian's Head" (1:20).

Margaret's cooptation of a dead religious language leaves her unfettered by any particular conceptual paradigm. As such, it operates as a kind of "natural" vocabulary, creating space for Margaret to engage in protracted games of expression, freely adopting, discarding, and coining phrases on impulse, as she gropes for a language adequate to her expanded capacities: "while I speak all I feel, there is more in me than I can ever speak. What harmony circumscribes the whole? In what are pain and pleasure one?" (1:314). She can sense the fundamental unity that encloses the new excesses of her interior life, but she cannot as yet name it. Margaret's experience of nature deepens with her reflective capacity, so that she finds her home "every year more beautiful, the trees more suggestive, the birds more musical, the bees more knowing" (1:314), but can only assimilate the totality within a gesture of limitation, wryly confessing to Mr. Evelyn, "To which divinity we are on the whole consecrated, I hardly know" (1:315). As a child, Margaret simply enjoyed the contiguity between her spontaneous innocence and the

physical world's sacred beauty; as a youth, she creates a self-contained but partial system of naming all her own.

Margaret's erudite mythologizing and free-play of associations renders nature—the physical world as well as her interior life—privately intelligible and so unintelligible to her fellow villagers, with their "unnatural" religious vernacular. But her jumbling of linguistic possibilities proves ultimately directional, hinting towards a future communal language in Unitarianism. At one point, perplexed by an encounter with Mr. Evelyn, she at first exclaims, "Patience, Silence, Feronia, Venus, O Mother God! help thy child!", a bizarre litany which demonstrates her freedom from any particular conceptual system. Her contemplative outcries, however, soon gravitate toward a Christological center: "O Christ!" she concludes, "relent thou iron soul of the skies, and speak to me!" (1:319). In Volume II, following a more extensive interaction with Mr. Evelyn, this Christological orientation becomes less fitful and more pronounced; the intersection of Unitarian doctrine with Margaret's unfettered impulses prompts the peculiar stream-of-consciousness outbreak, "Toupee, tyetop, pomatum, powder—my hair goes for a towel to wipe Christ's feet with" (2:33). Progressing through a combined association of sense and sound, this sequence purports to follow a natural advancement of linguistic forms towards a stylized culminating action centered on the figure of Christ.

The purportedly natural teleology of Margaret's developing language sets Judd's theory of language apart from his Transcendental compatriots like Emerson and Thoreau; Judd, indeed, never embraced the designation he and his novel would acquire as "Transcendental." On the one hand, he shared with other Transcendentalists a "linguistic program" of "romantic primitivism" (Hathaway 231), a theory of language as the purveyor of moral truths rooted in natural phenomena. With Thoreau, he would have affirmed that "the roots of *letters* are *things*" (582),

for he harbored a strong bent for capturing dialect and discrete natural facts in an effort, as Hathaway puts it, to "return to the origins of language, where grubby words smack of the soil" (231). On the other hand, Judd retained the Christocentric theology that Emerson and Thoreau abandoned, and this commitment shaped his representation in *Margaret* of a millennial evolution of language toward Christian fulfillment. In *Theology in America*, E. Brooks Holifield notes that by the time he composed *Nature*, "Emerson no longer believed in the transcendent and personal God of Christian tradition" (443), and Dedmond observes that Judd "found the Transcendentalists hollow, principally because Christ was not accorded his rightful place in their view" (32). For Judd, words "came from God, in the nature of things" (Hathaway 272) but they also tended toward *Christ* and therefore toward a recognizably Christian theological climax.

Unitarianism for Judd represented the Christian end toward which both natural phenomena and human inclinations tended; it reclaimed Christ "from an unnatural and factitious place in the universe" (qtd. in Dedmond) and placed him at the center of a harmonized relationship between human nature and Christianity ("Young" 27). In its emphasis on reason, order, and logic, Unitarianism indeed contrasted sharply with Calvinism's insistence on the suprarational quality of special revelation (Holifield 456) and, as a result, offered to the minds of many liberal Christians a welcome means of assimilating a formerly incomprehensible God to his more or less comprehensible creation. But for the Unitarians and ex-Unitarians who espoused Transcendental sympathies, this very attachment to the regularity of empirical systems signified a debilitating overcorrection of irrationalism. As Lawrence Buell notes in *Literary Transcendentalism*, the Transcendental movement "served as an expression of radical discontent within American Unitarianism," stemming from that denomination's tenet "that God and his laws are apprehended by rational reflection on the natural creation and the revelations of Scripture,

rather than by direct intuition" (4). As Judd himself would admit, "It is said that Unitarianism is a religion for cultivating the mind alone" ("Young" 32).

But therein lies the peculiar role of Margaret as organic angel, who, by virtue of her infallible intuition, unites the Transcendental "vision of divine immanence" (Holifield 439) with the theological and aesthetic symmetry of Unitarianism. According to Douglas, influential antebellum author Sarah Hale "defined woman as the register of man's capacity for personal experience," and Bushnell asserted that females by nature administer the "grace" of the "gospel" (141). Within this sentimental schematic, the woman embodies spiritual and emotional interiority on behalf of the male, and as a counterpoint to male rational abstractions, figured in *Margaret* as the person of Mr. Evelyn. Buell suggests that "the mind of [...] Margaret must be refined by Mr. Evelyn before she can qualify as the completely satisfactory alternative to Calvinist dogma (341). I would argue, however, the inverse: the legitimacy of Mr. Evelyn's Unitarianism as satisfactory alternative to Calvinism depends on the sanction of Margaret's intuition.

Through the reciprocity of Mr. Evelyn's rational disquisitions and Margaret's spontaneous feelings, Judd intimates that, once afforded enlightened translations of Scripture and attendant updated doctrine, human nature irresistibly gravitates toward Christianity as self-evidently desirable. Presented with the reasonable gospel of Unitarianism, Margaret's resistance to the language of the Christian faith dissolves; she can now respond to the underlying unified substance of Christian truth formerly hidden by the false dichotomies of orthodoxy. When Mr. Evelyn in their early encounter queries, "You have heard of the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ?", Margaret replies, "Till I am sick of the name. It sounds mawkish in my ears [...] The name is associated with whatever is distasteful in the world" (1:310). But a disinclination that traditionally signaled an attitude of rebellion towards God here proves evidence of the capacity

of individual instinct to separate true substance from false forms. Immediately after associating the name "Jesus Christ" with "all that is distasteful in the world," Margaret recollects a latent original harmony between form and substance, a substance self-validating through its evocation of desire: "What, my own Beautiful One? Christ—yes—that is his name. I had almost forgotten it [...] Is he not beautiful?" (1:310).

When, in their subsequent rendezvous, Mr. Evelyn pours out a torrent of Unitarian inflections on Christian orthodoxy, Judd presents the uncompromised simplicity of Margaret's emotional reactions as the definitive proof that reason and sympathy exactly coincide in Unitarianism's rational redaction of Christianity. After an expository enumeration of Christ's sufferings, Mr. Evelyn prepares to dispassionately transition "to other points" in his gospel program, when Margaret cuts in with a passionate outburst: "O, Mr. Evelyn! [...] how can you go on so! How cold you are! I cannot hear any more" (2:11). She then collapses on the ground with "an audible profusion of tears" (2:11). Margaret's grief appears incongruent to the form taken by Mr. Evelyn's discourse, that of a compressed homily, a block of text unrelieved even by notation of the speaker's deportment, which he neatly sums up as "a brief notice" (2:11) of Christ's sufferings.

But this very seeming discordance highlights the importance Judd places on the rational dimension of Unitarianism—a rationality often charged with being excessive and dry. For Judd, pure reason comprises absolute harmony and therefore absolute beauty, the beauty of this otherwise tedious prose which Margaret finds so irresistible: "I only know," she ventures, smiling through her tears, "that I feel it all through me, my heart swells like a gourd, and I ache in a strange way. My memory and my sensations seem to be alike agitated" (2:11). Margaret's profoundly sensual formulation of emotion suggests the vitality inherent but hidden in Unitarian

theology. Because her intuitive tastes and distastes infallibly derive the true life-giving substance beneath partial forms, when Margaret encounters the correct forms of the gospel history, she can proclaim to Mr. Evelyn, "I *know* what you say is true, and when I hear it said, I shall *feel* it to be so" (2:4, author's emphasis). Judd saw Unitarianism as at once the true Gospel, "virginal, verdant, beautiful, and God-given" (Dedmond 45) and as still evolving toward its perfection ("Young" 28); by aligning its doctrines with the intuitive approbation of Margaret as a organic angel, he sought to instigate and dramatize this perfection, bringing this "virginal" discourse to its moment of fertility.

Thanks to the rational discourse of Unitarianism, Margaret's conversion to Christianity involves no essential transformation but rather the learning of a new Christian terminology to express her "natural" spiritual state. She then symbolically extends this peaceful translation from partial to consummate names over her patch of New England, formerly dubbed "Mons Bacchi." As she initially senses the shift in formal allegiance inherent in moving from a partial and private to a consummate and communal system of naming, Margaret seeks to assert the continuity between her natural and Christian worlds by shoring up her mirrored interior and geographical possessions against the possibility of loss: "But what becomes of my pretty Pantheon, Apollo and Bacchus, Diana and Egeria, before this all-deluging One?" (2:4), she asks, in response to Mr. Evelyn's exaltations of Christ. In return, he breaks down for her how all classical divinities serve as a kind of "embodied Allegory," a concrete illustration of an original relation to divine attributes (2:5). His explanation reassures her of the continuity between original substance and consummate forms; nothing recontextualized as Christian suffers loss of intrinsic value.

Margaret in response gravitates towards the fullest expression of nature, as found in Christ, stating, "the names must be changed. Bacchus Hill shall be Christ's Hill, Orpheus's Pond,

his Pond. He shall be supreme; Head, Pond, and all, shall henceforth be called Mons Christi" (2:33). By renaming her region according to a contemporary religious language, rather than an academic classical one, Margaret establishes a new public domain that transcends her private articulation of possessive desire, without occasioning the loss of her object. She will not depopulate the region of its original deities but rather enable those deities, and the village folk who cannot share them, all to access the one universal object of desire, Christ. In this way she lays the foundation for the impending utopian Christian community, the future inhabitants of its titular grounds, now Mons Christi.

Margaret's translation of local geography from pagan to Christian tacitly evokes the colonial imposition of European names onto Native American land, and in the opening of the chapter subsequent to Margaret's epic act of renaming, Judd goes on to establish the importance of Native American absence to his millennial vision of a New England utopia.

Unlike the "little gods and goddesses" whose safety Margaret could energetically affirm in the progress between natural and Christian innocence, the actual oppression, dispersal, and dwindling of tribes by 1845, the time of Margaret's first publication, presented Judd with an immanent and iconic disruption between nature and Christian civilization that resisted his effort to posit the seamless assimilation of history into utopia. By the 1820's, Indian removal policies had obtained the status of "'permanent' solution" to the problem of Native American land holdings in areas of colonial expansion, and the government carried out the second phase of removals across the decades of the 40's and 50's (Berkhofer 157; 165). As a consequence of Federal Indian Policy pushing Indians west of the Mississippi, by "the middle of the nineteenth century, most native people had indeed been made to disappear from the eastern landscape" (Deloria 63-64).

In practice, Judd strenuously objected to governmental action and popular attitudes toward America's original inhabitants. In a Fourth of July lecture titled "The Idea of our Country," he attacked America's behavior toward the Indians as its capital offense: "The most glaring defection [...] appears in our treatment of the Indians. I think we have dealt worse by the Indians than by the Africans. We exterminate the former; we domesticate the latter" (qtd. in Hall 310-311). While slave-trading derived from importation, a grafting on to America's landscape, the destruction of Native Americans pertained to the roots of that landscape, and therefore represented a greater obstacle to a core narrative of progressive national innocence. The annihilation of aboriginals and their culture represented a "defection" from "the idea of our country," its true substance of liberty which Judd hoped to bring to fulfillment in a Christian utopia during his lifetime. Judd accordingly inveighed against the contemporary justifications for the decline of the Native American population, saying, "Away with this doctrine of manifest destiny, which, on our lips and in this connection, means nothing more than consummate selfishness!" (qtd. in Hall 311). In spite of these bold pronouncements, his dramatization in *Margaret* of millennial fulfillment would mirror the imperialist vision of Manifest Destiny in its reproduction of the Native American disappearance as necessary and inevitable.

It seems probable that because Judd anticipated no popular adjustment in the interpretation of Manifest Destiny, he determined to secure his projection of utopia against this major historical contingency. Furthermore, Judd must have sensed the difficulty posed by bringing a live, that is, contemporary pagan discourse into submission to Unitarian Christianity—a discourse intimately bound up with the possession of land, of the right to name and claim, in this case, "Indian's Head." Margaret's renaming of Indian's Head as Mons Christi precedes her eventual ownership of it, even as the loss of the original Indian name for the

geographical feature succeeded the respective tribe's loss of the land, and the communal embedding signaled by the name.

Judd's version of Unitarianism, however, admits for little nostalgia, since it argues for Christianity as not merely following upon but fulfilling all human expressions of truth, beauty, and goodness. In *The White Man's Indian*, Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr. points out that because of their attachment to "the scale of progress" in the "passage of history," American "artists and authors could never espouse the thoroughgoing primitivism of their European counterparts" (91). In *Margaret*, as Gavin Jones observes, "history is not to be bemoaned, but recreated" (461)—the loss of the Native American presence, land, and systems of naming must be constructed as a partiality that will be made whole in the Christian utopia of Mons Christi.

But if Native Americans have lost their American territories, how can the Christian utopia erected on American grounds serve as a realization of their desires? Just as through the progressive aesthetics of Margaret's language Judd creates a continuity between natural and Christian innocence, so through a progressive aesthetics of racial bodies, he will bridge the gap between Native American primordial innocence and American Christian utopia. The literal translation of names from one system to another that characterizes Margaret's private conversion maps onto a transference of bodies and land into a transcendent aestheticized estate, figured as contained by and emerging from the body of the organic angel.

In order to prefigure Unitarianism's succession of Native American intimacy with the natural world, Margaret must entertain a sliding racialized identity. Pejoratively called "Indian" by the community for her intuitive association with the earth and resistance to orthodox Christian instruction, the orphaned Margaret will function in the novel as a racialized stand-in for the native populations. Unlike an integrated member of a Native American tribe, however, Margaret

enjoys a peculiar kind of cultural mobility—as an adopted orphan, as an outcast of the religious community, and as the recipient of an idiosyncratic education. This allows her to play the role of local "Indian" without actually posing cultural barriers to her Christian conversion. Her self-conflation with nature remains always half-playful, half-fantastical. Of the trees she says, "They are my home [...] I was born in them, have been sheltered under them, and educated by them, and do sometimes believe myself of them" (2:3). Likewise, her language-play and toy divinities, although they articulate a genuinely-treasured privacy, in themselves signify a cultural vacuum readily filled by the complete system of Unitarianism, rather than an alternative natural language.

By contrast, Judd was well aware that Native American cultures presented a viable alternative to Western civilization, as he remarked in "The Birthright Church" on colonial captives' resistance to cultural rescue: "In our own New England history, little children, taken captive by the Indians, assumed the costume, habits, language and religion of the Indians. Eunice Williams, daughter of the well-known Deerfield minister, taken into captivity, married an Indian; and on coming back to her native town, no persuasions could induce her to leave her savage associates, or even lay aside her moose blanket" (11). Unlike the historical Eunice Williams or any of her adopted Native American siblings, Margaret has no "moose blanket" to lay aside—no real alternate costume, habits, language or religion to subsume in the course of her transferred allegiance to Unitarianism. She offers a transparent natural innocence in place of the Native Americans' opaque primitive innocence, which the novel represents as lost both from and for the Indians following their fall into the white man's vices.

Judd has Mr. Evelyn present the ideal Native American "nature," embodied by the New England Indian, as hopelessly lost to history, in spite of the novel's being set shortly after the Revolutionary War. When Margaret inquires what Mr. Evelyn knows about "the original

population," he immediately turns to "accounts written when they and the whites first met as friends," and treats all their virtuousness as characteristic of the past: "They are universally represented [in these accounts] as kind-hearted, hospitable, grateful, truthful, simple, chaste [...] They possessed more virtues and fewer vices than Christians" (2:21). By contrast, following a barrage of persecutions on the part of Christian settlers, they were forced "to assume a new attitude as all men do in similar circumstances," and now "exhibit a melancholy instance of the reflex, reciprocal action of evil" (2:35). These fallen Indians exist parenthetically between America's edenic past and utopian future, interpolating innocence with history. As such, they can no longer serve as representative "Indians" in the same way that the local orthodox population can no longer serve as representative Christians. Berkhofer writes that within early and antebellum constructions of "Indianness," "If the Indian changed through the adoption of civilization as defined by Whites, then he was no longer truly Indian [...] Change toward what Whites were made him ipso facto less Indian" (29). In Deloria's words, Americans "desired Indianness, not Indians" (90).

The resilient if marginalized presence of Native Americans posed a conceptual and economic obstacle to the integration of primitive innocence into Christian utopia; their geographic displacement via removal, however, enabled Judd to bracket their existence and orchestrate an ahistorical reunion between the Noble Savage and Margaret as New World heiress. In order to neutralize the land-based antagonism between Native and white Americans, Judd splits a historical moment of conflicted white on Native American coexistence to displace the virtuous pagan into an irretrievable edenic past and the true Christian into the utopian future, disarming both parties of imminent interest in the appropriation of American soil. To bridge the chronological and spatial gap the novel interposes between the races, Margaret must reach

backward to link the primordial virtuous Indian with America's legitimate manifest destiny. Only through the figure of Margaret as a culturally detached embodiment of American innocence and true destiny, can Judd create a continuity between Native American and white land ownership and between pre-history and utopia, thereby rendering the latter terms not only necessary but desirable as the consummation of lost pagan virtues.

Judd thus privileges her alone with contact with the terminal members of a lost New England tribe, looming magnificently out of an extinct era: "I know one Indian," she ventures to Mr. Evelyn, "an old man, who comes here every year, and has come ever since I can remember [...] He looks very old, as if he had seen a hundred years. Yet he is tall and straight, has fine muscular proportions, and passes the house with a taught, Junonian step" (2:36). Mr. Evelyn concludes that "He is probably a relic of the departed race, and comes to look upon the home of his ancestors" (2:37). Alive only to Margaret, this "relic" presents no active threat as a competitor of language and land—rather he has travelled out of the past to reconcile America's future, just as Margaret, who plays with his little granddaughter, has traveled into the past. As relic, he will offer himself up as aesthetic object in the coming Unitarian kingdom of *Mons Christi*.

But to merit such a gift, Margaret must yield in Christian charity what America claimed by mercenary coercion—the right to the land: "'What a pity they should not be here still; and I—I would willingly be not,' observed Margaret, dropping her head upon her hand" (2:37). Margaret's dejection atones for America's remorselessness, just as her sacrificial gesture restores its innocence. Yet the gesture can only concretize emotion, rather than initiate action between two peoples historically and geographically separated. Her token of self-abnegation creates an aesthetic link that will fix the continuity of an American narrative of innocence without

compromising its right, its obligation, to name the terms of that narrative. In essence, Margaret must be willing to relinquish the land to a people who can no longer receive it, just as the representative Native American must be willing to offer the land he has already lost. This mutual endowment inverts the historical conflict and can only occur through the detachment of both parties from the land.

Margaret's sliding racial identity enables her to espouse the victimhood of the Native Americans, suffering at the same hands of false religion and receiving their gift disinterestedly; at the same time, however, she will quit their encounter as a victor, the repository of Indian land and memory. By embedding Margaret's body in a discourse of whiteness, and her identity in an aboriginal discourse, Judd enables her to attach the Native Americans' memories of collective suffering and white guilt onto her body with impunity. As an "Indian outsider," Margaret earns the right to "mourn like an Indian" (Deloria 89). She is justified in completing what Native Americans began because she shares their identity, yet her completion of them will entail the fulfillment of her own body, ultimately a communal white body.

In their final fatal encounter, Margaret stumbles into the "giant form" (2:149) of Chief Pakanawket and his granddaughter, who lead her up to the Head—Indian's Head/Mons Christi. The village authorities have just hanged her beloved brother Chilion over a conviction of manslaughter, and what was for Judd the whole ugly unnatural machinery of the Puritan church and state has reached a climax, ready to be purified by the spark from the chief's pipe which has set the town ablaze. The townspeople's revelries over Chilion's hanging mirror the "thanksgiving" offered "to their God" at the burning of Indian children (2:152), pointing to a common enemy in false religion. The disenfranchisement of the Native Americans cleared a space for the erection of Margaret's village, and the destruction of the old structures of the village

will clear the way for the utopia of Mons Christi—the chief thus serves a double role of removal, through his own prior and impending absence and the goading of the fire that decimates the town.

He has, in fact, appeared to stage his disappearance, like so many antebellum fictional Indians before him (Romero 35), signaling both his protest of American history and his sanction of American utopia. Deloria explains how in literary figurations of the vanishing Indian, the last of tribes "offered up their lands, their blessings, their traditions, and their [...] history to those who were, in real life, violent, conquering interlopers" (65). Judd creates a variation on this trope by installing Margaret as "child of nature" cum organic angel who parallels the "romantic savage" (Berkofer 78) and therefore stands in opposition to the same "conquering interlopers" who have destroyed the Native American birthright. After narrating the aggressive mistreatment of the Indians by Puritan settlers and enumerating his tribal losses, Pakanawket accordingly bequeaths his forfeited lands to Margaret and seals his people's transformation into the aesthetic realm: "Take this land, this hill, these woods, these waters—they are yours. Sometimes in your love, your happiness, your power, remember the poor Indian!" (2:153). Equipped with his granddaughter's "Heron's Wreath," and entrusted with the collective memory of Native American losses, Margaret will go forth as the white Indian maiden uniting Old and New World innocence.

The chief has materialized out of history to purify the terms of a transaction that has already occurred. As "safely dead and historically past" (Berkofer 90), he offers in peace what has already been taken in violence, and makes a controlled departure into a death once forcibly inflicted: "The chief, taking his granddaughter in his arms, deliberately advanced to the edge of the rock, balanced himself over the abyss, and leaped off into the dark waters, where, borne down by the weight of his girdle, he sank beyond recovery" (2:153). In his relinquishment of the

land, his life, and the life of his progeny—Margaret's would-be rival as child of nature—he retroactively manifests the autonomous authority necessary to rectify the coercive character of American expansion. Margaret receives his legacy in a spirit of resignation; this "tragic finale" calls for no especial grief or action in the moment because the exodus simply restages a fact from the past. Lora Romero identifies this feature of the vanishing Indian myth as its representation of "the disappearance of the native not just as natural but as having already happened" (35). Contained in the past, the "elegiac mode" (35) of this moment commutes historical conflict into an image centered on "a safe, consensual past" (Deloria 69), and ultimately into a relic that mediates the communal fulfillment of all American peoples.

In the novel's epistolary third segment, titled "Womanhood," Judd has Margaret elucidate the Native Americans' part in his reconstruction of a maturing innocent American interior, figured as Margaret's own womb-like interior, which absorbs the historical disruptions of violence and transmutes them into consecrate objects. Chief Pakanawket "sank beyond recovery" into the dark waters of history, but Margaret's interior constitutes an alternative watery grave, one that will see the particularities of history resurrected as translucent art, letting only the light of innocence shine through. Judd will explicitly conflate Margaret's struggle for coherent selfhood following the death of Chilion with America's struggle toward nationhood following the destruction of Native American culture: "Suffering," Margaret contends, "make[s] us conscious of ourselves," and "I seem to myself to be deep as our own bottomless Pond. The Indian and his child lie *there*; in me the last of many ages and races of hope and life seem to have perished. *Clamavi de profundis*" (2:203, author's emphasis). This "*clamavi de profundis*" or "profound depths" provide not simply space but rather a peculiar climate of coalescing intimacy and

distance, the conditions that will yield, not the resurrection of Native American bodies, but bones, objects destined for aestheticization in the Unitarian utopia (2:263-4).

Margaret's transparent interior comprises the crystallizing interval between pre-history and utopia. The sublime depths of her aesthetic womb bring all historical contingencies to a single luminous surface of divinely-ordained ownership, what she calls "the edge of this illimitable, whale-bearing, sky-cleaving Nature," which, "with hoe and axe, microscope and alembic, love and health, we take possession of [...] in the name of God and Christ, amen" (2:263). For in spite of the threat of depths as productive of psychological and cultural disruptions, a block in the "transition—from myself to myself" (2:201), Margaret's capacious innocence leaves no object unilluminated by divine light. As she reassures a friend, "the sun swims through me, and I hear Jesus walking on the troubled waters above" (2:203). Once Margaret, heir of her grandfather's fortune, together with her now-husband Mr. Evelyn, has taken official possession of the Head and its surrounding area, "Nature" finally finds its realization in aesthetic productions; and just as landscaping will consummate the land, so will enshrinement consummate its original inhabitants (2:263-4).

If, at a national level, Judd had to reckon with a conflict centered on racial and cultural dispossession, at the communal and psychological level he had to address the disruptive force of desire itself, in its possessive and exclusivist dimensions. Just as he dramatized through Margaret's conversion the consonance of natural desire and divine beauty, Judd wished to assert the fundamental compatibility of private desire and communal prosperity. To illustrate this paradox, he deploys communally accessible aesthetic commodities as the centerpiece of his fictional utopia. With the desirable person or object rendered sharable through aestheticization, beauty, as Judd represents it, fuels generosity rather than provoking possessiveness. Because it

purports to rely on a dynamic of access rather than possession, this process simultaneously intensifies and diffuses desire, creating a sustainable community centered on personal gratification.

Philip Gura notes that antebellum utopian novelists "portrayed ideal communities, often based on the socialist ideas of the early-nineteenth-century French utopian thinker Charles Fourier," who "was widely read at the time for his vision of a harmonious world devoid of social and economic competition, where gratification of one's passions was assured" ("Truth's" xvi; xvii). Judd would not go so far as to promote the literal "communism of property and persons" through, for instance, complex marriage (Mandelker 18). Rather, he tried to present an alternate form of consumption that maintained privatized material ownership and sexual commitment while democratizing aesthetic and erotic enjoyment. As Gavin Jones observes, *Margaret* "confines radical ideas of free love [...] entirely within orthodox structures" (457). Fourier had advocated that "all aspects of life" be "organized by the 'passions'—the instinctual, nonrational parts of the self that demand gratification" (Gura, "Truth's" 97), and Judd, in effect, abstracted Fourier's belief in "the law of 'attraction'" as "the underlying principle of the cosmos" in order to spiritualize its application.

Judd sets up this paradigm of nonpossessive desire in a side story devoted to contextualizing Margaret's auspicious birth as herald of a new social order in which natural desire and divine beneficence mutually flower as artistic creation. The child of nature turns out to "have her birthplace in song" (1:115), reflecting Judd's Transcendentalist-tending faith in genuine art as an organic outgrowth of nature (Buell 147) and therefore an immanent interaction with divine life. Because artistic products can disseminate pleasure outside of ownership, woman-as-art serves as the ideal remedy for the problem of marital exclusivity and, by

extension, material property. Margaret's conception, therefore, occurs in the context of an amative triangle mediated by aesthetic pleasure.

Though raised by an impious peasant family, Margaret, was born the daughter of the naturalized Hessian Gottfried Brückmann and his American wife Jane Girardeau. Margaret's name derives from her father's deceased great love, his erstwhile German pupil Margaret Bruneau who perished an ocean away at the conclusion of the Revolutionary War. At the news of Margaret Bruneau's death, Gottfried immediately devotes himself to an aestheticization of her absence that reconstructs her presence through the art of flute-playing: "Margaret would reappear in the tones of their love and their youth; her spirit would echo to the voice of his flute; in song, like night, they would meet again; by an invisible pathway of melody they would glide on to the grave" (1:102). Gottfried's exclusive love-object while embodied, Margaret can now, as melody, entertain additional lovers. Lured by the enchanting music of the flute, a neighboring young woman Jane Girardeau appears on the scene and takes pity on the lonely and destitute Gottfried. The real object of captivation afforded by Gottfried's back story, however, turns out to be Margaret Bruneau, or, more precisely, Gottfried's erotic gaze directed at Margaret as an object who can be infinitely accessed but not possessed.

Instead of seeking to possess Gottfried for herself, by replacing Margaret in his affections, Jane will seek aesthetic access to his more perfect union with Margaret, more perfect through its freedom from the partial possession inherent in the limitations of particular bodies. After successfully securing a subsequent visit with Gottfried and insisting on a repetition of his life's story, an idea "seized her, and for that she was willing to sacrifice every thing" (1:106). The narrator's description of this idea as one that "had neither shape, nor color, nor definition,

nor end" (1:106), anticipates Gottfried's declaration that Margaret "was a transparent, articulate revelation of God" (1:107).

Jane's falling in love with Gottfried entails a reenactment of his falling in love with Margaret, through whom Jane in turn conceives of herself as aesthetic object of desire. A complex intersubjective aestheticization ensues, creating an erotic triangle of perpetually circulating desire:

[Gottfried] seemed for his devotion to Margaret Bruneau, purer, greater, diviner. He and Margaret constituted to [Jane's] mind a delightful company. She entered a magic circle when she came into their communion. She became one of a glorious trio. Then she saw herself interpreted and symbolized in Margaret; and acted as a conjuration to bring that delightful vision from the shades. (1:109)

The playful terms of "magic" and "conjuration" signal the manipulation of aesthetic objects that allows for erotic desire to pleurably diffuse without ever arriving at a terminus. Jane and Gottfried's courtship and eventual marriage revolves around the dissolution of desire's boundaries, as Jane at once seeks to be desired by Gottfried and Margaret, to be desired by Gottfried as Margaret, to desire Gottfried because he desires Margaret:

I ask for entrance, for a home, in that which you are, for fellowship with you and all your life. Tell me more of Margaret; I will grow up into her image; I will transmute myself to her nature. You shall have a double Margaret; no, not double, but one. Nay, if needs be, I will go out of myself; I will be the servant of you both. Call me your child, your and Margaret's child, your spirit-child, and so love me. (1:112)

Jane attempts every conceivable relation to Gottfried and Margaret in order to demonstrate the totality of her desire. Absolute, transparent, seamless, and endless, Jane's passion expresses dispossession—going "out of" oneself—as the unqualified plunge into desire, rather than a resignation of it. A desire without boundaries knows no confining edges of objects, only a diffusion through the objective gaze toward an infinite end.

The anomalous, even bizarre dynamic of Jane and Gottfried's romance provides a crucial contextualization for Margaret Hart/Brückmann's birth, destining her as the ambassador of a religion that promotes an erotic continuum hosted within the neutral sphere of art. Through art, Judd seeks to dissolve the boundaries between private and public, personal and impersonal, spiritual and material, and desire and beauty, so that desire can seamlessly transfer from one object to another without a sense of loss incurred by limitation. Jane rejoices that "little Margaret is to have her birthplace in song!" and, were she to die along with her parents, would be additionally succored by "our other Margaret" and blessed by Jesus (1:115). Born "in song," Margaret will thus lay the foundation for a religion that nurtures, intensifies, and diffuses erotic desire by circulating it endlessly through artistic representation. The erotic triangulation that characterizes Margaret's parentage acts as a synecdoche for the controlled satisfaction of all human desire which will typify the utopian community of Mons Christi.

Mons Christi, which takes shape in the last third of the two-volume novel, reflects Judd's effort to institutionalize an organic progression from natural phenomena into aesthetic productions infused with divine life. Rabinowitz comments that an "attempt to visualize, construct, and maintain a physical environment designed for holiness concretely expressed the liturgical spirit among evangelicals in the 1840s and 1850s" (203). Unitarians and, by mid-century, liberal Congregationalists, had begun "aggressively to patronize the arts" (Buell, *New*

England 49) which they "tended [...] to view as a means of evangelism rather than as a threat to religion (*Literary* 26). Artistically-inclined Transcendentalists pushed the significance of art even further, "intensifying the Unitarian commitment to artistic expression by envisaging the creative process [...] as originating in the experience of divine inspiration" (*New England* 47). "Beauty and truth came to seem inextricably intertwined" (*Literary* 26), and invoking religious conversions by constructing aesthetically pleasing environments followed as a logical corollary. Augusta Jane Evans, in her 1859 novel *Beulah*, would declare, "it may be safely proclaimed that genuine aesthetics is a mighty channel, through which the love and adoration of Almighty God enters the human soul" (202).

While Judd certainly envisioned *Mons Christi* as a formal instigation of "genuine aesthetics," contemporary critics have found his concretization of the continuity between nature and the supernatural awkward, to say the least. Hathaway asserts that when, "at the end of *Margaret*, Judd tried to create a *deus ex machina*, the novel fell apart [...]. The transformation is mechanical, not an organic growth from what has gone before, and the result is a bit ludicrous" (239). This very breakdown in *Margaret's* illusion of organicism highlights the dissonance between Transcendental aesthetics and narrative, illustrating "why Judd wrote novels and transcendentalists generally did not" (281). Hathaway points out that, unlike Emerson for instance, Judd refused to "put off the weeds of time and place and personal relation" in his quest for infinitude (281-2); his brittle crystallization of particularities around absolutes thus only serves to suggest the contradictions inherent in the liberal Christian impulse itself.

As Philip Judd Brockway would remark, Judd "stands as an interpreter of his generation, filling in colors and details of the good life sketched by Emerson and the Transcendentalists" (108). If the estate of that good life, in Douglas' characterization of *Margaret*, "is laid out

exactly like the new cemeteries, with floral names, marble statuary, etc" (373), it is because Judd rejected an individualistic vision of divine immanence in art. Cemetery environments seek to inculcate intensely private experience within a democratically accessible, public space, and Mons Christi models Judd's conceptual balancing of individual and communal enjoyment of divine beauty.

This communal tendency in Judd's vision revolves around Margaret, the female messiah who, in Jones' words, "possess[es] the ability to reduce the ideal to the actual by embodying her natural beauty and virtue in surrounding things" (460). Margaret makes possible the democratic intersection of the real and the ideal that remains illusive, even undesirable, for thinkers like Emerson, who valorized the heroics of self-contained salvation. Like Bushnell, Judd's philosophy stands "opposed to the *individualism* of the then prevalent theology, and recognizes and emphasizes the *organic* life [...] wherein no soul lives or acts alone as a unit, but all as parts of a living organism" (Cheney 178). His choice of a heroine over a hero significantly counterpoints Transcendental masculine heroics; Emerson, for instance, as Camille Paglia points out, "rarely mentions women, from whom Romanticism normally draws its power" (601). Judd, by contrast, called women "the bonds of society" (qtd. in Hall 148), and stated that *Margaret* as novel "shows what [...] a woman can do" (qtd. in Hall 375). The novel, he further explained "would give body and soul to the divine elements of the Gospel" (qtd. in Dedmond 63), and Margaret, like the sacrament of Christian communion, instantiates the infinite multiplication of a divine particular. The sacramental aesthetic of her body makes of the "many" "one," and thus doubles as the distinctively American figuration of community, *e pluribus unum*. Nature, divinity, and aesthetics converge in Margaret as the uncorrupted and incorruptible consumable object at the center of a new "transcendental republic" (Jones 459).

In section III, "Womanhood," Judd turns to an epistolary saga as the most effective form for both setting out and illustrating this aesthetic solution to the problem of conflicted interests, centered on the messianic role of Margaret. The letter's generic expectation of self-disclosure provides the basis for a forthright transparency unavailable through dramatic action, enabling Judd to rapidly round out his vision of the relationship between forms and substance, beauty and desire. As epistolary collection rather than an exchange, "Womanhood" completes the dissolution of the problem of alterity by deploying each voice as unidirectional; that is, each letter addresses a minor character without an included response. The sweeping complementarity of these voices compels the reader to assent to the accounts and forego critical analysis. Thus even the most potentially troubling aspects of the new utopia subside into the guileless enthusiasm and rhetorical questions which present them, an enthusiasm purportedly no longer attributable to the narrator but expressive of the firsthand experience of the only ones with the right to judge. The epistolary collection thus encapsulates Judd's version of Christian democracy—an aesthetic community that allows all to access the same thing and bear the same witness about it.

The estates of Mons Christi, redeemed through a tremendous influx of wealth from Margaret's maternal grandfather Mr. Girardeau, represent democracy without conflict, capitalism without self-interest, and religion without factions—the imaging of a repaired microcosm of the United States. Margaret's inheritance, which enables her and her now-husband Mr. Evelyn to purchase the district including and surrounding the Head, consolidates her and the villagers' interests. The Evelyns' possession of the grounds remedies the economic and spiritual dispossession of the villagers, many of whose estates were mortgaged to the despotic Mr. Smith,

and who were correspondingly enslaved to sinful habits of "indolence and dissipation" (2:224), visually manifest as distasteful living conditions.

While hard cash literally redeems the estates, aesthetic harmony provides the irresistible locus of spiritual transformation, mediating exterior and interior order and collapsing the distinction between them: "Mr. Evelyn had their houses repaired and painted, sent men to help clear out their intervals, planted a row of trees along the street, and had a beautiful statue of Diligence set up at the corner" (2:224). For Judd, people recognize and irresistibly respond to an exterior world in keeping with their interior orientation toward beauty, and art serves, not as mere representation, but as an actual site of a centering equilibrium between interior and exterior states. Freed from the impinging confusions of aesthetic disharmony, the villagers align themselves with their new environment; as Margaret subsequently reports, "Houses, rooms, yards, fences, streets, as well as persons, in all parts of the town, look wonderfully clean, neat, tidy" (2:246).

The pseudo-virtuous qualities of cleanliness, neatness, and tidiness reveal Judd's vision of the fullest intersection of the human and divine at the point of aesthetics rather than simply of "nature," as the organic physical world. The accumulation of dirt, physical deterioration, and random and profuse growth which characterized portions of the village prior to its renovation paradoxically represent a falling away from nature, so that aesthetic reform must in effect rescue nature itself from its own unnatural conditions. This Unitarian utopia or Christian state of nature thus involves the introduction and proliferation of artifice as corrective to undisciplined nature.

Because for Judd the intersection of the natural and divine occurs at the point of aesthetic forms, he turns to the importation of artistic riches of the Old World to construct the New, even as he contends that the New World completes the Old. In this way he participates in what John

Gatta has called a "myth of total renewal,' whereby Europe can be colonized, remade and reinvented according to the messianic destiny laid down for the United States" (84). The importation of European statues, architecture, and even forms of recreation demonstrates the New World's boundless access to all the aesthetic products of history, freed from the contingences of history, as Mons Christi's pastiche of aesthetic objects and practices reveals: "Mr. Evelyn brought from Europe a valuable library, fine maps and engravings, and a few choice pieces of architecture [...] We have busts of the old philosophers, a copy of the Venus de Medici, Apollo Belvidere, Antinous, Belisarius, a Psyche and Butterfly, a Prometheus and others, and some excellent paintings" (119). In defense of the importation, Margaret first cites the domestic unavailability of some products, then challenges, "Besides, what matters it? I am made up of all nations, German, French, English, American" (2:221). The rather abbreviated list of "all nations" here, drawn from Margaret's ethnic origins, stresses the utopia's solution to the still disconcerting origins of the United States as a rebel colony—everything found elsewhere can be found in Mons Christi also, and more perfectly realized: "No European village that I have heard of," Margaret attests, "no American village that I have seen, is so beautiful" (2:297). By exceeding the beauty of both European and traditional American villages, Mons Christi and its surrounding estates collapse the loss implicit in the separation of the United States from its mother countries, even as it suggests the auspiciousness of Anglo-Saxon roots as the basis for New England's privilege of pioneering utopia.

The aesthetic forms distilled out of the chaos of Old World and classical history, freely recontextualized at Mons Christi, create a transcendent atmosphere of transformative beauty that passively converts its witnesses, so that the acquisition of foreign art dovetails with domestic charity. Initially Margaret's explanation of her estate's structural and ornamental opulence

sounds like raw self-interest: "When Mr. Evelyn was in Europe," she recounts, "he visited the Cemeteries of Naples, Pisa, and Pere la Chaise at Paris, and here he would reproduce the effect. We cannot imitate all architectural and princely forms, but we can do that which pleases ourselves" (2:237). Margaret's emphasis, however, on the reproduction of effect helps situate her ensuing remark that "Several of the citizens have already put up tasteful monuments" (2:237). She can openly seek to please herself, insofar as her pleasure comprises a contagious aesthetic delight; the purchase and production of aesthetic objects proves self-justifying, as private ownership invites democratic participation.

Because a shared beholding rather than proprietary rights constitutes real access to the Mons Christi heirdom, Margaret can unabashedly boast about the extent and expense of her and Mr. Evelyn's investments. Of her husband's liberal expenditures she reports, "Our house is finished [...] The expense within and without, Mr. Evelyn says, has not been less than one hundred thousand dollars" (2:261). She further celebrates aesthetic dominance over the land by establishing a correlation between vista and conquest: "Our house [...] will command a more extensive Western view than we now enjoy, taking in the whole of the Pond, the Brandon Hills, and Umkiddin. Through avenues that we shall cut in the Maples will be seen the Village, the River, the Meadows, the champagne country, and mountains beyond" (2:215). Possession of Mons Christi comprises a kind of absolute conquest grounded in innocence through the democratic accessibility of visual objects. Whatever can be seen proves subject to possession, yet all can possess what they see.

As a result, the more material harmony created through cultivation, importation, and construction, the more justifiable, even charitable, the project. Bushnell entertained the same level of boldness with respect to aligning Christianity and affluence: of the church, he wrote,

"The wealth of the world runs towards her [...] till she has both enriched and regenerated the world" (*Views* 163). Margaret associates the construction of her palatial grounds at Mons Christi with Christian obligation, saying, in reference to her experiment in renovation at No. 4, "I know not that I was ever conscious of any mission to this people; but after our house was done, I could not be satisfied till something else was doing" (2:279). The "effect" on the villagers, she relays, "was almost instantaneous and quite magnificent; that the Scripture might be fulfilled where it is written, 'Though they have lain among pots, they shall become as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold'" (2:279).

Aware of the problematic slippage between "silver" and "gold" as aesthetic object and currency, Judd has Margaret defend their expenditures by exploiting the slippage itself:

Some would fain make themselves believe that we have opened a battery of systemic bribery, that we have got into the human heart [...] by our gold. You would be surprised to know how little we have bestowed in a mere eleemosynary manner. We gave nothing to the No. 4's, except what took an ornamental form. (2:279)

Currency, crystallized as ornament, can advertise rather belie its basis—the more extravagant the investment, the more beautiful the object, and the more communal satisfaction occasioned. In *American Romanticism and the Marketplace*, Michael Gilmore observes that, for Emerson, "the taint of commodity is transcended by spiritualizing matter and exchanging it for meaning instead of money" (29). Judd points to this purification process when he has Margaret assert, "Our money indeed has gone freely, but more in ways aesthetic and religious than otherwise" (2:280). Meaning, not money, has converted the inhabitants of the village. Aesthetic consumption thus

provides the wedge between capitalism and venal self-interest that weds private and public possession, disinheriting none while enfranchising all.

At the heart of this program of proliferating artifice stands Margaret, the organic angel. In a letter from Mr. Evelyn to Margaret's friend Anna, the former insists that "it is she herself, and not we, who is, under God, and in Christ, the soul of all that which we now behold" (2:264). And as Margaret herself acclaims, it is her dreams which "have gone out in realities" (2:229), with the erection of a benign, floral cross on the Head, now Mons Christi. Margaret serves as Judd's representation of uncorrupted nature flowering into transformative art, the reconciliation of two fundamentally compatible natures—human and divine.

II. NATURAL ELECTION IN MARIA CUMMINS' *THE LAMPLIGHTER*

In Chapter 1 I outlined Sylvester Judd's utopian vision of the aestheticized female body as the matrix of universal regeneration; this chapter explores a scaled-down version of that ideal as it appears in the antebellum genre of the female-authored female bildungsroman, variously described as domestic, women's, or sentimental fiction. The traditional female bildungsroman, like Judd's male-authored anomaly *Margaret*, takes as its fundamental premise the unique converting power of the mature American Christian woman and attempts a concrete representation of the process of her development into sainthood. As Lucinda L. Damon-Bach observes, "the process of growing up for nineteenth-century women was synonymous with becoming a Christian" (33), and novels of female maturation consequently double as a distinct genre of the conversion narrative. In Judd's utopian novel, the heroine's absolute innocence remains unqualified from birth to adulthood; the supernatural so fully interpolates Margaret's nature from the outset that it threatens to dissolve the narrative tension of conversion. By contrast, female-authored sentimental novels maintain a greater tension between nature and divinity: the "natural" female child must still in some sense shed sinful inclinations in order to fulfill her predisposition toward divinity.

Although it qualified the innocence of pre-conversion nature, the female bildungsroman allied itself with a processual rather than instantaneous model of conversion, the latter associated with contemporary revivals and, historically, with a specific moment of divine intervention that displaced the naturally depraved heart with a supernaturally redeemed one. The processual

model of conversion emerged as a rationalist redaction of orthodoxy; critics of the orthodox model of salvation by divine election saw conversion as a disconcertingly arbitrary supernatural event.²⁸ In an increasingly rationalist society, instantaneous conversion—the idea that one might be randomly selected for a complete and immediate change of nature—came to look both somewhat implausible and unacceptably elitist. Sentimental novelists thus perpetuated a democratized concept of salvation as universally accessible; regardless of circumstances, "rather than awaiting religious conversion" as divine intervention, a person "could achieve moral perfection through self-sacrifice and the power of the individual will" (Gura, "Truth's" xv).

But while the female developmental novel as a genre already reflected a major theological revision through this depiction of salvation as gradual and self-directed, discrete novels from the period differ widely in their representation of the conversion process as continuous or discontinuous with a preexisting state of the heart. As Erica Bauermeister and Philip Gura have argued, the two most popular representative female bildungsromane of the period, respectively Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1850) and Maria Cummins' *The Lamplighter* (1854), offer markedly divergent dramas of conversion, with Warner's novel emphasizing the depravity of unredeemed instincts and Cummins' suggesting an innate predilection for sanctity.²⁹ While both novels present rigorous voluntary discipline as the catalyst for spiritual development, *The Wide, Wide World's* heroine Ellen must relentlessly mortify "her natural impulses and desires" (23) to achieve sanctity, whereas Gertrude's natural impulses and desires eventually realize a perfect overlap with divine imperatives. A combination of primitive

²⁸ Marianne Noble argues for understanding the "sentimental literary tradition" as to a certain extent "an outgrowth of—rather than a reaction against—the Enlightenment," p. 64.

²⁹ See Bauermeister's article, "*The Lamplighter, The Wide, Wide World, and Hope Leslie,*" and *Truth's Ragged Edge*, pp. 117-118.

energy and inborn taste fits Gertrude for a spiritual transformation that selectively cultivates rather than crushes natural desire (Fisher 66). Gertrude's blend of democratic discipline and special predisposition reflects Cummins' attempt to conceptually reconcile the processual model of conversion as universally accessible and an older orthodox model of conversion as contingent on special election.

This effort to harmonize orthodox and liberal Christian constructions of human nature has significant structural implications; *The Lamplighter* comprises a long, unwieldy narrative whose second half unexpectedly shifts to read much "like a novel of manners" (Singley 117), a dramatic generic departure that begs for formal analysis. Bauermeister rightly contends that the "groundwork" laid in the first half of the novel works "against the theory that *The Lamplighter* is a fiction which, due to financial pressure to make the book longer or a lack of artistry on the part of its author"—a theory which resonates with the reputation, for instance, of Melville's experimental *Pierre*—"suddenly and incongruously takes a detour" (26). Rather, as Bauermeister suggests, Cummins' "compromise between conflicting cultural values" demands generic deformation. *The Lamplighter* thus serves as an ideal candidate for analysis in terms of the intersection of religion and literary form by virtue of its uneven but radical attempt to map divergent structures of conversion onto mid-century middle-class material culture.

The Lamplighter has become a minor staple in critical discussions of mid-century American women's fiction, usually in conjunction with or, more recently, as a foil to analyses of Warner's preceding and more conservative bestseller *The Wide, Wide World*. Belonging to the class of women's sentimental fiction, *The Lamplighter* has, however, seldom received the kind of formal treatment Susan Harris encourages in *19th-Century Women's Novels* (1990), the "paying attention to the way women writers manipulate language, not only words but also sentences,

paragraphs, and full narratives" (22). Harris dares to label these kinds of novels "exploratory" by virtue of "their loose narrative constructions and disjunctive codes" which "give readers far more freedom to constitute their own hermeneutic, to perceive different configurations, than they would be permitted to perceive in more tightly structured didactic texts" (33). Formalist attention to sentimental fiction as "exploratory" helps to elude the trap Lydia Fisher identifies as that of consigning this literature to "one of two camps—as forces of either containment or cultural critique" (50). Fisher warns against "reducing rich literature to accommodate our limited, often binary understanding of the past" and urges critics to concentrate instead "on the competing desires that shape individual domestic texts" (51). While critics since the publication of Jane Tompkins' watershed defense of sentimental literature in *Sensational Designs* (1986) have taken antebellum women's novels seriously as cultural agents, these works remain understudied as formally innovative companions to male-authored "American Renaissance" texts.

By emphasizing sentimental theme as coextensive with simple formal imitation, the first generation of American literary critics isolated out women's novels from a canon devoted to formal complexity and conceptual richness. However, in so doing they neglected both the shared sentimental thematic of traditional American Renaissance texts and the formal complexity of women's "exploratory" fiction. Experimental novels by both male and female antebellum authors reflect a shared thematic and formal preoccupation with the crisis initiated in the conversion plot by a culture-wide shift in the perception of human nature. While antebellum women's novels avoid the "ontological extremes" (Harris 21) characteristic of the works by canonical male authors, they are invested in exploring the same problem of how to accommodate the doctrine of natural innocence associated with liberal Protestantism to a plot structure predicated on original depravity and divine intervention. Tompkins took the first step in reuniting the thematic interests

of women's fiction with specific stylistic devices, but much work remains in terms of examining, not merely the diverse cultural ideologies expressed in these texts, but their peculiar mechanisms of expression—of examining not merely what they convey but how they convey it.

In the case of *The Lamplighter*, Cummins creates a hybrid model of conversion through two strategic compromises. First, she universalizes Gertrude's situation by making her an impoverished orphan and so an every-child whose resistance to conversion through spiritual instruction, she implies, could not be exceeded by any child anywhere. The little Gerty thus seems to present a test case for developmental conversion because she begins at spiritual ground zero, knowing nothing at all of God and breaking out in acts of aggression toward her cruel guardian. At the same time, however, Cummins creates a covert but powerfully operative blend of specific origins for the orphan, by, on the one hand, deploying the trope of the noble savage to associate Gertrude with Native American "noble" if not innocent passions, and, on the other hand, revealing in the novel's final pages Gertrude's true aristocratic bloodline. As a consequence, while the child Gerty resembles in ugliness of feature and deportment a depraved child beyond the reach of grace, in fact these "features" of both body and character prove signs of her special undeveloped capacity to receive and disseminate grace. As her second strategic compromise, Cummins further blurs the distinction between a natural and redeemed life by portraying Gertrude's sexual maturation as itself a sign of her increasing sanctification; the narrator and diverse characters generate contradictory, overlapping, and ambiguous descriptions of Gertrude's physical appearance and its relationship to her moral character. This very ineffability allows Gertrude to function as a liminal figure who captivates and converts spectators. By positing the attractive female body as the conciliatory site that initiates salvation,

Cummins thus conflates sexuality with spiritual power, closing the gap between natural and divine life.

Because the burden for carrying out the work of conversion lies with the organic angel and her harmonizing of sexual and spiritual interests, *The Lamplighter* paradoxically invests its noncoercive model of conversion with an imperializing tendency. Women in the novel encounter the divine directly through submission to spiritual discipline as the point of contact between desire and duty; by contrast, men in the novel encounter the divine indirectly through their attraction and attachment to saintly women. As a result, the male-dominated, market-driven world acquires a tacit dispensation for the expansion of empire as a caveat to the domestic evangelical imperative of aligning conflicting interests through benevolent action. Choosing the converted woman signifies conversion for the male character, which, in turn, ensures that any imperial spoils from abroad translate at home into gracious living and good works. The Christian woman can afford to be absolutely transparent because she has no hidden, private interests as distinct from public, charitable ones, and her transparency extends by proxy to her male counterpart. In this way, female transparency, as the sign of pure alignment between self-interest and self-sacrifice that results from conversion, blocks the view to selfish mercantile interests and affords the means of enfolding material gain back into the bosom of charity.

The influx of new scientific and philosophical theories in the first half of 19th century America put the concept of human nature as fundamentally depraved under profound pressure, and by midcentury "the Calvinist idea of natural depravity was losing ground to the romantic idea of natural innocence" (Baym 15). Marianne Noble observes that "Calvinist determinism" had "tended to see human nature as inherently sinful, the body and the feelings as sites of corruption and confusion, and passion as 'the devil in the inside of man'" (62). Sentimental

ontology emerged as a reaction to "such pessimistic attitudes toward human nature, maintaining instead that human being are naturally inclined to virtuous actions because of the pleasurable feelings such actions generate" (Noble 62). The figure of the child and, in particular the orphaned child, provided the ideal test case for ascertaining the unaffected moral constitution of human nature and, as Nina Baym remarks, during this period in fiction "the image of the divine child was put to special use" by liberal-leaning novelists (15).

In *The Lamplighter*, Cummins walks the line between conservative and progressive concepts of human nature by proposing that both good and evil intentions may constitute legitimately "natural" or spontaneous and intuitive responses to human experience and, more radically, posits that the passions themselves might prove indicators of exceptional future spirituality—in contrast, for instance to *The Wide, Wide World* where "the passions *are* the problem, both physically and spiritually" (100). Rejecting both the "fallen child" and "the divine child of nature" (Singley 104) as the prototypical candidate for conversion, Cummins develops the figure of the "wild child" (Fisher 71) whose passionate intensity forecasts a vigorous spirituality.

The trope of the noble savage provides Cummins with a preexisting literary tradition that offers a third option for construing the passions as at once unchristian and non-culpable, what Lydia Fisher calls "savage innocence" (63). In the opening chapter of *The Lamplighter*, the reader finds the orphaned urchin Gerty victim, not only of her vicious guardian Nan Grant's verbal and physical abuse, but of her own inflamed temper in reaction to that abuse. Cummins characterizes Gerty's personality and behavior in terms of natural savagery: "spirited, sudden, and violent," she "made herself feared, as well as disliked" among the gangs of street children (5). Prior to her first touchstone of sympathy in the form of a kitten, Gerty's "fierce, untamed,

impetuous nature [...] only expressed itself in angry passion, sullen obstinacy, and hatred" (7). But the narrator insists that the "fire" of Gerty's nature is "a fire that Nan Grant had kindled" (49), much as antebellum writers like Washington Irving would insist that Native American violence was an inevitable reaction to white oppression. By no means the mark of a divine child, the rage of "the wild little creature" (47) nevertheless bespeaks an absence of Christian instruction and charity rather than a fundamental depravity. Indeed, the narrator laments Gerty's condition in terms reminiscent of religious reflections on the unenlightened heathen, saying, "Poor little, untaught, benighted soul! Who shall enlighten thee? Thou art God's child, little one [...] Will he not send man or angel to light up the darkness within, to kindle a light that shall never go out, the light that shall shine through all eternity!" (4). Gerty's lack of the instruction and affection associated with a religious nuclear family and the cruelty she suffers at Nan Grant's hands push her beyond the boundaries of Christian society and put her in need of the kind of missionary action directed toward Native Americans. She does not merit condemnation because unconverted but simply the illumination of Christian teaching and example.

Gerty's potential for exceptional moral character lies inscribed in the very outbursts of passion that mark her as a racialized outcast in the Christian community; the measure of her aggression coextends with the measure of her untapped affection. When the kindly Trueman Flint, accidentally responsible for delaying one of her errands and thereby provoking the wrath of Nan Grant, attempts to compensate Gerty by giving her a kitten, Cummins reveals the masked nobility of Gerty's natural inclinations. The narrator reports that Gerty "had often felt a sympathy" for the many stray cats in the area but had never considered harboring them for practical reasons (7). She accordingly plans to release the kitten that Trueman has placed in her arms, "But, while she was hesitating, the animal pleaded for itself in a way she could not resist"

(7). It creeps up to her neck, clings there, cries piteously, and initiates Gerty's first loving sacrifice: "its eloquence prevailed over all fear of Nan Grant's anger [...] She hugged pussy to her bosom, and made a childish resolve to love it [...] and feed it" (7). Cummins insists on the coexistence of and indeed correspondence between Gerty's "angry passion" and her soul's "fountains of warm affection, yet unstirred, a depth of tenderness never yet called out, and a warmth and devotion of nature that wanted only an object to expend themselves upon" (7-8). Gerty's finding the kitten's appeal to her compassion irresistible precedes any "ideas of abstract right and wrong" (8) and signals an inborn predilection for benevolent self-sacrifice, a sacrifice motivated by the pleasures of fierce loving attachment. Her most savage act of aggression, violently striking Nan in the head with a stick of wood, occurs after Nan discovers the kitten and throws it into a pot of boiling water, and accordingly reflects the depth of her spontaneous pity for "the only thing she loved in the world" (11).

Cummins systematically asserts the naturalness of young Gerty's "spirited" character in tandem with her physical appearance; both initially uninviting, they nevertheless conversely register the promise of a superior attractiveness. We learn that Gerty is "told, a dozen times a day, that she was the worst-looking child in the world; and, what was more, the worst-behaved"; and Nan Grant, after Gerty fails to complete an errand, administers "one blow for her ugliness and another for her impudence" (2). This apparent organic connection between body and behavior sets up an inverted continuity between the pre-converted child and post-converted adult: the adult Gertrude's moral and physical magnetism will grow precisely out of little Gertie's grotesqueness. The narrator takes care in first introducing Gerty to imbue her unsightly physical profile with a subtle air of intrigue and promise:

She was scantily clad, in garments of the poorest description; her hair was long and very thick; uncombed and unbecoming, if anything could be said to be unbecoming to a set of features which, to a casual observer, had not a single attraction,—being thin and sharp, while her complexion was sallow, and her whole appearance unhealthy. She had, to be sure, fine, dark eyes, but so unnaturally large did they seem, in contrast to her thin, puny face, that they only increased the peculiarity of it, without enhancing its beauty (1-2).

The "uncombed" condition of Gerty's hair does not negate its length and thickness, just as the jaundice and thinness of her face cannot negate the large, fine, dark eyes. Thus even as she insists on the repulsiveness of Gerty's appearance, the narrator carefully delineates a potential lushness to select features, an exoticism increased by its very foreignness or "peculiarity." The "fine, dark eyes" might have been too small in the peaked face and sealed Gerty's moral and physical fate as outcast, but they prove rather too large, "unnaturally" large, a foreshadowing of a supernatural beauty that requires development. By the time she reaches maturity, Gertrude's eyes will "have retained their old lustre" and "do now look too large for her face" (129).

Cummins relies on signs of racial difference to initially associate Gerty with moral inferiority imputed to nonwhites, but this association functions to project a superior physical vitality that express an amplified moral aptitude. As a neglected child, Gerty's appearance and behavior lend themselves to xenophobic demonization; a neighboring boy, having "caught the tone of the whole neighborhood" views her "as a sort of imp, or a spirit of evil" (2), and even Gerty's future and first loving guardian Trueman Flint, when he initially encounters the waif, exclaims, "What an odd-faced child!—looks like a witch!" (3). But the unhallowed aura born of Gerty's emotional and physical excess presages her powers of Christian conversion, a

bewitchment on behalf of holiness. As Fisher observes, "In America in the 1840s and '50s, the prevailing scientific beliefs placed whites at the top of an evolutionary racial hierarchy" but "some whites developed an avid interest in the physical and mental gifts of nonwhites" (57). Americans had reacted to Native America racial difference since colonial days by alternately exalting and demeaning their supposed unique constitution, and Cummins relies on this paradox to represent Gerty's overt deficiencies as hidden assets. Gertrude's dark but "fine" features and "dark" but "clear" complexion (128; qtd. in Lang 25) encode a sliding racial identity that will allow her to shed her "dark infirmity" (63) of vengeful passions while retaining aboriginal nobility and spontaneous warmth.

Gerty's tacit association with the noble savage forms part of the mystery of her origins. Further, insofar as Gerty is "possibly...illegitimate and not quite white" (Fisher 65) she seems to embody the radical democratic possibility of Christian conversion, which promises that even an unknown and nonwhite orphan might find conversion available. However, as many critics have noted, when the final chapters of the novel disclose the secret of Gerty's genteel ancestry, this resolution works against the novel's pretext of radical democracy as embodied in the figure of the unclaimed orphan. Nevertheless, Cummins' resolution works beyond simple reversal in that she strategically maintains Gertrude's implicit natural election to spiritualized womanhood. First, the racialization of Gerty's heritage persists even after the revelation of her genteel white origins; Gerty's father Philip Armory turns out to similarly sport both an impetuous and ardent nature and a mesmerizing aspect. In profile and deportment he resembles the noble savage, for he "was above the middle height, slender, but finely formed, and of a dignified bearing [...] His features were rather sharp, but expressive, and even handsome; his eyes, dark, keen and piercing, had a most penetrating look, while his firmly-compressed lips spoke of resolution and strength of will"

(258). As with little Gerty's "peculiarity" (2), the narrator notes the "peculiarity" of Philip's hair (258), and onlookers even mark his habits as "peculiar" (285). A dark, handsome, aloof stranger with the melancholy air of a "Vanishing American" (Romero 35), Philip endows Gerty with the biological source for her bio-spiritual charisma and confirms her natural predestination to captivating Christian womanhood. Gentility and savage nobility dovetail; figurative Native American and literal white blood map onto one another and create a blueprint for magnetic holiness.

By asserting Armory's nobility prior to his conversion, Cummins furthermore maintains the novel's theological ascription to savage innocence. When Gertrude urges Philip to "Trust in *goodness*, wherever it be found" (305, author's emphasis) he confronts her with orthodox religion's traditional "strict demarcation between the saved and the damned" (Singley 105), saying, "Your world, your religion, draws a closer line" (305). This "line," according to Calvinist doctrine, "would damn the unconverted but 'noble' savage to everlasting punishment in the afterlife" (Romero 26), and Cummins, in Gertrude's rejoinder, explicitly distances herself from this doctrine: "'Call it not *my* world, or *my* religion,' said Gertrude. 'I know of no such line. I know of no religion but that of the heart'" (305, author's emphasis). Gertrude and Emily, her guardian and Philip's childhood sweetheart, will bring Philip into the fold of Christianity, but long before he considers conversion Gertrude believes "that nothing was hid behind [his face] that would not do honor to the man" (272). Philip's past crimes prove, like Gertrude's, crimes of passion—and that passion a measure of his sympathetic attachments and hatred for injustice. The daughter of her father, Gertrude's peculiarity of temperament and appearance mark her as the embodiment of an innovative theological compromise in the form of natural than divine election or democratic choice.

Antebellum America saw a drastic transposition of religious authority from the male-dominated public world to the female-dominated private one. Alongside the proliferation of Protestant splinter sects, sensational novels centered on exposing the corrupt underside of contemporary life fed into a broad undercutting of clerical influence. As David Reynolds established in *Beneath the American Renaissance*, "by the 1840s it had become virtually impossible for an American novelist to portray a sympathetic clergyman figure because of the satirical stereotype of the reverend rake" (342). Furthermore, with the rise of liberal Protestantism's emphasis on cultivating rather than replacing the unconverted heart, women seemed the obvious choice for channeling this new kind of Christian enlightenment. Romero quotes Harriet Beecher Stowe's representative throwback conservative in *Oldtown Folks* as believing "the minister who does not excite the opposition of the natural heart fails to do his work" (22). Once exciting the natural heart itself served as the new evangelical paradigm, those activities traditionally associated with mediating (while not ensuring) conversion—preaching, church-going—prove superfluous, as the woman could do what the minister did, only better and anywhere. When, as a result, "the female moral exemplar takes the place of the male clergyman" in sentimental fiction (342), she absorbs the erstwhile sanctity of the church environment into her own body.

While many critics have examined the centrality of motherhood to this revised religious paradigm, to the point that in places the "ideal mother" functions as "God in human form" (Tompkins 412), others like Cindy Weinstein have noted the remarkable dearth of biological mothers and intact mother-daughter relationships in sentimental novels. As Claire Chantell contends in the case of Ellen and her mother in *The Wide, Wide World*, I argue that the biological mother, as too absolute an incarnation of divine mediation, threatens to keep the energies of

benevolence turned inward; by contrast, organic angels, of the kind Gertrude enjoys and will become, ensure that those attractions that mediate conversion continue to circulate and make additional converts.³⁰ Furthermore, biological motherhood necessarily implies that sexuality is anchored in bodily functions, a correlation that undermines the conflation of sexual and spiritual power so central to transferring "gospel authority from the clergy to the eroticized domestic woman" (Romero 22). That is, actual reproduction denotes bodily direction of sexual desire, the tendency of sexual desire toward sex rather than toward worship.

Accordingly, while a few oblique references to an active clergyman occur in *The Lamplighter*, there is no mention of babies, pregnancy or birth—a truly remarkable feature for a 19th century text and genre predicated on the woman's sphere. Baym writes that female authors of sentimental fiction "both as Christians and as Victorians, were disinclined to acknowledge the body and physical sexuality as elements of self either inherently spiritual or capable of being spiritualized [...] Hence rather than integrating physical sexuality into their adult personalities they tried to transcend it" (18). This transcendence—presented as viable in *The Lamplighter*—provides the means by which the women fulfill their organic bio-spiritual destiny as females, not by birthing and raising children but by attracting converts.

Critics of 19th century women's fiction typically focus on antebellum reverence for the spiritualized maternal body within an enclosed domestic space. Cummins, however takes care to separate out surrogate mother from associations with home, a strategy that throws into relief the mature female body's non-maternal force of influence. The fact that Gerty as a child does not go

³⁰ In her article on the relationship between depictions of adoption in *The Lamplighter* and shifts in antebellum adoption laws, Cindy Weinstein explains how increasingly through the early 19th century "children were no longer the inalienable property of their parents" and, by law, "their affections were free to circulate," p. 1033.

to live with her primary surrogate mother, Emily Graham, highlights the latter's role as mediator of divine enlightenment rather than nurturing mother. The compassionate and unsophisticated Trueman Flint, rather than a woman, takes in the disheveled and ill-tempered orphan left to freeze on Nan Grant's steps; for, as he explains, "'t an't much there is here, to be sure; but it's a *home*; and that's a great thing to her that never had one" (21, original emphasis). But "True" himself ultimately articulates the insufficiency of his powers of affection to convert the strong-spirited little girl: "Yes, Miss Emily," he affirms, "I loved my little birdie; but I was a foolish man, and I should ha' spiled her. You knew better what was for her good, and mine too. You made her what she is now, one of the lambs of Christ, a handmaiden of the Lord" (91). When, in one instance, Gerty refuses to return to school after fighting with her schoolmates, the narrator announces simply that "all True's persuasions had failed, and she would not go. But Emily understood the child's nature so much better than True did, and urged upon her so much more forcible motives [...] that *she* succeeded where *he* had failed" (65, original emphasis). Cummins' emphasis on the gendered pronouns underscores the woman's singular power to motivate the disciplinary regimen that translates her protégé into the self-possession coextensive with female conversion. Emily's labor of spiritual discipleship locates her role closer to that of minister, while it is True's parenting that stands closer to an image of maternal nurture.

This distinction provides an important corrective to views of the conversions depicted in women's fiction as chiefly reflective of patriarchal conquest. Elizabeth Barnes, for instance, explores the trope of conversion in the antebellum female bildungsroman in general, and *The Lamplighter* in particular, in terms of a dispossession "by the ultimate father figure" that correlates with the heroine's self-discovery (85). "[I]n order to be reformed," Barnes contends, "the heroine must first learn to see herself as she would be viewed through the eyes of an all-

seeing Father" (85). Barnes notes Gerty's association between the ideal Father and True as his earthly counterpart (*TL* 41), saying, "the humble man who lights the lamps becomes for Gerty the embodiment of the Father who lights the stars" (85). Without discounting the validity of Barnes' reading, I think it overstates the role of both earthly and heavenly father in Gertrude's conversion. As both True and the narrator themselves suggest, the key lies with Emily's capacity to effect desire for such union with God through setting out a moral system that rewards discipline with intimacy.³¹ While Gerty has a spontaneous yearning "for God and virtue" (41) as self-identical objects, she lacks an immediate prospect of feminine intimacy that would excite the necessary discipline to counteract her childish fury. Unlike Ellen, who, as Chantell points out, must suffer physical separation from her mother in order to initiate her disciplinary journey (136), Gerty's physical proximity to Emily and desire to maintain that proximity prompts her first efforts at self-control.

Gerty's first encounter with the young lady Emily results in a profound emotional resonance that factors directly into the child's subsequent decision to "be good" (55). They are both listening to an organist play in an empty church building when Gerty stirs and startles Emily, who is blind. Emily calls to Gerty, and, as the narrator reports, Gerty "not only stopped, but came close up to Emily's chair, irresistibly attracted by the music of the sweetest voice she had ever heard" (53). After a brief interchange, Gerty discovers that Emily is the woman who has encouraged True to adopt her and promised to support his endeavors; at that moment the child bursts out, "You asked him to keep me; he said so—I *heard* him say so; and you gave me my

³¹ Although focusing on the same dynamic, my emphasis here differs from Richard Brodhead's in his definition of "disciplinary intimacy," pp. 17-18, as a program that "insists that disciplinary authority resides in persons *and* that persons *in* authority make their authority [...] dissolve into their merely personal presences, p. 19, author's emphasis).

clothes; and you're beautiful; and you're good; and I love you! O! I love you ever so much" (54, author's emphasis). Emily's "irresistible" voice and attractiveness fuse with her benevolent disposition ("you're beautiful; and you're good") to trigger an overwhelming "excitement" (54) ("I love you!" O! I love you ever so much!). Noble describes how authors in the sentimental tradition "endorse an epistemology that is neither purely rational nor purely sensual but blends both in a form of apprehension that is best—though imperfectly—understood as 'intuition,' consultation with the 'heart,' or simply 'feeling'" (64). Cummins captures something of this primal connection when she adds that "As Gerty spoke with a voice full of excitement, a strange look passed over Miss Graham's face, a most inquiring and restless look, as if the tones of the voice had vibrated on a chord of her memory" (54). Emily remains silent, and, "passing her arm around the child's waist, drew her closer to her" (54). What the reader does not yet know concerns the fact that Gerty is the child of Emily's childhood sweetheart Philip Armory, who was accidentally responsible for her blindness and fled the scene forever. Emily's attractiveness on the one hand, and Gerty's biological connection to Emily's early lover on the other, in combination add an organic erotic dimension that intensifies the resonance between them while obscuring its origins. Indeed, while "the sweet voice and sympathetic tones of Emily went straight to [Gerty's] heart" (55) the "excitable but interesting child took no less strong a hold upon Miss Graham's feelings" (57).³² And it is in the context of this mutual excited affection that their first conversation on discipline takes place.

³² A more extended excerpt of the passage further suggests the eroticized impact of the connection: "[I]t was something in the child herself that excited and interested Emily in a unwonted degree. The tones of her voice, the earnestness and pathos with which she spoke, the confiding and affectionate manner in which she had clung to her, the sudden clasping of her hand [...] all these things so haunted Miss Graham's recollection, that she dreamt of the child at night, and thought much of her by day," p. 57.

As she has from the novel's outset, in the first conversation between Emily and Gerty Cummins explicitly associates appearance and behavior, now illustrating their relationship to discipline and intimacy. When Gerty learns that Emily is blind, she exclaims joyfully, "*I'm so glad* [...] so glad you can't see me!—because now, perhaps, you'll love me" (54, author's emphasis). Gerty accounts for her relief by explaining, "folks say that I'm an ugly child, and that nobody loves ugly children" (55). Emily counters that "people do [...] love ugly children, if they are good" (55), and Gerty, in turn, protests, "But I an't good [...] I'm real bad!" (55). In the novel's most succinct endorsement of the universal accessibility of conversion, Emily replies, "But you *can be good* [...] and then everybody will love you" (55). This emphatic direct connection between discipline and intimacy, however, skips an important third term that shows up in the larger context of the novel—namely, that good behavior and physical attractiveness develop along a parallel lines and work in tandem to promote intimacy.

But Cummins is not making a disingenuous gesture here; rather, she is trying to assert the transformative powers of conversion as effecting an occult change in the whole person and producing a mystical appeal best rendered along a sliding bio-ethical spectrum. In a subsequent private afternoon consultation between the exemplar and her protégé, the narrator makes an overt attempt at categorizing—or rather, *not* categorizing—this appeal:

Some said that Emily had the sweetest mouth in the world, and they loved to watch its ever-varying expression [...]. But the chosen few who, who were capable, through their own spirituality, of understanding and appreciating Emily's character [...] had *they* undertaken to express their belief concerning the source whence she derived that power by which her face and voice stole into the hearts of young and old, and won their love and admiration, *they* would have said, as

Gerty did, when she sat gazing so earnestly at Emily on the very Sunday afternoon of which we speak, "Miss Emily, I know you've been with God." (64, author's emphasis)

Cummins here explicitly invests the sensual projections of "face" and "voice" with the power to penetrate consciousness as spiritual agents, for winning love and stealing hearts, in this context, produce "a susceptibility to religious penetration" (Chantell 135). Apparently independent of material expression (not the true source), the organic angel's spiritual luminosity nevertheless comes to rest in physical features, which accounts for Gerty's "gazing so earnestly at Emily." Indeed, the woman's sensual body serves as a sacred material projection that disintegrates into discrete features in order to allow for the passage of divine light, a living Protestant iconography. Gazing at Emily serves as a transformative private devotion that takes the place of public worship.

Indeed, the fact that Gerty's first encounters Emily sitting under a pulpit in a church building on a week day signals the latter's substitution for the once-central pastor and congregation. In fact, Emily goes so far as to remark, "I love to go into a large church on a week-day" (52), marking the superfluity of the clerical exercises that will play no recognizable part in Gerty's religious awakening. Rather, Emily herself will comprise the whole ministry once entrusted to appointed religious leaders. Church-going receives a few marginal references in the text, but, in the paragraph devoted to the joys of Gerty's Saturdays and Sundays, escapes reference entirely; rather, Gerty's Sabbath experience revolves around intense psychic and emotional bonding with Emily:

Sunday afternoon Gerty always spent with Emily, in Emily's room, listening to her sweet voice, and, half-unconsciously, imbibing a portion of her sweet spirit.

Emily preached no sermons, nor did she weary the child with exhortations and precepts. Indeed, it did not occur to Gerty that she went there to be *taught* anything; but simply and gradually the blind girl imparted light to the child's dark soul. (67, author's emphasis)

Not only does Cummins decline to have the narrator even mention Gerty's presumed Sunday morning occupation, she boldly advertises Emily's tutelage as the ideal alternative to traditional homiletics with its "sermons," "exhortations," and "precepts." Gerty "[goes] there," to Emily, as to the building set aside for religious instruction and,

when goodness had grown strong within her, and her first feeble resistance of evil [...] had matured into deeply-rooted principles, and confirmed habits of right,— she felt, as she looked back into the past, that on those blessed Sabbaths, sitting at Emily's knee, she had received into her heart the first beams of that immortal light that never could be quenched. (67)

Cummins could scarcely be more explicit in identifying the catalyst for Gerty's processual conversion in "the first beams of that immortal light" absorbed "at Emily's knee." Cummins does not, in the manner of Emerson and Thoreau, actively scorn structures of organized religion—she simply marginalizes them; they appear only in traces, taking shape in the physical features, the voice (not the words), in the *physical presence* of this woman, whose body here substitutes for the sermon.

In the conversation in which Emily prevails where True had failed over Gerty's resistance to returning to school, Cummins lays out Emily's dual role as both spiritual intercessor and incarnational divinity; that is, she both functions as lay minister in symbolically baptizing and blessing the child and offers her own companionship as the inducement for conversion. When

Emily, in an effort to arouse Gerty's conscience, inquires, "Do you not wish God to forgive and love you?" Gerty struggles to piece together her primitive ideas about God, saying, "God, that lives in heaven,—that made the stars?" (62). While Gerty expresses desire for obtaining access to heaven by further musing, "Will he love me, and let me some time go to heaven?" she finds the cost, trying "to be good, and love everybody," to exceed her capability: "Miss Emily," said Gerty, after a moment's pause, "I can't do it,—so I s'pose I can't go" (62). Emily does not reply, but a baptismal "tear fell upon Gerty's forehead," prompting the child to a new consideration:

"Dear Miss Emily, are you going?"

"I am trying to."

"I should like to go with you." (62)

Gerty's extremely limited concept of heaven comes here to coincide with the attraction of Emily's presence, fostering a new strength of resolve that triggers her developmental conversion, a simultaneous growth in physical and spiritual stature. When Gerty, after a period of silence, whispers, "I mean to *try*, but I don't think I *can*" (author's emphasis), Emily "lay[s] her hand upon Gerty's head" and pronounces the benediction, "God bless you, and help you, my child!" (63). Emily thus consecrates her spiritual daughter to her new life, allowing herself to serve as the initial inducement to that life.

If, however, Gerty is to become in her own right the initiator of others' conversions, she must achieve an unmediated access to divine light. Unlike the male convert, the female convert must move beyond her union with the attractive organic angel to reconcile in her own body the divine and human natures. Cummins dramatizes the intermediate stage in this process when Gerty, now the adolescent Gertrude and living with the Graham family after the death of "Uncle True", encounters a new obstacle to the imperative to "be good and love everybody" in the form

of the Grahams' surly housekeeper Mrs. Ellis. When Emily remarks, "It will make me unhappy if I have any reason to fear that you and she will not live pleasantly together," Gertrude again despairs of good behavior and cries, "I do not want to make you unhappy [...] I'll go away! I'll go off somewhere, where you will never see me again!" (99). Aggrieved, Emily replies, "Gertrude, do you wish to leave your blind friend? Do you not love me?" (99). This consideration subdues Gertrude's "proud spirit," and, throwing "her arms around Emily's neck," she "exclaimed, 'No! dear Miss Emily, I would not leave you for all the world! I will do just as you wish. I will never be angry with Mrs. Ellis again, for your sake'" (80). When confronted with Gerty's childish ardor to accompany her to heaven, Emily had "left the child to the working of her own thoughts" (62); now Emily corrects Gertrude's motive for good behavior: "'Not for *my* sake Gertrude,' replied Emily,—'for your own sake; for the sake of duty and of God'" (99, author's emphasis). Emily's admonition signals the time for a developmental shift in Gertrude's conversion journey: self, duty, and God, will comprise the triadic structure of the final stage of conversion in which the female protégé leaves her subordinate spiritual status for perfect self-possession, the organic angel's converse of sanctification.

The novel's climactic conversion scene, occurring less than a third of the way through the expansive narrative, takes place during Gertrude's fourteenth year, and dramatizes the transference of the locus of spiritual motivation from Emily to a triangulated spirituality circumscribed by self, duty, and God, as interchangeable integers. Gertrude has just learned that the obnoxious Mrs. Ellis sifted through her things and discarded as junk several mementoes of her beloved Uncle True. After throwing herself on her bed and weeping, Gertrude prepares to confront her antagonist, but "some new thought seeming to check her, she returned again to the bed-side, and, with a loud sob, fell upon her knees, and buried her face in her hands" (117).

Cummins provides only an outside view of the transfer of motive for self-discipline in order to maintain it as a quasi-supernatural operation; the transformative thought remains hidden in Gertrude's rapidly evolving selfhood:

Once or twice she lifted her head, and seemed on the point of rising and going to face her enemy. But each time something came across her mind and detained her. It was not fear;—O, no! Gertrude was not afraid of anybody. It must have been some stronger motive than that. Whatever it might be, it was something that had, one the whole, a soothing influence; for, after every fresh struggle, she grew calmer [...] (117)

As in the case of Emily's source of power, Cummins refrains from categorizing Gertrude's impetus for her "her first instance of complete self-control" (118). But its completeness derives from its unprecedented autonomy from Emily—who discovers the incident from the maid and "expected, for several days, to hear from Gertrude the story of her injuries; but Gertrude kept her trouble to herself" (118). The hidden triangulation of self, duty, and God provides a "stronger motive," and therefore a more perfect discipline of behavior, than even intimacy with Emily entailed.

But neither self, duty, nor God takes a clear dominant role; the transaction, as Cummins would have it, remains beyond the scope of simple articulation and is only suggestive of traditional conversion through its depiction of protracted interior struggle and subsequent relief and peace. The divine makes an appearance only indirectly through the amplification of natural beauty in the scene outside Gerty's window, "the brilliant rainbow, the carol of the bird, the fragrance of the blossoms," that coincides with the doubly beautiful "light that overspread the face of the young girl" (117-8). Aside from the bird's "shout[ing] forth a *Te Deum*," no direct

reference to God occurs; rather, the narrator affirms of Gertrude, "She had conquered; she had achieved the greatest of earth's victories, a victory over herself" (117)—a truly unthinkable and even blasphemous description of conversion from a Calvinist point of view. Self, duty, and God presumably all play roles in the mature self's conquest of its childish passions, but the roles remains mutually sublimating in the emergence of the organic angel.

In her transfiguration of Gertrude into an organic angel, Cummins reworks a central sentimental strategy for constructing the moral exemplar—a processual repression of bodily passions so forcible that, when complete, it dissolves the body into a transparent medium for moral light (Noble 97). Typified in *The Wide, Wide World*, this rhetorical device, what Marianne Noble calls corporeal "abjection," enables the heroine to exercise spiritual power by virtue of the absolute mortification of her natural inclinations; the suppression of sexuality to the level of unconsciousness in the heroine corresponds to a proportional increase in the erotic awareness of spectators. Such unconscious eroticism permits the heroine to excite romantic interest as a means of disseminating grace (Romero 22). But while Cummins fuses Gertrude's sexual and spiritual influence on a plane parallel to that of *The Wide, Wide World*, she rejects Warner's Calvinist insistence on total self-abnegation as precondition for this fusion and the organic angel's power. Gertrude, accordingly, does not develop along a simple sanctifying trajectory from bad passion to passionless purity, just as she does not develop along a simple physical trajectory from ugliness to beauty; rather, her biological makeup, as both physical and temperamental profile, actively shape her emergent spirituality.

The beauty and docility that attend Gertrude's maturation process do not displace her childhood ugliness and excitability—rather, their contradictory coexistence opens up a space for the passage of supernatural power. Cummins crafts a dialogic of spectacle that deconstructs

Gertrude's physical appearance by refracting it through a network of overlapping and divergent impressions. Because neither narrator nor characters can definitively articulate Gertrude's appearance and its relationship to her moral attributes, her physical features and fashion choices remain in constant conversational circulation, generating perpetual interest and ensuring that Gertrude's attractiveness persists as an irreducibility. The very ambiguity of impression that Gertrude produces becomes the portal for the organic angel's moral light, for the way her features and deportment strike the spectator serves as a measure of that person's moral composition and susceptibility to conversion. Cummins thus elicits the spiritual illumination associated with the sentimental trope of corporeal abjection, but by disarticulating rather than abasing the body and its attendant passions.

The first extended public exchange on Gertrude's appearance occurs in a relatively early chapter which, by foregrounding spectatorship, anticipates the latter of half the novel in its preoccupation with "the properly feminine 'art of getting looked at'" (Romero 23). Because the novel concerns itself not merely with interior female development, but the relationship between interior development and spiritual influence over others through attraction, emphasis on the apparently superficial phenomena of physical features and self-presentation corresponds with Cummins' project of illustrating how a girl matures physically into a Christian woman, and how, as embodied female, she makes converts. Even this early instance of public scrutiny, therefore, follows a vacillating course between exploration of Gertrude's physical and moral attributes, as filtered through diverse perceptions.

The chapter opens with the musings of two farcical characters, "Miss Peekout" and "Mrs. Grumble," as each from her private purview evaluates the tableau of an unnamed girl, whom the reader may infer to be an older version of the Gerty left behind in the previous chapter, walking

in support of a "feeble-looking old man" (86). Their respective reflections function both to highlight their own moral condition and to generate an accumulative portrait of the girl's moral prowess. Miss Peekout remarks her as a "slender girl" and a "nice child" and speculates on who she might be and whether "she takes all the care of the old man" (86). The sight of the girl's tenderness and the old man's helplessness elicits pity from the harmless old maid. By contrast, Mrs. Grumble's speculations mark her self-preoccupation, even as they also recapitulate the narrative of the young girl's extraordinary kindness: "'I *wonder*,' said old Mrs. Grumble [...] I *wonder* if anybody would wait upon me, and take care of me, as that little girl does of her grandfather! No, I'll warrant not! Who can the patient little creature be?" (86, author's emphasis). In spite of Mrs. Grumble's apparently default movement to self-consideration, even she cannot resist speculating out of admiration on the girl's identity.

While Miss Peekout marks the girl's slenderness, a feature that will recur as denoting inborn grace, the elder women prove chiefly interested in the tableau as moral exhibition. Cummins, however, abruptly shifts from their points of view to those of two young girls, Belle and Kitty, whose dialogue complicates the portrait of the girl by taking physical beauty as the springboard for their assessment. While Belle and Kitty's interchange, as in the case with the older ladies, underscores their spiritual dispositions, it also overtly introduces the problem of Gertrude's inscrutable appearance and its interplay with her moral character.

Cummins deploys the girls' reaction to further establish Gertrude's exceptional moral attractiveness while unsettling its relationship to her physicality: "'There, look Belle!' said one young girl to another [...] on their way to school; 'there's the girl that we meet every day with the old man. How can you say you don't think she's pretty? I admire her looks'" (86). Here Cummins tacitly discloses this tender ritual as a daily occurrence, but she also indicates as a

parallel the recurrent anatomization of Gertrude's qualities on the part of onlookers. Belle and Kitty have apparently been in regular dialogue about Gertrude's relative merits, and Kitty's open admiration signals her future susceptibility to Gertrude's influence, which will one day secure her a clergyman husband and her own orphaned protégé (414). When Belle retorts, "You always do manage, Kitty, to *admire* people that everybody else thinks are horrid-looking" (86) Kitty provides as countervailing evidence Gerty's affective disposition, saying, "'she's anything but *horrid-looking!* Do notice, now, Belle, when we meet them, she has the *sweetest* way of looking up in the old man's face'" (87, author's emphasis). Sweetness, as in the case of Emily's sweet smile, provides an ambiguous meeting-point between physical and moral expression and can thus, in spite of its status as a "way of looking," function to offset Belle's epithet regarding physical attributes.

Kitty, indeed, implies this point of ambiguity by returning in her next question to Gerty's perplexing features: "Don't *you* think she has an interesting face? (author's emphasis). Belle concedes only a single definable attraction—"She's got handsome eyes [...] I don't see anything else that looks interesting about her" (87)—but her concession is important for two reasons. First, it puts into circulation a particular attractive physical feature that will recur in conversation to undermine avowals against Gertrude's attractiveness as originating with physical beauty. At the same time, however, the feature she selects allows for the most mystique in terms of the association between eyes and the soul; the rest of Gertrude's features can disappear around the large eyes that mediate divine light directly from within. Like a sweet expression, "handsome eyes" straddle the border between interior and exterior affect, leaving Gertrude's attractive influence just beyond definition.

In order to link spiritual influence with unconscious eroticism, Cummins must simultaneously orient the reader towards Gertrude's body while discounting such orientation. The importance of at once categorizing Gertrude as *not* beautiful and leaving an impression of her beauty thus proves both thematically and structurally important to the novel. Early on in a conversation with Gerty over Belle's cherubic beauty, Willie, Gerty's handsome young adoptive brother who will ultimately choose her over Belle as his wife, provides a classic example of Cummins' slight of hand in this respect. Gerty has just sadly revealed how she "heard Ellen Chase tell Lucretia Davis, the other day, that she thought Gerty Flint was the worst-looking girl in the school" (69). When Gerty adds in some desperation, "Oh, Willie! [...] it's true," Willie's response leaves the reader with the knowledge that Gerty is not beautiful coupled with the impression that she is:

"No, it an't *true*," said Willie. "To be sure, you haven't got long curls, and a round face, and blue eyes, like Belle Clinton's, and nobody'd think of setting you up for a beauty; but when you've been running, and have rosy cheeks, and your great black eyes shine, and you laugh so heartily [...] I often think you're the brightest-looking girl I ever saw in my life [...]" (69, author's emphasis)

The concrete references to Gerty's rosy cheeks and great black shining eyes leap out from Willie's description to conceptually overpower the abstract references to Gerty as "the worst-looking child in the school" and someone "nobody'd think of setting [...] up for a beauty." Belle's typecast beauty contrasts unfavorably with the luminous fusion of feature and spirit that makes Gerty "the brightest-looking girl," and which, as physical and moral spirit develop together, will result in a preeminently attractive illumination of faith.

In the chapter following Gertrude's climactic conversion step at age fourteen, the narrator provides yet another introduction to the now matured young woman, this time inviting the reader to share the narrator's spectatorial evaluation. Through the narrator's purview, Cummins negotiates with painstaking delicacy between avowing and denying Gertrude's physical attractiveness following puberty. The occasion of introduction begins at a quiet moment with Emily, who hears a "new comer" whom, the narrator explains, "We must pause to introduce, for, though an old acquaintance, time has not left *her* unchanged, and it would be hard to recognize in her our little quondam Gertrude [...] [who] has now become a young lady" (128). The narrator's initial description balances vigor and stature against delicacy and transparency, so that Gertrude emerges as a purified yet robust, sensual woman: "She is some inches taller than Emily," we learn, "and her figure is slight and delicate. Her complexion is dark, but clear, and rendered brilliant by the rosy hue that flushes her cheeks; but that may be the effect of her rapid walk from the railroad station" (128-9). The narrator emphasizes her own provisional role as spectator, assessing Gertrude from the outside and speculating on the ambiguous origins of her flushed cheeks. Gertrude's complexion, like her eyes "dark, but clear," likewise mediates an inner brilliance whose origins remain loosely linked to physical exercise but hearken to the effects of her intense spiritual discipline. Without yet directly addressing the question of beauty, the narrator marshals every resource to establish Gertrude's attractiveness in terms of a peculiar luminosity, exoticized through her dark complexion and colorful cheeks.

In preparation for her announcement that Gertrude is not "a beauty," the narrator takes every care to enhance the desirability of select features, which again stand out in luminous contrast to the vague allusions made to her physical imperfections: "Gertrude's eyes have retained their old lustre, and do not now look too large for her face; and, if her mouth be less

classically formed than the strict rule of beauty would commend, one can easily forgive that, in consideration of two rows of small pearly teeth, which are as regular and even as a string of beads" (129). The attenuated image of a mouth which fails to obtain to "the strict rule of beauty" yields to the precision of small, pearly, and regularly strung teeth, the shining counterpart to Gertrude's lustrous eyes. But in putting these features together, the narrator only creates an infinite regression of contradictory assertions and evidence: "Is Gertrude a beauty?" she inquires rhetorically, "By no means. Hers is a face and form about which there would be a thousand different opinions, and out of the whole number few would pronounce her beautiful" (129). Gertrude has, in effect, transcended the spectrum of mere physical beauty to generate kaleidoscopic impressions that partake unevenly of spiritual and physical criteria. Thus even in definitively stating that Gertrude is "by no means" a beauty, the narrator leaves open the consideration of those few who would pronounce her beautiful; any combination of impressions is possible as physical and moral attributes mix to illuminate the spiritual character of the onlooker. Gertrude's discrete features find their framework, not in a categorical kind of physical beauty, but through her inner light: for, "there are faces whose ever-varying expression one loves to watch [...] faces that now light up with intelligence, now beam with mirth [...] and now, again, are sanctified by the divine presence [...] Such a face was Gertrude's" (129).

Cummins' efforts to disengage Gertrude's spirituality *from* her features after accessing it *through* her features leads, however, to one of many instances of implicit and explicit contradiction: for, after learning of Gertrude's "slight and delicate" figure, we are told, "There are forms too, which, though neither dignified, queenly or fairy-like, possess a grace, an ease [...] a power of moving lightly and airily in their sphere [...] such a form was Gertrude's" (129). Visualizing the distinction between a "slight and delicate" figure that "possess[es] a grace, an

ease" and a "power of moving lightly and airily in [its] sphere," and a "dignified, queenly and fairly-like" form proves conceptually challenging, to say the least. At this point, Cummins' effort to navigate between physical and moral beauty simply breaks down, leaving the reader with a diffuse impression of luminosity and elegance, contextualized by the weight of communal approbation, for "whatever charm these attractions might give her [...] there were those who estimated it highly" (129). And yet the narrator has officially established, with a kind of triumph, the fact that Gertrude is "by no means" a beauty—lest the reader be tempted to mistake converting powers for seductive ones.

With Gertrude's entrance into sexual maturity, a third ingredient enters the mix of her compound appeal, that of her habits of dress. Cummins makes explicit Gertrude's instinctual predilection for middle-class tastes in ornament and apparel as biologically derived, thus further complicating her depiction of "the relationship between the natural, the cultivated, and the divine" (Fisher 63). Even prior to the young Gerty's first efforts at self improvement, she recognizes the concept of "flowered head-gear" on a widow as absurd, for, as the narrator reports, "Good taste is inborn, and Gerty had it in her. She felt that Mrs. Sullivan, attired in anything that was not simple, neat, and sober-looking, would altogether lose her identity" (47). The matured Gertrude's identity comprises a self-identical whole that purports to extend seamlessly through spirit, body, and attire. In this sense, the divine, the natural, and the cultivated prove mutually derivative, as Gertrude's outermost expression of holiness, her elegance of dress, turns out to fulfill an inborn sense of taste. This nimble negotiation of categories on the part of the author perpetuates the novel's tension between democratic choice and divine election, for, while the prospective disciple of Gertrude as moral exemplar may

imitate her fashion choices, by definition she can never willfully reproduce an "inborn" sense of taste—a taste which the novel conflates with Gertrude's converting powers.

In order to affirm Gertrude's preeminent attractiveness as organic angel among people of all walks of life, Cummins must restage her powers of enchantment among the urban and fashionable as well as the country rustics. In the latter half of the novel, Cummins has Gertrude travel with the wealthy Graham family to the fashionable resort at Saratoga, and thereby creates the ideal setting for testing the viability of Gertrude's charm as merely provincial or truly transcendent. Once Gertrude and the Grahams have settled into life at the resort, the narrator reports that, "in the circle of high-bred, polished, literary and talented persons," Gertrude "found much that was congenial to her cultivated and superior taste, and she soon was appreciated as she deserved" (286). Having established Gertrude's good taste as "inborn," Cummins here begs the question of whether Gertrude has cultivated an inborn taste or was, paradoxically, born with a "cultivated" taste. Either way, her early years as a "wild child"—nature—and her maturation into an angelic intercessor—the divine—have worked together to fit her for "fashionable life" (286), the height of social artifice. Fisher notes that Cummins presents Gertrude as "a figure of *natural* perfection when compared with the worldly, sophisticated women of high society" (68); but in order for Gertrude's natural perfection to triumph over worldly sophistication, it must sublimate the affect of fashion into a charismatic holiness—otherwise the erotic fascinations of worldly charm would overshadow her spiritual light.

Because high society centers on the cumulative effects of repetitive self-exhibition, while domestic ideology demands self-forgetful reticence, in order to unite the affect of the former with the virtue of the latter, Cummins stages a dramatic debut for Gertrude as an act of impassioned sympathy. Seeing a small, friendless child tormented on the other side of the

Congress Hall, Gertrude "sprung from her seat [...] and hastily crossed the room" (289), triggering the precise kind of spectacle necessary to put Gertrude's features, morals, and style simultaneously on display for public assessment: "Gertrude's excited and enthusiastic manner of starting on her benevolent errand [...] together with the unusual circumstance of her crossing the large and crowded room hastily and alone, drew the inquiries of all the circle whom she had left, and during her absence she unconsciously became the subject of discussion and remark" (289). A barrage of appraising remarks follow, as the spectators attempt to engage the source of Gertrude's singular attractiveness from a variety of angles. Ellen Gryseworth observes that "It is n't every girl [...] who could cross a great room like this so gracefully as Gertrude can" (289), while Madame Gryseworth adds, "She has a remarkably good figure [...] and knows how to walk" (289). Dr. Gryseworth attempts to tie these compliments to a more profound conclusion, saying, "She is a very well-formed girl [...] but the true secret of her looking so completely the lady lies in her having uncommon dignity of character, being wholly unconscious of observation and independent of the wish to attract it" (289). Gertrude's sexual allure, as inscribed upon her walk and "well-formed figure," does not, Dr. Gryseworth certifies, hold the "true secret" of her appeal; the spectator's gaze must, accordingly, be redirected to a hidden interior of "dignity of character" and unconsciousness. But this interior remains carefully embedded in a discourse of surface appeal, such that even Dr. Gryseworth abruptly and unaccountably adds, "She dresses well, too;—Ellen, I wish you would imitate Miss Flint's style of dress; nothing could be in better taste" (289).

In fact essential, rather than supplementary, to her attractiveness, Gertrude's "good figure" and tasteful style of dress mediate an ultimately irreproducible sanctity; Gertrude as moral exemplar may be an everywoman, but she "is n't every girl." In spite of having counseled

his daughter to imitate Gertrude's style, even Dr. Gryseworth concedes the fact that "in a certain sense [...] the two girls are not sufficiently alike to resemble each other, if their dresses were matched with Chinese exactness" (290). This "certain sense," unsurprisingly, will turn out to be an ineffable bio-spiritual charisma. When a Mrs. Petrancourt challenges Dr. Gryseworth for wishing his "beautiful daughter" to resemble "one who has not half her attractions," he replies that, as Mrs. Petrancourt has spent little time with Gertrude, "it is impossible you should have any idea of her attractions, as they certainly do not lie on the surface" (290). Gertrude's attractions, however, certainly *do* lie on the surface; or rather, they appear there, kindled by a bio-spiritual luminosity and the capacity of the spectator's gaze for illumination. As Madame Gryseworth reports,

'One must see her under peculiar circumstances to be struck by her beauty at once;—for instance, as I did yesterday, when she had just returned from horseback-riding, and her face was in a glow from exercise and excitement; or as she looks when animated by her intense interest in some glowing and eloquent speaker, or when her feelings are suddenly touched, and the tears start into her eyes, and her whole soul shines out through them!' (290)

An excess of physical and emotional energy fuse into a supernal light that transcends but integrally includes Gertrude's discrete features, those "great dark eyes," that "splendid head of hair" (291). This mysterious magnetism further extends to every tasteful choice in clothing, from her broad-brimmed hat (136), to her white cape-bonnet (190), to her gingham morning-gown (190), and to her rubber overshoes (271), which prove, Cinderella-like, too tiny for the large-footed Belle. Because of her inborn sense of good taste, Gertrude unfailingly selects what is tasteful; because of her cultivated spiritual discipline, whatever Gertrude selects becomes

tasteful. Her attractiveness invites imitation that cannot reproduce her attractiveness, deriving as it does from *je ne sais quoi*.

Gertrude's attractions thus do and do not lie on the surface, and because she is and is not beautiful, no one can match her for fascination. As an admiring but perplexed lieutenant observes, "Something becomes her; she makes a fine appearance" (198). By staging Gertrude's presence as a complex web of interpenetrating and irreducible phenomena, Cummins precludes the tracing of her magnetism as the organic angel to explicitly erotic sources—rather, each source redounds on to another, ensnaring the spectator into a round of perpetual contemplation that opens the door to conversion.

Through its conflation of female sexual development with sanctification, sentimental fiction attempts to harness erotic power for spiritual ends and thereby purge sexual love of its self-interested dimension without forfeiting its influence over the heart. This conceptual splicing of sexual interest with spiritual ends encapsulates liberal Protestantism's effort to reconcile desire with duty in the "religion of the heart." Lang speaks to this configuration in sentimental fiction as the "literary analogue" to "the doctrine of the harmony of interests" which "subsumes differences into one harmonious whole by means of a kaleidoscopic substitution of terms" (24). This remarkable substitutionary network allows Cummins to embed the novel's most erotically-charged scenes into a narrative of male conversion, while demanding a complete displacement of outcome from means. The erotic pleasures of male conversion by female attraction culminate in filial and spiritual outcomes, thus ensuring the retention of female eroticism for religious ends.

By thus repurposing pleasures and freedoms associated with self-interest as other-centered and spiritually-oriented, progressive sentimental authors like Cummins tried to solve the problem of competing interests in an age when competing interests functioned as the emerging

capitalist commercial paradigm. Accordingly, Cummins reproduces this substitutionary structure at an economic level, so that male characters whose self-formation in the marketplace revolves around competing rather than harmonizing interests, can nevertheless reintegrate into a benevolent spiritual sphere through their devotion to saintly women at home. Just as female spirituality converts sexual capital into spiritual influence, so it converts financial capital into benevolent service. The respective male protagonists in the novel who accrue material assets abroad on behalf of Christian woman thereby redeem themselves and their spoils from complicity in the "nation's increasingly expansionist economic and territorial policies," which many Americans read "as signs of the moral decay of the 'city on the hill'" (Fisher 55). To paraphrase the narrator of Melville's *White Jacket*, the men cannot do a good for their women, without giving alms to the world.³³ This substitution thus functions as a tacit reinforcement of antebellum America's midcentury imperial expansion, apparently so at odds with a moral mission of "disinterested benevolence" (Gura, "Truth's" 51). Assimilating material wealth accumulated beyond national boundaries back into the domestic space provided one way for sentimental discourse to manage the tensions between America's economic structures and imperial activities and its avowed religious values.

The Lamplighter's primary narrative of male conversion provides a test case for the organic angel as reconciler of sexual and economic interests with disinterested ends. Philip Armory, Gertrude's long-lost biological father, will officially come to faith through the perduring influence of Emily, subsequent to their marriage near the novel's conclusion. Gertrude, however,

³³ "[N]ational selfishness is unbounded philanthropy; for we cannot do a good to America, but we give alms to the world." See *White Jacket*, p. 151.

through her magnetic attractiveness, initiates his processual conversion before Cummins abruptly but necessarily diverts the passionate attachment of father and daughter. Cummins withholds knowledge of the biological connection between Philip and Gertrude till close to the novel's end, a veiling which makes possible an astonishingly free interplay of erotic and filial cues, in the context of Gertrude's wooing her father into faith.

Philip makes his first appearance at the Saratoga resort, as a handsome stranger with eyes for Emily, whom he recognizes as the sweetheart he inadvertently blinded in a desperate effort to restore from a fainting fit. Having mistakenly believed for decades that Emily reserves an undying resentment towards him for his act, he does not attempt to identify himself. When Gertrude joins the group around Emily, however, Philip shifts his gaze to the woman he knows to be his daughter but also fears to approach. The reader, as yet unapprised of Philip's identity, can only follow the cues laid down by character and narrator with respect to the origins of his interest in Gertrude, cues which point unequivocally to romance; as the narrator reports, "the fine color which mantled her countenance, and the deep brilliancy of her large dark eyes [...] were, perhaps, the cause of the stranger's attention being at once transferred from the lovely and interesting face of Emily to the more youthful, beaming and eloquent features of Gertrude" (258). The narrator, in fact, contrasts this interest with the "affectionate admiration" the same features evoke from Gertrude's long-time friends, Dr. and Mrs. Jeremy. Gertrude's reaction to the stranger's attention further intensifies the moment's erotic charge, for "she became aware of the notice she was attracting" and "it embarrassed her" (258). Cummins has taken great care through the course of the novel to emphasize Gertrude's lack of embarrassment in moments the reader might expect an erotic crisis; as a result, the narrator's notice here operates with heightened suggestibility. When Philip departs, Gertrude and company take the opportunity to dilate on his

appearance and age. Whereas Mrs. Jeremy calls him "queer-looking" and puts his age at "about fifty," Gertrude remarks him as "elegant-looking" with "beautiful" hair and puts his age at "about thirty" (258-9).

Amidst this compendium of cues suggesting mutual sexual attraction between Philip and Gertrude, Cummins interjects a mitigating but crucial signal of benevolent interest; even as she calls the stranger's hair "beautiful," Gertrude adds, "I wish he didn't look so melancholy; it makes me quite sad to see him" (258). Philip's evident sadness, a sadness which will turn out to involve not only his loss of Emily and others but his loss of faith, destabilizes the erotic trajectory enough to pave the way for the vital redirection of emotional energy at the novel's conclusion. In the meantime, this attractive sadness or "melancholy" provides the benevolent pretext that allows Gertrude to maintain the otherwise potentially illicit intimacy of private interviews. Repeatedly after their first encounter, Gertrude "betray[s] [...] confusion" under the gaze of the stranger; his "look" "disconcert[s]" her (267), his "handsome" yet "melancholy" face causes her to blush (266). In one of these instances of his intense "scrutiny of her features" and her correspondent "embarrassment," Philip "turned away, and a shadow passed over his fine countenance, lending it for a moment an expression of mingled bitterness and pathos, which served at once to disarm Gertrude's confusion at this self-introduction and subsequent remarks" (267). As Gertrude is alone with a handsome stranger who is gazing earnestly at her face, presumably her "confusion" partakes of the situation's erotic charge, out of which Philip's expression of sadness provides a teleological escape; she can stay at the private interview because she has now has benevolent cause. Thus when Dr. Jeremy comes upon the two and subsequently teases Gertrude about "her grey-headed beau," the narrator can proclaim that Gertrude's interest in Philip "which she did not deny, was quite independent of his personal appearance" (268).

Gertrude's first exercise of spiritual influence over Philip occurs in a conspicuously romantic context and setting; she comes upon him asleep at the end of a long climb to the edenic "pine gardens" (274) high on a Saratoga mountain. But the romantic aura of the occasion doubles as the same kind of hyper-naturalism suggestive of the divine that Gertrude beheld outside her window at the climax of her own conversion, for "the foliage of the oaks, the pines and the maples, which had found root in this lofty region, was rich, clear, and polished, and tame and fearless birds of various notes were singing in the branches" (273). Furthermore, this encounter between Philip and Gertrude occurs, like the young Gerty's spiritually instructive sessions with Emily, on a Sunday—but now explicitly in place of church as institutional agent of conversion. Cummins underscores this point through a dialogue on the previous day, in which Dr. Jeremy remarks, "There will be no church for us to-morrow, Gerty," and Gertrude responds, "gazing about her with a look of reverence", "how *can* you say so?" (271, author's emphasis). Philip, with a kind of embittered playfulness, then adds, "There is no Sunday here, Miss Flint; it does n't come up so high" (271). But Gertrude will, in fact, comprise through her own spiritually luminous presence the intersection of church and nature, divine and natural beauty; in coming up "so high" on the mountain to where he takes his troubled sleep, she will *be* "Sunday" to Philip, the beauty that mediates conversion.

Because in his sleep on the mountainside Philip evinces dreams troubled by grief, a profoundly intimate moment between attractive and mutually attracted strangers proves an occasion for consecration and spiritual instruction. Hearing Philip's mournful, childlike cry, "*Oh, dear*" from out of his dreams, Gertrude recognizes her role as maternal consoler; she "leaned over him" to brush away an insect from his forehead, "and, as she did so, one of the many tears that filled her eyes fell upon his cheek" (275, author's emphasis). Gertrude's pity

allowed her to overlook the compromising aspect of her actions, for "she forgot that he was a stranger; she only saw a sufferer" (215). Nevertheless, as Philip awakens from his sleep, she awakens to her action: he "looked full in the face of the embarrassed girl, who started, and would have hastened away" (275). Gertrude remains because Philip alludes, not to the fact that he finds her leaning over him, but to her tear, saying, "My child, did you shed that tear for me?" (275) The holy tear, hearkening back to the baptismal tear Emily sheds for Gerty, binds the moment's erotic charge to spiritual intent; the two must pursue the meaning of the tear to its sacred end.

In the subsequent exchange, they engage in a kind of metaphorical contest, where nature stands in for their respective spiritual states; Philip points out, from their lofty mountain outlook, the "curtain of thick clouds" that spreads darkness over the world, while Gertrude enlarges on the light "shines brightly above the clouds" (277). When the light then breaks through the clouds, Gertrude, "her eyes glowing with the fervour with which she spoke," triumphantly draws attention to this symbolic representation of conversion. Anticipating that nature may be mediating her spiritual message to Philip, Gertrude turns, only to find him "watching, not the display of nature in the distance, but that close at his side. He was gazing with intense interest upon the young and ardent worshipper of the beautiful and the true; and, in studying her features and observing the play of her countenance, he seemed [...] wholly absorbed" (277). This is aesthetic conversion at its most powerful because it simultaneously harnesses the emotional registers of awe, erotic passion, and mystical devotion. As Gertrude in this moment stands in for nature, God, and lover, no wonder Philip finds himself "wholly absorbed" in contemplating "the play of her countenance," whose very instability of expression allows for this outbreak of all-inclusive radiance; his penetrating gaze signifies his own susceptibility to divine light. Finding herself yet again the object of intense scrutiny, Gertrude begins to turn away, when, also once

again, Philip's response signals the spiritual telos of his fascination: "Go on, happy child!" he exclaims, "Teach *me*, if you can [...] to love and pity, as you do, that miserable thing called *man*" (277, author's emphasis). And Gertrude first, then Emily, becomes the stepping stone by which that "miserable thing called *man*" gains access to faith. When he cannot yet subscribe to "religion," Philip can nevertheless attach himself to the organic angel as his first step toward the divine; in his words to Gertrude, "I will try and have faith in *you*" (305, author's emphasis).

Divine light radiating through the body of the organic angel pierces the spiritual darkness of "miserable" man, a darkness Cummins links directly to the male-dominated world of commercial competition with its attendant selfishness and distrust. Philip's accidental blinding of Emily—and with it, the dashing of his domestic aspirations and attendant faith—is the culmination of a heated argument with her father and employer in which Mr. Graham falsely accuses Philip of attempting to usurp his fortune and of committing "forgery of a large amount" under his name (*TL* 319; Fisher 74). Fleeing abroad, Philip spends decades in misadventures, "following strongly contrasted employments, and with fluctuating fortune" (384), a journey which teaches him "the sad lesson that peace is nowhere, and friendship, for the most part, but a name" (384). It is small wonder, then, that Philip thinks of the world as a place of "heartless strangers" (278), all "selfish" and "unkind," and trusts "*no one*" (304, author's emphasis). But it is from that world that Philip returns with the fortune that will enable him to reclaim his paternal estate, "repair and judiciously modernize the house, and fertilize and adorn the grounds" (419).

Philip's backstory affords Cummins the opportunity to purify his representative prosperity in two ways; first, by disentangling his material success from the self-consciously competitive environment from which it derives and, secondly, by redirecting it into the service of the organic angel, whose moral imperatives drive her to "fulfill her charities" and "do good on

earth" (421). Philip's profits from outside his home territory provide the means for both enjoyment and sacrifice at home—Cummins' gesture toward reconciling her nation's evident burgeoning prosperity, directly resultant from aggressive expansion, with her belief in the fundamental compatibility of human and divine interests. While Philip and Willie, as Fisher has noted, both perform "successful American manhood in imperial trade" by "battling Bedouins in the Arabian desert," (67), Philip's actual windfall could not occur in a more overtly passive manner. In a letter to Gertrude in which he identifies himself as her father, Philip details how, while he had earned "a decent maintenance" in his travels, "Accident [...] at last thrust upon me a wealth which I could scarcely be said to have sought" (385). This "accident" transpires in the California Gold Rush following the United States' wresting of the state from Mexico, but Philip distances himself from this "land of falsehood and deceit," saying "For me [...] who sought it not, it showered gold" (385). In perhaps the most competitive economic context of the antebellum era, Philip underscores the absence of both effort and intention in his achievement, declaring, "without effort, almost without my own knowledge, I achieved the greatness which springs from untold wealth" (385).

In the last pages of the novel, this accidental, "untold" wealth finds its proper end in liberal Protestantism's evangelical economy, with its affirmation of private and collective interests as mutually inclusive. The male conversion initiated by the organic angel ensures the orientation of potentially compromised means toward divinely-sanctioned ends; she becomes heir to his wealth and he to her works of charity. Emily, whose erotic appeal Cummins studiously diminishes in the latter half of the novel in contrast to Gertrude's, becomes the fitting agent for finalizing Philip's conversion as spiritual consummation terminating in benevolent service:

The blind girl's prayers are answered; her last, best work is done; she has cast a ray from her blessed spirit into his darkened soul; and, should her call to depart soon come, she will leave behind one to follow in her footsteps, fulfill her charities, and do good on earth, until such time as he be summoned to join her again in heaven. (421)

All the means of Philip's newfound happiness, "his beautiful home, his wide possessions, and honorable repute among his fellow-men, [and] even the love of the gentle Emily," prove, by virtue of his conversion, stepping stones to philanthropic labor.

In the narrative of Philip's conversion, Cummins brings together the two greatest challenges to a moral mission of disinterested benevolence: erotic and material enjoyment. By putting both the attractiveness of wealth and the attractiveness of the body into the service of charity, Cummins boldly grafts America's contemporary prosperity onto liberal Protestantism's religion of the heart. In *The Lamplighter*, disinterested ends purify means—not in a retroactive sense, but immanently, as the body of the female saint and the sphere of her active charity redirect all human interests toward holy ends, converting men and the money they make.

Conclusion

In an era when "violent boundaries were in violent flux" and the nation "doubled its national territory, completed a campaign of Indian Removal, fought its first prolonged foreign war, wrested the Spanish borderlands from Mexico, and annexed Texas, Oregon, and California" (Kaplan 583) sentimental authors like Cummins were writing about the harmonizing of self-interest with benevolence as the fundamental outcome of conversion. In *The Lamplighter*, Cummins demonstrates one strategy female Christian authors deployed for addressing the paradox of antebellum culture's simultaneous emphasis on gentle persuasion in religion and

competition and coercion in business—figuring the organic angel as microcosmic utopia, the incarnational representation of reconciled interests.

Cummins' rendition of the organic angel thus invests Christian conversion with an imperializing tendency through its grafting of male economic success onto female benevolent labors. However, attention to her specific articulation of the organic angel should caution us against overgeneralizing about the relationship between sentimentalism and domesticity. Kaplan, for instance, argues that sentimental fiction "regulates the traces of savagery within itself" (582) and, in this vein, contends that Gertrude must "purge herself of both her origin in a diseased uncivilized terrain and the female anger identified with that 'dark' realm" (601). Weinstein and Fisher rightly challenge this conclusion, with Fisher stressing Cummins' participation in the antebellum "attraction to the figure of the noble savage" (53) and the novel's concomitant celebration of "a savage in the house" (53). Indeed, in contrast to contemporary sentimental authors like Susan Warner who depicted conversion as the extinction of human will by divine will, Cummins creates an organic angel whose erotic power stems uniquely from her exoticized origins as dark, peculiar, and impassioned orphan. In so doing, however, she complicates the democratic reproducibility of her moral exemplar, whose holiness remains ambiguously rooted in free-will and natural election.

III. AESTHETIC PERVERSION IN HAWTHORNE'S THE MARBLE FAUN

The organic angel figures in antebellum fiction as an aesthetic intersection between human inclination and divine beauty, a living icon who translates individual and national desires into the sphere of spiritual consummation. In Chapters 1 and 2 I demonstrated how the development of the organic angel structures the narrative movement of the female bildungsroman; as she unfolds from natural child to supernaturalized woman, the heroine bridges the principle of organicism with the conversion narrative structure. While many sentimental novelists of the period engaged this dynamic trope, a few tested her purifying powers and found them wanting. Chapters 3 and 4 of this study trace the malformation of the organic angel in its impact on the narrative trajectories of romance novels by Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville, respectively.

In her positive figurations, the organic angel serves as a millennial trope that opened up a purified purview of the future and translated her witnesses into a postlapsarian harmony between nature and divinity. She thus encapsulates antebellum America's optimism regarding an imminent fulfillment of its combined idealized origins as "Nature's nation" and the "City on a Hill"—as grounded in the innocence of nature and privileged with divine election. But while the trope of the organic angel thus functions as a harbinger of futurity, she likewise signals an incipient return to an ancient past, that of Medieval Christianity, with its compounded hierarchies of intercession and its treasuries of art.

By the middle of the 19th century, American Protestantism had nearly made an about-face in its attitude toward the role of art, beauty, and the human imagination in matters of faith, with liberal Protestant tourists showing a "tendency to identify art with religion" (Vance 195). James Jackson Jarves, for instance, in his 1864 treatise *The Art-Idea*, contended that art "brings down the incomprehensible, by a species of incarnation, to the range of finite faculties," further calling it "the spiritual representative of Love" and announcing that the "scope and direction of Art is 'GODWARD'" (qtd. in Vance 195). Author of the massive two-volume study *America's Rome*, William Vance argues that the "religion of Beauty for more than two centuries has filled a void created by the absence of adequate ritualistic and aesthetic satisfactions in Protestant [...] faiths" (183). The "religion of Beauty," however, did not simply displace a minimalist Protestantism; it grew out of Protestantism's own new investment in imagination and intuition as facilitators in the interaction between human and divine life, an investment centered on the transformative figure of the organic angel.

As a result of America's ascetic religious heritage by way of Puritanism, critics have traditionally depicted the antebellum confrontation between Protestantism and Catholicism as an encounter between related but inversely gendered religions. The industrial revolution and commercialism of the 19th century further entrenched a notion of American Protestantism as a masculinized religion in contradistinction to the feminized decadence of Catholicism. Annamaria Elsdon, for instance, remarks that "precisely what Americans found offensive about Catholicism—its ornamentation, idolatry, ritual—was also subordinated as feminine and placed in contrast to the more masculine values of Enlightenment Protestantism" (xii). While both Puritan sensibility and utilitarian ideology unquestionably informed the antebellum confrontation with Rome, antebellum Protestantism had developed an unprecedented veneration for the divine

feminine as a material mediator between human and divine natures. Consequently, as American tourists crossed the threshold of Italy in unprecedented numbers beginning in the 1850s, their newer, liberal feminized faith collided with the older, institutionalized feminine faith of Rome. In *Roads to Rome*, Jenny Franchot argues that the "Protestant cult of domesticity [...] enabled a partial recovery of a repudiated incarnational and intercessory 'aesthetic'" (253), one centered on the female saint as agent of conversion. Because Catholic iconography so closely mirrored this emergent aesthetic—woman-as-art mediating divine life—it threatened to merge the two faiths in the mind of American tourists and, as a consequence, often triggered a violent effort at self-extrication from aesthetic influence. For those Americans who "saw in Mary the same transfigurative powers as those claimed for American Christian domesticity" (253), Catholicism seemed like the consummation of liberal Protestantism's movement toward a more aesthetically and emotionally satisfying religion. In the next moment, however, it seemed like a contamination of Protestantism's purity through the very forms of religious mediation that attracted them.

When American Protestant tourists encountered Rome, they were approaching the very roots from which their own faith had been birthed through recoil (Vance xx). As Franchot notes, "animus against Romanism was a central determinant in colonial Puritan identity" (xix). What is more, they were approaching it out of interest in the very aspects of Catholicism that had triggered that recoil: devotional decadence, material excess in religion, feminine mediation—art. As America's fledgling mid-century religion of art came into contact with the aesthetic decadence of Roman Catholicism, the encounter produced a deadlock of what has been variously called the "attraction and repulsion" and "approach and retreat" (Natterman 55) of the New World's reunion with the Old. The danger of idolatry meant that even as Americans brought a "hunger for communion" with divine goodness through the material consolations afforded by the

Catholic religion, they felt compelled to continually register their "fear of corruption" (Franchot xxiii).

Art conceived as icons threatened to expose Protestant viewers to the sensual contaminations of idolatry associated with Marion and saint-worship, even as it seemed to offer the logical culmination to their nascent belief in the transfigurative role of the organic angel. Upon the confrontation of Protestant consciousness with "the 'foreign faith' lodged at the heart of American Christendom" (Franchot xviii), the organic angel revealed as her hidden oblique the "Whore of Babylon," divine womanhood's intercessory influence morphed into powers of seduction and idolatry. When, in the "era's most significant Protestant fiction of Rome" (350), Hawthorne's 1860 novel *The Marble Faun*, the organic angel encounters a more fully materialized mirror of her transformative capacities, her suppressed powers of sexual and spiritual seduction accordingly return with a vengeance.

In *The Marble Faun*, the pressure of competing feminized aesthetics causes the figure of the organic angel as art to split into two separate incarnations—one magnetic, sensual, and transformative, but damned; the other pure, static, ineffectual, and saved. Miriam, sensual by nature can only transform her spectators by contaminating them with illicit sexual desires. Hilda, innocent by nature, altogether resigns her transformative powers in favor of simple self-preservation. As his *Italian Notebooks* demonstrate, Hawthorne preoccupied himself during the months he spent in Italy with finding a means to extract the sensual vitality of Catholicism to serve purified Protestant ends; the novel's bifurcation of the organic angel into equally non-redemptive avatars of idealized womanhood reflects his ultimate inability, against a Catholic backdrop, to conceive of the purified sensual vitality typified by the trope of the organic angel. For Hawthorne, the soluble sexuality of the organic angel in sentimental fiction found too

thorough and persistent a concretization in Rome, with its promiscuous aggregations of nude sculptures and sacred icons. In place of her redemptive and millennial role, he aggressively separated out the natural seductress from the natural saint, the latter stripped down to domestic ornament, a mere self-contained cipher of divine womanhood.

Hilda and Miriam both stand as natural women, wholly contiguous with their respective origins in Catholic Europe and Protestant New England. But because Miriam emerges from Rome's staggeringly ancient and prolific religion of art, the spiritual magnetism and transformative powers of the organic angel accrue to her body, rather than to Hilda's. Miriam, an unwilling but "natural" seductress, represents female sexuality as inherently damning, the source and conduit of Catholicism's overpowering illicit sensuality. She embodies in the novel the dangers of aesthetic intimacy, a work of art that ensnares and pollutes the innocent votary unawares.

Apposed to the charismatic and sensual Miriam, Hilda embodies the safety of a puritanical aesthetic distance. As she navigates through the museums and streets of Rome, Hilda repels the dangerous influences of sensuality, eluding the snare of idolatrous Rome with its powers of "instant conversion" (qtd. in Franchot) by way of transformative art. A congenital and incorruptible innocent, Hilda can neither transform nor to be transformed, convert others or be converted, in the tradition of the female bildungsroman. Her organic intimacy with divine life remains a thing apart, magnifying rather than collapsing the distance between pure divinity and fallen humanity. A conceptually polarizing figure, Hilda rejects any form of redemptive contact between saint sinner and insists that the power of transformation lies only on the side of the sinner to pervert the saint.

In the antebellum sentimental novel, narrative development takes its shape along the lines of transformation experienced and enacted through the trope of the organic angel as female saint. Accordingly in *The Marble Faun*, the static trajectory of Hilda's innocence serves to neutralize the story's thematic and structural investment in the *felix culpa*, a redemptive storyline whereby the fall into sinful knowledge enables an ultimate elevation of character. This ostensible structural incompatibility within the novel prompted Franchot to call *The Marble Faun* a novel "hostile not only to the 'flesh' but to itself as organic narrative" (351). Hilda's non-developmental passage through the contaminating city of Rome has, more than any other aspect of the book, frustrated critics counting on Hawthorne's reputation for insisting on the importance of the "flesh" in its capacity to vitalize human relationships and religion. But projecting a sacred vitalized woman against the backdrop of Rome proved a different matter than projecting her against a backdrop of New England Puritanism, and resulted in "strenuously segregated" (351) and mutually deconstructing storylines.

As a product of Catholicism and what Protestants viewed as its sanguine and sensual history, the aesthetics of Rome seemed as likely to spread perversion as to facilitate communion with the sacred, and *The Marble Faun* is a nightmare drama of trying to navigate between the liability of the one and the longing for the other. Perhaps the most profound anxiety for Protestant spectators lay with the uncertain overlap between pagan and sacred representations of the ideal woman.³⁴ Sacred icons and nude images alike purported to idealize and therefore divinize the female body, and these inverse representative types often mingled in the same

³⁴ Leonardo Buonomo notes that "it may be difficult for the uninformed to distinguish between statues (or pictures) of [...] pagan goddesses and those of the Madonna. As subjects [...] they are treated with equal reverence and devotion in that they all inspire the portrayal of noble and beautiful features." See *Backward Glances: Exploring Italy, Reinterpreting America (1831-1866)*, p. 23.

galleries. As residual Puritan fears of idolatry competed in the Protestant imagination with aesthetic veneration, sensual pagan sculptures raised questions that mapped onto sacred icons. If depictions of pagan deities "represented idolatry, indecency, and lies," then "How could they be ideal?" (Vance 184). And to what extent did similarly perverse human impulses infiltrate purportedly sacred Catholic art?

Hawthorne expresses this anxiety both in the *Italian Notebooks* and in narrative commentary of *The Marble Faun*, where the problem of "impure pictures" proceeding from the same "impious hands" as apparently "Heaven-descended likenesses" (*MF* 263) threatens to destroy the trust the spectator places in divine inspiration as the source of art. "Who can trust the religious sentiment of Raphael," he complains, "after seeing, for example, the Fornarina of the Barberini palace, and feeling how sensual the artist must have been, to paint such a brazen trollop of his own accord, and lovingly!" (263).³⁵ Implicit in the example of Raphael's works is the danger of masquerade, the sensually-conceived work presenting as spiritual and ensnaring the unwitting Protestant viewer's idolatrous, rather than reverent, gaze.

The threat of inadvertent idolatry stemmed from the possibility of a spectator's involuntary sensual resonance with a work of art's hidden, corrupt origins. Representations of bodies, even toward the end devotional reverence, necessarily involved the viewing of actual bodies—by embodied artists—and the viewer could not determine the degree of separation between aesthetics and sexuality in the relationship between maker and model. As T. Walter Herbert explains, "The Hawthornes had been startled by the nudity of the pictures and statues they viewed in Italy, and their minds insistently formed a judgment concerning the sexual interaction between artist and model" (*Dearest* 231). Although he tried to disguise his objections

³⁵ See also *French and Italian Notebooks*, p. 93.

as philosophical and aesthetic, Hawthorne resented nude statuary "on moral grounds" (Vance 191).³⁶

Questioning the ethical grounds of the process of aesthetic production lead Hawthorne as narrator³⁷ to speculate on the potentially perverse origins of all affective iconography. With some cynicism he remarks that "If the artist sometimes produced a picture of the Virgin, possessing warmth enough to excited devotional feeling, it was probably the object of his earthly love, to whom he thus paid the stupendous and fearful homage of setting up her portrait to be worshipped" (*MF* 263).³⁸ When it comes to representations of a viable, vital divine womanhood, Hawthorne suggests, categories of spiritual and sensual "warmth," devotional and sexual "excitement," hopelessly interfuse, and the affective success of the former may depend on the latter. Creating and consuming *any* affective feminine aesthetic would then involve a contaminating sensual indulgence.³⁹

³⁶ Buonomo observes that for American tourists, the "evaluation of Italian art could hardly be, in most cases, the result of merely aesthetic considerations." He further contends that "What needs to be considered, then, is not only the way in which this art is described and appreciated by the Protestant observer, but also his or her awareness (or lack of it) of the particular difficulties involved in the matter," p. 23.

³⁷ For treating the perspective of the narrator of *The Marble Faun* as synonymous with Hawthorne's, see Stern p. 146, n. 7. See also Millicent Bell's "*The Marble Faun* and the Waste of History," p. 359.

³⁸ The narrator concludes this passage somewhat tongue-and-cheek, saying, "But no sooner have we given expression to this irreverent criticism, than a throng of spiritual faces look reproachfully upon us. We see Cherubs, by Raphael, whose baby-innocence could only have been nursed in Paradise [...] and withdraw all that we have said," p. 263.

³⁹ My reading here stands in opposition to Sabine Metzger's claim that Hawthorne "assigns the primacy to 'earthly love' by making it a precondition of both religious art and religious devotion." Metzger takes the quote on "earthly love" out of context when she contends that "Giving a work of art 'the warmth [...] to excite spiritual feelings' [...]"

At the outset of *The Marble Faun*, Hawthorne sets up a tentative community of tourists, a circle of tenuously linked, isolated figures, with the character Miriam as this sensual and contaminating feminine aesthetic at its heart. Hawthorne establishes Miriam's background in terms evocative of the hidden, potentially corrupt origins of a voluptuous piece of art. "There was an ambiguity," the narrator explains, "about this young lady, which, though it did not necessarily imply anything wrong, would have operated unfavorably as regarded her reception in society, anywhere but in Rome" (19). Although "nobody knew anything about Miriam, either for good or evil" (19), rumors abound regarding her as Jewish, German, or even Southern mulatta in origin (20). Miriam's past cannot be definitively ascertained, but her exotic physicality invokes speculations on sexual deviance having had a hand in her destiny, whether through an act as taboo as miscegenation or merely the abandoning of her marriage out of devotion to art (20). As if she were in fact an aesthetic object, the narrator asserts that she "was a beautiful and attractive woman, but based, as it were, upon a cloud" (20). While the base/basis of Miriam's magnetism remains uncertain,⁴⁰ the effect of it does not: Miriam's "nature had a great deal of colour, and, in accordance with it, so likewise had her pictures," which exude "warmth and passionateness" (18).

The "colour" and "warmth" of Miriam's artwork and personality suggest an anterior perversion effected through the process of artistic production. Thus, while the narrator for a time encourages playful speculation regarding Miriam's colorful "nature," he develops a more sinister tone at the appearance of a male figure from Miriam's past, a stalker subsequently designated

becomes the source from which religious art and religious devotion spring." See "'That Indefinable Nothing, That Inestimable Something': Empathy and the *Miraculum* of Art in *The Marble Faun*," p. 104.

⁴⁰ Near the conclusion of the novel, Miriam reveals some details from her past, including that she is of "mixed race," English and Italian, and her aura of guilt can be traced to her effort to free herself from an "odious" marriage p. 334.

"the Model." This epithet derives from the fact of his "being often admitted to her studio," and leaving "his features, or some shadow or reminiscence of them, in many of her sketches and pictures" (27). Vance observes that "the past they share [...] is one obviously characterized by sexual guilt" (122), and sexual guilt in the novel finds representation largely through allusions to bloodshed—a displacement of lust into bloodlust. In a fragmentary conversation that occurs between Miriam and the model, he accordingly torments her with inferences of an "imaginary blood-stain," concluding of her hand, "It looks very white [...] but I have known hands as white, which all the water in the ocean could not have washed clean!" (76). Miriam's reply—"It had no stain [...] until you grasped it in your own" (76)—indicates the compromise of aesthetics with sensuality, material become bodily contact.

The details of Miriam's prior involvement with the model, however, remain ambiguous, the facts of their relationship inaccessible through the textual frame; the narrator goes so far as to insist he has imaginatively generated their conversation to fill a gap in facts (72). This avowal in the context of a work entirely fictional seems redundant and highlights Hawthorne's point that the facts of the sexual relationship, including the distribution of culpability, are of secondary importance. The primary importance of the conversation lies rather with its disclosure of a dynamic of sensual resonance between model and artist: "Of so much we are sure," the narrator attests, "that there seemed to be a sadly mysterious fascination in the influence of this ill-omened person over Miriam; it was such as beasts and reptiles, of subtle and evil nature, sometimes exercise upon their victims" (72).

While the narrator speculates on the degree of Miriam's culpability for this entrapment, the contagiousness of illicit association ultimately subsumes the distinction between guilt and victimization. Has an external stain "attach[ed]" itself to Miriam, or has her own nature "evoked"

its corresponding "spectre" (76)? Regardless, this irremediable resonance between artist and model obtains a quasi-pathological status, diffusing the taint of sensuality into the very atmosphere: "In their words, or in the breath that uttered them, there seemed to be an odour of guilt, and a scent of blood" (76). Because only quarantine can prevent the transmission of sensual resonance through aesthetic consumption, the one person who achieves intimacy with Miriam, closing the gap between sensual desire and aesthetic embodiment, will fall. In contrast to this hapless erstwhile innocent, the Italian Donatello, the two Americans maintain a fixed aesthetic distance from Miriam at the crucial moment and thereby elude her adulterating touch.

Kenyon, American tourist and artist, first brings to bear the principle of aesthetic detachment in his role as sculptor of the exoticized Cleopatra, an enmarbled Miriam; he will deploy analogous discretion in his climactic encounter with Miriam as woman of art come to life. By means of Kenyon's masterpiece *Cleopatra*, Hawthorne tests the potential of the exercise of aesthetic distance to channel sexual vitality without compromising the moral integrity of the artist or work of art.

Fashioned after Octavius' jilted lover, *Cleopatra* epitomizes sexual vitality as feminine aesthetic. Captured in a moment poised between seduction and self-murder, Cleopatra "might spring upon you like a tigress, and stop the very breath that you were now drawing, midway in your throat" (98). Suppressing nothing, Kenyon has shaped "all Cleopatra—fierce, voluptuous, passionate, tender, wicked, terrible, and full of poisonous and rapturous enchantment" (99), clothed with "a garb [...] best adapted to heighten the magnificence of her charms, and kindle a tropic fire in the cold eyes of Octavius" (98). *Cleopatra's* scarcely-contained sultry grandeur ensures aesthetic immortality, for "she would be one of the images that men keep forever, finding a heat in them, which does not cool down, throughout the centuries" (99).

But the intensity of this "heat" immediately calls up the question of its inception, whether it derived from the sensual contact of flesh with flesh, or whether the sculptor managed to maintain an aesthetic distance that interposed cold marble between his actual flesh and the sculpture's implicit flesh. When Miriam, the living type of *Cleopatra*, makes an appearance at his studio, she immediately seizes on the implications of Kenyon's apparent intimacy with such a prepossessing woman and demands the circumstances of this latent knowledge: "Tell me, did she never try—even while you were creating her—to overcome you with her fury, or her love? Were you not afraid to touch her, as she grew more and more towards hot life, beneath your hand?" (99). Kenyon does not directly address any of these more sensitive questions, but only her last, "How have you learned to do it?" (99). In itself, this last question implies the others, namely, how has Kenyon learned to conceive a sexually-vital yet uncontaminated art?

His answer discloses a process of simple displacement from generative body to generative mind: "I know not how it came about, at last. I kindled a great fire within my mind, and threw in the material—as Aaron threw the gold of the Israelites into the furnace—and, in the midmost heat, uprose Cleopatra, as you see her" (99). Kenyon makes a rhetorical move parallel to that of the Biblical Aaron, who, accused of leading the Israelites into idolatry through the sculpting of a golden calf, disclaims any intimate contact with the defiling materials, saying, "they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!" (Ex. 32.24). Hawthorne's selection of this allusion as the analogue for Kenyon's defense advertises the act of material creation as one of repression. Because Cleopatra emerges independent of any actual artist-model collusion, Kenyon can more easily suppress any correspondence between intellectual and bodily "fire."

Although Richard Brodhead has attempted to read *The Marble Faun* as a critique of repression (Intro xxiv), Hawthorne's purpose in highlighting Kenyon's act of repression does not bear resolving into satire. The alternative—sensual contact between artist and sculpture/model—clearly alarmed and offended him—so much so, that, when a friend objected to his idea of fully-clothed statuary, Hawthorne confided to his journal, "Then let the art perish" (*FIN* 209). In the chapter "Cleopatra," Hawthorne has Miriam echo his journaled sentiments contrasting a bygone era's primeval chastity with illicit present-day reenactments: unlike the case of "an old Greek sculptor" who, "no doubt, found his models in open sunshine, and among pure and princely maidens," the modern sculptor, he suggests, must entertain the volatile intimacy of a privatized gaze. The "guilty glimpses" endemic to the artistic conception then bleed into the work of art itself, and "the marble inevitably loses its chastity under such circumstances" (96). The infamous "coloured Venuses" (96) of the period further literalized this crossover, their flesh-tones disclosing the sensuality of their conception. By contrast, Hawthorne counted on the coldness and whiteness of the traditional bare marble to interpose its inanimateness between the metaphorical warmth inhering in a naked statue and the warmth inhering in the body of the viewer.

In "The Erotics of Purity," Herbert suggests that for men operating within the confines of the paradigm of the cult of domesticity, "struggles to contain their own sexuality make them deeply fearful of the power of women to arouse them, such that only when the woman is portrayed as passionless and helpless can masculine erotic feeling be allowed to surface" (124). Kenyon, in this vein, represses any erotic resonance with the statue of Cleopatra, displacing the need to be fearful of touch onto the implicitly unresponsive sculpted hand of Hilda, which, as *part* of the virginal Hilda, rather than "all" the seductress Cleopatra, inversely calls forth

Kenyon's most scrupulous reverence—as if *it*, rather than Cleopatra, might come to life. Encased in an "ivory coffer," the hand "had assumed its share of Hilda's remote and shy divinity," so that Kenyon "dared not even kiss the image he himself had made" (95). By projecting a lack of resonance onto his virginal love-object, Kenyon can successfully contain the energies invoked by his creation of *Cleopatra*. Concentration on virginal purity thus allows for a subconscious passage of sensuality from artist to image that escapes contaminating contact with the surface of the conscious mind.

By his act of displacement, Kenyon has successfully, if barely, locked Cleopatra's warmth into a purely aesthetic realm. But on the occasion of Miriam's visit, he obtains prospective access to *Cleopatra's* model as live woman, the chance for the knowledge of sexually vital womanhood implicit in the statue (99) to find its corresponding object in the flesh. Patricia Pulham notes how the contrast between *Cleopatra* and the sculpture of Hilda's hand "suggests a passion for Miriam that is channeled into sculpture" (95), implicating Miriam as the unacknowledged model in the artistic process. Miriam's provocative questions regarding the statue's inception, then, take on a more dangerous dimension in the context of her presence alone with Kenyon in his studio, and he will reenact the original repression that made possible the statue's detached purity possible, this time by directly thwarting contact with the contaminating secret of Miriam's past. Burdened with the secret of her resurfaced sexual entanglement, Miriam seeks to confide in Kenyon as the one person who, based on his creation of Cleopatra, surely has a sympathetic knowledge of "womanhood" not of the "ethereal type" (99).

Miriam cannot lure Kenyon, who has emphatically attached himself to Hilda, across the aesthetic distance that keeps her corresponding statue *Cleopatra* locked in the purity of marble, while she herself, the woman-as-model, writhes in the agony of her isolation. The very intensity

of Miriam's need for an intimate to relieve the isolating impact of her secret past ensures Kenyon's interposition of a prudential barrier. When Miriam cries out, "Ah, if I could but whisper it to only one human soul! And you—you see far into womanhood! [...] Perhaps [...] you might understand me! Oh, let me speak!" (100), she associates her secret with the problem of female passion itself, seeking a counterpart. Kenyon's "perfectly frank and kind" response—"if I can help you, speak freely, as to a brother"—accordingly sends her into a tailspin of despair: "Help me? No!" (100) she retorts. In her search for a consolatory intimacy, Kenyon's offer to "help" "if" he can and as a "brother" signals an introduction of distance as willful lack of understanding.

Even though Miriam initially rages over the "gush of passion [...] thus turned back upon her," and accuses Kenyon of being "cold and pitiless as [his] own marble" (100) she ultimately sanctions his act of self-preservation. Upon leaving the studio she reflects, "Unless I had his heart for my own, (and that is Hilda's, nor would I steal it from her,) it should never be the treasure place of my secret. It is no precious pearl [...] but my dark-red carbuncle—red as blood—is too rich a gem to put into a stranger's basket!" (101). The heart of a friend here transforms into a "stranger's basket," but, in the terms of the novel, necessarily so, if Kenyon is to remain the "clear-minded, honorable, true-hearted young man" (101). Only the man willing to immerse himself in an illicit atmosphere of sensuality and blood, "plunging" into the associations deriving from Miriam's sexuality, ultimately to "drown" there, will prove the fit correspondent of her womanhood (101).

Only Donatello, the novel's titular "marble faun" and prelapsarian natural man, crosses the distance to Miriam, unaware that her attractiveness corresponds with her power of contamination. Although the novel iconically locates Donatello's "fall" at the moment when,

half way through the novel, he throws the Model down from a precipice, his fall into the aggressive passions that fuel his murderous act corresponds with his growing intimacy with Miriam. Nancy Proctor contends that Donatello's commission of murder in fact "masks the novel's other, far more central crime [...] a crime of passion, a crime of desire" (62). Miriam, like the other protagonists and the narrator himself, likes to construct Donatello as incapable of sexual passion. But the attribution of primordial innocence to Donatello proves tragic because the very combination of his "natural" sexuality and "natural" naiveté ensures his failure to maintain a requisite aesthetic distance from Miriam as an object of spontaneous attraction.

Miriam's infantilization of Donatello's sexuality allows her to briefly suppress the knowledge of her contaminating powers and enjoy a temporary respite from her isolation. When Donatello passionately avows, "I am glad to have my lifetime while you live; and where you are, be it in cities or fields, I would fain be there too" (33), Miriam responds, "Hilda would never let you speak so, I dare say," adding, to herself, "But he is a mere boy [...] a simple boy, putting his boyish heart to the proof of the first woman whom he chances to meet" (35). Recognizing that Hilda, like Kenyon, would assert a prudential distance in the face of sexual passion, Miriam rationalizes her consent by denigrating Donatello's pronouncements of love to a mere "toy," and their erotic interaction she compares to "playing with a young greyhound" (64). Buonomo notes that Miriam "seems to describe sinister consequences that may result from simple physical contact or proximity with her person" (48) when she provides Donatello with a token "warning against imaginary peril" (*MF* 63), saying, "If you were wiser, Donatello, you would think me a dangerous person. " She nonetheless readily consents to his stubborn attachment: "'I speak in vain,' thought Miriam within herself, 'Well, then, for this one hour, let me be such as he imagines me'" (65). She thus chooses to imagine herself free of contagion and Donatello of susceptibility.

But, at the sudden reappearance of the Model, Miriam discovers she has excited a far greater than "boyish" passion. When Donatello catches sight of the Model, "the expression of his face was fearfully changed, being so disordered, perhaps with terror—at all events, with anger and invincible repugnance—that Miriam hardly knew him" (71). At that moment, the fatal resonance of sexual passion occurs, displaced into the realm of sanguinary aggression. After they both on impulse articulate their hatred for the Model, the narrator notes that Miriam "had no thought of making this avowal, but was irresistibly drawn to it by the sympathy of the dark emotion in her own breast with that so strongly expressed by Donatello" (71). The narrator then characterizes this sympathetic resonance as a transaction of bodily fluids evocative of intercourse: "Two drops of water, or of blood, do not more naturally flow into each other, than did her hatred into his" (71). While Donatello makes the inaugural exclamation of hatred, the source of illicit aggression lies with Miriam, whose prior hatred flows "into his." Because the resonance as yet remains unsealed by the act of murder, Miriam attempts unsuccessfully to reinstate the quarantine of her contamination by sending Donatello away (71).

The murder itself occurs as the spontaneous flaring up of contagious passions, an involuntary transference that obscures Miriam's culpability as the contaminating agent. Having followed a company of tourists to the Tarpeian Rock, Miriam and Donatello discover themselves alone at the edge of a precipice—but "not entirely alone": Miriam's "strange persecutor" approaches (132). Caught up in the crossfire of passions, Miriam "beheld herself as in a dim show, and could not well distinguish what was done and suffered; no, not even whether she were really an actor and sufferer in the scene" (132). Donatello, however, having pitched the Model over the precipice, asserts, "I did what your eyes bade me do, when I asked them with mine" (134). Here Miriam discovers, to her horror, that she has apparently acted the part of catalyst in

the crime, holding a kind of mesmeric sway over Donatello as victim in reenactment of the Model's hold over her own passions: "Could it be so? Had her eyes provoked, or assented to this deed. She had not known it. But alas! [...] she could not deny—she was no sure whether it might be so, or no—that a wild joy had flamed up in her heart, when she beheld her persecutor in his mortal peril" (134). Susan Manning notes that "Action" in *The Marble Faun* "is reduced to glances": "[Miriam's] crime', as Hawthorne's conclusion puts it, 'lay merely in a glance', but one caught, like a fever" (xxxix).

Initiated by passionate glances, the murder serves as the transposed consummation of Miriam and Donatello's sexual desires and signals a fatal collapse of aesthetic distance. Officially sealed together in the realm of "sin, sexual guilt, and death" (Vance 123), subject and object of desire dispense with boundaries, replacing guilty glances with ecstatic touch: Miriam "pressed him close, close to her bosom, with a clinging embrace that brought their two heart together, till the horror and agony of each was combined into one emotion, and that, a kind of rapture" (135). Though the consolation of their union in crime will prove short-lived, and the narrator will censure the sin-born rapture as illusory, the moment nevertheless stands out as the novel's first and only instance of physical and emotional intimacy, a hasty release of tensions that, through the remainder of the narrative, will reassert themselves with a vengeance.

By inflaming and subsequently consummating Donatello's sexual desires, Miriam's sensual body completes its function as a corrupt and corrupting feminine aesthetic. Her inherent affective powers operate on Donatello's instinctive predilection for female beauty to invite and initiate a radical transformation in his nature. This 'fall,' indeed, represents the only such transformation to occur in the novel and, as such, suggests Hawthorne's skepticism towards the idea of the female body as efficacious medium of Christian conversion. As Herbert explains,

"after intimating the inward dialectic of innocence and contamination," Hawthorne "insists finally upon a rigid separation between them" (126), foreclosing the role of redemptive mediation.

Sentimental domestic novelists had deployed the figure of the organic angel as a means of binding together the spheres of flesh and spirit, appropriating the affect of the body on behalf of Christian salvation. By dislocating sexual and emotional desires from carnal ends, the organic angel reintegrated those selves cut loose by midcentury religious disestablishment into a new kind of Protestant communion of saints, where her aestheticized body purported to mediate rather than adulterate the ascetic purity of Protestantism. Her cohesive quality thus functioned as an antidote to the heroic individualism valorized by American Renaissance nonfiction writers like Thoreau and Emerson, whose creative landscapes reflect what Franchot calls the "imperatives of the antebellum Protestant imagination to dissolve the mixtures of human intimacy into the purity of the solitary self" (211). But when Hawthorne tested New England's version of the female saint against her Old World rivals, the pressure of Rome's baroque commingling of sacred and sensual aesthetics forced these puritanical imperatives to resurface in fictional form, dissevering transformative sexual body from ornamental saint.

Hilda's sacral but unapproachable body forbids the kind of affective mediation of the aesthetic female imagined by sentimental domestic authors, and effectively shuts down the conversion process and its corresponding structural movement in the novel. Critics have struggled to reconcile the storyline of Hilda's immutable innocence with the dynamic trajectory of Donatello's fall from an animal innocence into a human culpability, and his subsequent movement toward redemption. In *Contexts for Hawthorne*, Milton Stern outlines the long history of this tension, noting that "At least since F.O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance*,

there has been little disagreement about the general theme of the book, the *felix culpa*, and Hilda's role within it" as standing in direct opposition to the thematic and structural thrust of the narrative (106). Hilda, "putatively the moral arbiter of the Romance," rejects the very premise of the *felix culpa*, "that the effects of sin can lead to an anguished but ennobling understanding of isolation from and community within the magnetic chain of humanity" (106). Stern objects to those readings that "seek to vindicate Hawthorne as an ironist" (107)⁴¹ and explains the novel's obtrusive formal and thematic contradiction in terms of Hawthorne's capitulation to the ideological demands of the marketplace, with its appetite for affirmations of the perpetual innocence of "respectable, Protestant, young America" (107).

In "The Choice of Innocence: Hilda in *The Marble Faun*," Emily Schiller attempts to recuperate Hawthorne's authorial integrity by protesting that Stern too easily "surrenders the story to Hilda and her unrelenting mediocrity" (373). Her resolution to Hilda as formal and thematic disturbance lies in detecting hidden satire, but this approach forces her to confront a daunting collection of apparently non-satirical counter-strains, with which she defensively challenges the critic who would read the novel with the grain rather than against it:

If we hate Hilda so much, why do we assume that Hawthorne likes her? Is it because she seems to represent country, home and wife to a homesick author? Is it because she ends up in the happy couple at the close of the novel? [...] Is it because she silences "heretical" voices [...] Is it because she is said to be "innocent"? [...] Or is it because the narrator takes her part? (373)

⁴¹ Udo Natterman, for instance, in "Dread and Desire: 'Europe in Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*," contends that Hawthorne's "ironic characterization of his American heroine [...] ridicules Hilda's moral and artistic pretentiousness," p. 59.

The answer to these many rhetorical questions—yes—nevertheless glosses over a foreclosure within Schiller's first provocative question. Hawthorne may not, in many respects, "like" Hilda, but both the aspects of the novel that Schiller delineates and the testimony of Hawthorne's personal and private correspondences during his expatriation implicate him in the struggle that Hilda represents, of passing unscathed through the contaminating influences of foreign sensuality and history.

When read as the breakdown of the figure of the organic angel as transformative aesthetic, the apparently contradictory storylines of Miriam/Donatello and Hilda/Kenyon in fact form a complementary whole, centered on Hawthorne's final incredulity over the prospect of a revitalized Protestantism. As affective female aesthetic, Miriam can initiate Donatello's perversion, but ultimately both her and Donatello's "redemption" must be worked out in solitude as an infinite penance without absolution. Hilda, by preserving the kind of absolute distinction between sinful and holy humanity characteristic of Calvinist election, can only effect her own and Kenyon's return to an uneasy but unaltered Protestantism, centered on a regressive feminine aesthetic of divine woman as domestic ornament. Juxtaposed, these plots disclose the breakdown of the organic angel as foundation for a renewed Christian community and its reconciliation of human and divine interests.

In *Hilda*, Hawthorne imagines the female saint as congenitally incapable of experiencing or effecting a transformative erotic resonance; rather she stands as an aesthetic piece of uncompromised origins and therefore radically reduced affect. The lack of sensual resonance associated with virginal interiority forms the basis of Hilda's character and accounts for her ability to "pass" through "corrupt environments" without "being passed through" (Franchot 357). In *Hawthorne: Calvin's Ironic Stepchild*, Agnes McNeill Donohue observes that the "often

covert and furtive references to women's virginity and chastity" in Hawthorne's earlier writing "become almost obsessive in the European notebooks" (230), and adds that "Hawthorne's search for the perfect virgin, as recorded in the *Italian Notebooks*, permeates [*The Marble Faun*]" (268). While Donohue focuses on this preoccupation as a function Hawthorne's residual Calvinism, midcentury sentimental Protestantism better accounts for his anxiety over the intercessory female body, and the failure of the trope denotes his disillusionment with liberal Protestantism's proposed means of reconciling flesh and spirit.⁴²

Set against Miriam's powers of perversion through aesthetic intimacy, Hilda's perennial chasteness encapsulates the principle of aesthetic distance as a means for cleaving flesh and spirit into mutually repellent, static spheres. Hilda both embodies and deploys the strategy of aesthetic distance: the "clear, crystal medium of her own integrity" (298) serves, not as medium of divine light, but as a controlling mechanism for redirecting sensual and sexual knowledge back through the gates of her gaze. The "moral arbiter" of the novel, she herself determines the appropriate distance between subjects and objects of desire, between spectator and art, and between Protestant and Catholicism. Her gaze can effectually return a contagious intrusion of idolatrous desire back through the marble gates of art, disincarnating the contaminated model. In this vein, Miriam will complain to Hilda, "Your very look seems to put me beyond the limits of mankind!" (162), and Kenyon will later declare, "Had you condemned Cleopatra, nothing should have saved her" (294). Even where Miriam as model-in-the-flesh will find herself on the wrong side of Hilda's judgment, she ultimately assents to Kenyon's conclusion that "the white, shining purity of Hilda's nature is a thing apart; and she is bound, by the undefiled material of which God moulded

⁴² Lawrence Buell observes that "it is more customary to see [Hawthorne] as 'post-Puritan' than as 'post-Unitarian.'" See "Rival Romantic Interpretations of New England Puritanism: Hawthorne versus Stowe," p. 85.

her, to keep that severity which I, as well as you, have recognized" (225). Kenyon here depicts Hilda as the literal "undefiled material" of the chaste statue, the uncompromised white marble that relieves the spectator of sensual pressure by advertising its strictly spiritual conception.

Having come all innocent into the world, straight from the uncorrupting hand of God, Hilda maintains an unqualified vertical access to the divine, but at the expense of a horizontal, intercessory role. The strictly skyward dimension of Hilda's spirituality finds literal representation in her residence in Rome—Hilda inhabits and tends a "lofty shrine" of the Virgin Mary (42). While such an abode and service might suggest an intercessory function, the narrator specifically notes that Hilda occupies "a shrine of the Virgin, such as we see everywhere at the street-corners of Rome, but seldom or never, except in this solitary instance, at a height above the ordinary level of men's views and aspirations" (42). In an early visit to the shrine, Miriam remarks to Hilda, "You breathe sweet air, above the evil scents of Rome; and even so, in your maiden elevation, you dwell above our vanities and passions, our moral dust and mud, with the doves and angels for your nearest neighbors" (43-4). The ethereal, detached quality of the shrine takes on added importance in light of the fact that Hawthorne considered titling his novel *St. Hilda's Shrine* (Stern 110). This is, in fact, Hilda's shrine, rather than the Virgin's: she employs it not to implore Mary's mediation for humankind but to "pay honour to the idea of Divine Womanhood" (44), an "idea" ultimately mirroring her own isolate purity.

Unable to serve any intercessory function, Hilda's moral obligation lies with simple perpetuation of her natural-born "Christian innocence" (Vance 125). After inadvertently witnessing the impassioned glance exchanged between Miriam and Donatello, as well as the ensuing crime, Hilda finds herself poisoned by the knowledge of human passion—its origins, tendencies, and expressions. Hilda fears that her witness of the murder may have "impugned" her

"spotlessness" (257), and therefore recoils rapidly and irrevocably from Miriam's body as infected and infecting flesh. Pulham investigates the locus of Hilda's perceived guilt and asks whether "the murder, while triggering an eroticized moment of heterosexual desire between Miriam and Donatello" may also have "provoke[d] Hilda's tacit recognition of her own love for Miriam" (97). Certainly in the gap between the witness of the sin and the diffusion of a feeling of sinfulness within the spectator lies an implicit invitation to the pursuit of illicit desire—to a heightening of intimacy through shared knowledge both cognitive and carnal, mediated through the vulnerability of the gaze. But the difference lies in Hilda's deliberate exercise of a virginal insensibility, a dynamic pictured in the novels' opening paragraph as "the pretty figure of a child, clasping a dove to her bosom, but assaulted by a snake" (7). Sexual temptation for Hilda represents, not the natural resonance between sensual bodies, but a forcible penetration by an exterior evil. As a result, Hilda's sudden recognition of Miriam's sensuality sparks an instantaneous recoil and closure that cuts off the contaminating interpenetration of eye and flesh, reasserting the power of aesthetic distance.

This boundless capacity for self-preservation, however, comes at the cost of conversion, of the reconciliation between human and divine natures that forms the basis of Christian community. When, the morning following the murder, Miriam climbs the steps to the Virgin's Shrine, Hilda will offer her nothing but a reinforcement of the hopeless gulf between their natures, and the priority of her own purity over Miriam's rescue. Miriam herself recognizes the necessity of detachment, but, given over to her yearning for physical and emotional intimacy, determines to risk Hilda's innocence just as she did Donatello's. The narrator and Miriam muse together over the risks of contamination through bodily contact, whether Miriam, "guilty as she was" could "permit Hilda to kiss her cheek, to clasp her hand, and thus to be no longer so

unspotted from the world as heretofore" (159). She first resolves to prevent this transgression of her "white-souled" (158) friend, saying, "I will never permit her sweet touch again [...] if I can find strength of heart to forbid it" (159); but, overcome by an instinct urgency for touch, Miriam crosses the distance anyway.

In the charged moment of encounter, Miriam's aesthetic and sensual appeal appear at their most formidable because disguised as a medium of divine light: "she appeared to have dressed herself up in a garb of sunshine, and was disclosed, as the door swung open, in all the glow of her remarkable beauty" (161). Like Raphael's renditions of the Virgin Mary, Miriam captivates through her beauty even as she threatens to translate the vulnerable viewer to a sensual, rather than spiritual locus of conception. As polluted and polluting model come to life, Miriam imperils Hilda with the prospect of actual fleshly embrace, an invitation exponentially magnified through her real human need for intimacy: "She forgot, just one instant, all cause for holding herself aloof. Ordinarily there was a certain reserve in Miriam's demonstrations of affection, in consonance with the delicacy of her friend. To-day, she opened her arms to take Hilda in" (161). The narrator stresses the invitation as an enfolding into Miriam's flesh; she seeks, not to be taken in by Hilda, but "to take Hilda in," a forced translation into a contaminated sphere and a reenactment of her gesture to serve as animated model for Cleopatra, immersing her artist in the deadly depths of her "secret" womanhood.

A copyist by trade and therefore lacking the creative vitality of Kenyon as sculptor, Hilda cannot displace her knowledge of Miriam's secret into the realm of art; her encounter with Miriam accordingly necessitates a more rigorous strategy of containment. To counter Miriam's summons to intimacy, Hilda transmutes the space between viewer and desirable object into a medium of separation rather than communion: "When her friend made a step or two from the

door," Hilda "put forth her hands with an involuntary repellent gesture, so expressive, that Miriam at once felt a great chasm opening itself between the two" (161). Hilda as surely as Miriam acts on instinct, her protest the "involuntary" backlash of an innocent nature deflecting assault by evil. As the narrator pictures it, the two women inhabit states as absolute and inexorable in their separation as that of the saved and the damned in the afterlife: "They might gaze at one another from the opposite sides, but without the possibility of ever meeting more; or, at least, since the chasm could never be bridged over, they must tread the whole round of Eternity to meet on the other side" (161). Hilda's repellent gaze here cleaves human nature from intercessory aid as mercilessly as Calvin himself; material bodies and aesthetic appeal can no more mediate reconciliation across the "chasm" of natures than the damned can remove an elect soul from the hand of God. Hilda accordingly "expressed a kind of confidence" in commanding Miriam's aloofness, "as if the girl were conscious of a safeguard that could not be violated" (161). This inviolable inheritance comprises a virginal sensibility that recoils by instinct from the same force of appeal that ensnares those subject by nature to human passions.

In spite of its interest in the Christian arc of redemption, across *The Marble Faun* questions of repentance and purification yield to this implacable fact of quarantine between human beings as subjects and objects of desire. The effect of this puritanical "imperative" consists ultimately in a concession to sensuality in aesthetics as superior in affect to the sacred, and, by extension, the sensual woman as overpowering the sacral essence of the female saint. Hilda herself openly justifies her detachment from Miriam in these terms, saying,

If I were one of God's angels, with a nature incapable of stain, and garments that could never be spotted, I would keep ever at your side, and try to lead you upward. But I am a poor, lonely girl, whom God has set here in an evil world,

and given her only a white robe, and bid her wear it back to Him, as white as when she put it on. Your powerful magnetism would be too much for me. The pure, white atmosphere, in which I try to discern what things are good and true, would be discoloured. (162-3)

Hilda sets up her defense in terms of the discourse characterizing antebellum Protestants' sense of tension between Catholicism and their native faith as a choice between deprivation and excess, whiteness and color, original purity and intermediary corruption.⁴³ In the moment of Miriam's profound deprivation of any human solace, Hilda sets up a counter-deprivation, the poverty and loneliness of having "only a white robe." But this very deprivation constitutes the negative power of her virginal sensibility, representative of a larger religious and cultural heritage: Hilda will at least remain pure—she can at least anywhere, anytime reassert the boundaries of her innocence, born out of a fusion of Puritan election and Unitarian optimism about human goodness.

The fallout of this discrimination between vitality and purity is the failure of the organic angel as transformative trope; Hilda cannot "lead" Miriam "upward"—she can only escape or succumb to the perverting magnetism of the sensual woman. But while transformative power lies with Miriam, the force of moral definition lies with Hilda, who can denounce and quarantine the source of contamination but can neither redirect human passions to higher ends nor countenance the redemption of a nature compromised by misdirected sexual desires.

Counterfeit Confession and Failed Transformation

⁴³ See Franchot, p. 242 for Protestant "anxieties about purity and contamination" expressed "through references to whiteness and color."

Hilda's implacable consignment of the sinner to perpetual isolation corresponds directly with Hawthorne's anxiety about the Roman Catholic version of reconciliation between penitent and God, one which involved the capacity of a priest as mediator to confer the absolution of sins. Hawthorne, who spent "long hours" at confessionals, "meditating and musing or timing confessions" (Donahue 259), praised what he saw as the confessional's psychologically purgative capacity. Nevertheless, the intimate exchange within the confessional echoed that of the art studio in its interposition of sensual flesh between seeker and medium of divine inspiration, and it bred in Hawthorne's imagination a two-fold fear: first, that the hidden dynamic between confessor and penitent would facilitate the spread of contamination by producing an illicit resonance between them, and secondly, that the Church's claims regarding the spiritual efficacy of absolution would encourage an idolatrous attribution of moral purification to human agency. The confessional's "notorious powers of seduction" had long scandalized "conservative Protestants" (Franchot 212), a trend exacerbated midcentury by proliferating anti-Catholic publications. The fabricated *Awful Disclosures, by Maria Monk, of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery of Montreal*, for instance, first published in 1836, sold more than three hundred thousand copies over the next twenty-five years (Gutjahr 167) and purported to disclose confessionals as a mere pretext for sexual exploitation on the part of lascivious priests (175). Stowe's 1862 novel *Agnes of Sorrento*, though sympathetic towards Catholic aesthetics, would similarly stage the tortured sexual desires awakened in a priest by the guileless confessions of a young female penitent.

To Hawthorne, the confessional represented a potentially ideal arrangement compromised by the humanity of its parties: in *The Italian Notebooks*, he reflected that the "relation between the confessor and penitent might, and ought to be, one of great [55] tenderness and beauty [...] If its ministers were themselves a little more than human, they might fulfill their office, and supply

all that men need" (91). In *The Marble Faun* as narrator he would echo this sentiment, declaring that "If there were but angels to work it [...] the system would soon vindicate the dignity and holiness of its origin" (268). To solve this complicating factor of flesh within the novel, Hawthorne alters, not the character of the "class of engineers who now manage its cranks and safety-valves" (268), but the character of the penitent—rather than sending sinful flesh to priestly flesh, he sends angel to priest, thereby eliminating the risk of contaminating sensual resonance between human beings.

Hawthorne permits Hilda among all the characters to approach the sacramental heart of the Church, not only because she lacks a threatening sexual interiority, but because, by extension, she has no occasion to mistake the psychological and emotional resources of the Church for divine clemency of sexual sins. Ironically, the actual Catholic characters and iconic sinners of the novel—Donatello and Miriam—Hawthorne consigns to work out their salvation through a harsh and lonely pilgrimage, contemplating in perpetual isolation the import of their sins at private shrines, and never pictured in communion with either the Catholic Mass or the Sacrament of Reconciliation, lest they find themselves, "kneeling for a little while at the confessional, and rising unburdened, active, and incited by fresh appetite for the next ensuing sin" (320). Under the illusion that the Church's absolution has cleansed them from the contaminating effects of sin, mercenary penitents rise up to sin more, compounding contamination and producing that "mass of unspeakable corruption, the Roman Church" (284). Idolatrous practice and sensual appetite thus work hand in hand: availing themselves of a blasphemous absolution, Donatello and Miriam might mistakenly believe themselves purified and reintegrate within the Christian community, instead of seeking by quarantine what Hilda enjoys by nature—a strictly vertical, unmediated access to spirit. Precisely because Hilda lacks

by nature the capacity and desire to sin, Hawthorne can test his speculations on the possibility of isolating out the psychological efficacy of the sacraments from what he saw as their perverse tendency toward sensual and idolatrous indulgence.

Hawthorne creates the occasion for Hilda's visit to the confessional by mirroring actual culpability and her feelings of violation, the search for mercy and the search for comfort. As Hilda broods over her cognitive fall from innocence, an emotional torpor ensues that resembles "a half-dead serpent knotting its cold, inextricable wreaths about her limbs," a type of "that peculiar despair [...] which only the innocent can experience, although it possesses many of the same gloomy characteristics that mark a sense of guilt" (256). The "snake" of "Evil" (7) assaults her as alien element, necessitating only an extraction of "the dark story which had infused its poison into her innocent life" (277). Herbert describes how "Beset by such consternations, Hilda seems to drift along the edges of actual contamination, as though her innocence were a twin sister of Miriam's defilement" ("Erotics" 127-8). Unfallen from grace but in desperate need of psychological purgation, Hilda ventures from her dovecote to wander through St. Peter's Cathedral, in search of a strictly maternal figure who, unlike Miriam, can console her with uncontaminated flesh. When, shortly before, Hilda knelt "before the Virgin's shrine" in prayer, Hawthorne took care to interpose this distinction between maternal and blasphemous flesh: "was Hilda to be blamed?" he ventured, "It was not a Catholic, kneeling at an idolatrous shrine, but a child, lifting its tear-stained face to seek comfort from a Mother!" (259).

But Hilda who, as she proceeds through the Cathedral, "lingered before the shrines and chapels of the Virgin, and departed from them with reluctant steps" (270), cannot find the consummation of the Protestant domestic mother in Catholic iconography. Unlike the figure of the organic angel, 19th century representations of the domestic mother, typically absent in body

and present only in spirit, stressed her intercessory powers as maternal rather than erotic, and therefore sanctioned as wholly self-effacing and spiritual. If Hilda could find the domestic "Mother" fulfilled in Catholic iconography, then, Hawthorne suggests, Catholicism could revitalize Protestant aesthetics without a dangerous sensual affect; instead, however, Hilda instinctively recognizes the eroticism at the root of the images' power:

If the painter had presented Mary with a heavenly face, poor Hilda was now in the very mood to worship her, and adopt the faith in which she held so elevated a position. But she saw that it was merely the flattered portrait of an earthly beauty, the wife, at best, of the artist, or, it might be, a peasant-girl of the Campagna, or some Roman princess to whom he desired to pay his court. (270)

The material base of aesthetic production belies, for the Protestant Hilda/Hawthorne, iconography's claim to divine mediation. "Here," the narrator explains, Hilda's "delicate appreciation of Art stood her in good stead, and lost Catholicism a convert [...] She never found just the Virgin Mother whom she needed" (270).

Unable to access the domestic mother as comforter through aesthetic means, Hilda turns irresistibly from shrines to confessional. Upon her discovery of a confessional designated for English-speakers, the narrator declares that "If she had heard her mother's voice from within the tabernacle, calling her, in her own mother-tongue, to come and lay her poor head in her lap, and sob out all her troubles, Hilda could not have responded with a more inevitable obedience" (277). The anonymity of the confessional and the purity of the "penitent" allows Hawthorne to set up the interchange as an unmediated relation between the domestic Mother and her troubled, innocent daughter, so that at the apparent heart of a sacramental matrix Hilda actually reinforces the boundaries of her ascetic Protestant subjectivity. The voice of the priest "acted like a

magnetism in attracting the girl's confidence to this unseen friend" (277), but the magnetism lies not between flesh and flesh, but between angel (278) and the invisible.

For, as Hilda will shortly demonstrate, she has placed no confidence at all in the priest as spiritual authority; in passing through the confessional, she simply cleaves the Sacrament of Reconciliation into unrelated acts of confession and absolution, separating out the psychological efficacy from the falsely imputed spiritual efficacy, the psychology from the sacrament.⁴⁴ Notably, Hawthorne has the priest emerge from behind the screen in order to administer absolution, so that at the crucial moment any "magnetism" between Hilda and "an unseen friend" has been broken. Hilda who assents to a "voice" in its role as confessor recoils from the man in his role as priest, affirming that she has resonated with nothing extrinsic to her "New England birth" (278). When the priest demands on what basis Hilda, as self-confirmed heretic, has come to "avail" herself of the "blessed privileges [...] of Confession and Absolution," Hilda reacts with horrified astonishment to the implied idolatry and responds with a prescription of salvation worked out in isolation:

"Absolution, Father?" exclaimed Hilda, shrinking back. "Oh, no, no! I never dreamed of that! Only our Heavenly Father can forgive my sins; and it is only by sincere repentance of whatever wrong I may have done, and by my own best efforts towards a higher life, that I can hope for His forgiveness! (279)

⁴⁴ See Gary J. Scrimgeour, "*The Marble Faun*: Hawthorne's Faery Land," on forms of penance: "The story of Hilda's sufferings seems specifically designed to illustrate their psychological (but not their metaphysical) efficacy [...]. Neatly she distinguishes between the acceptable and the unacceptable," p. 281.

Hilda's declaration seems rather gratuitous for a context of which she insists, "It was the sin of others that drove me thither, not my own" (285)—but her definition of redemption proves the operative one for the novel in its emphasis on sustained private effort toward an uncertain goal.

But unlike Donatello and Miriam, consigned to this lonely and ambiguous pilgrimage, Hilda can reunite with the spirit of the lost domestic mother, who collapses flesh and spirit into the original harmony of the unbroken divine/human continuum which Hilda inhabits as born innocent. Hilda's stint in the confessional represents a psychological rebirth (283) into primordial unity, the subsuming of art's duplicity into an aboriginal wholeness with the immaculate mother. She thus defends her appropriation of the sacrament in terms of her motherlessness, an extension of her Protestant expatriation: "I am a motherless girl, and a stranger here in Italy. I had only God to take care of me, and be my closest friend; and the terrible, terrible crime, which I have revealed to you, thrust itself between Him and me" (279). Hilda's joy and the "soften[ing]" of her "virgin pride" (287) subsequent to the confession point to her recovery of the maternal-infantile tenderness contained within the mother-child bond. This regressive reification of purity purges her of the knowledge of sexual desire attendant upon maturation into womanhood and triggers Hilda's initiation from lonely girl into household goddess, from virgin daughter to chaste wife (357). As such, it will preclude the need for any further interaction with the Church (285), or ultimately with Rome and its art, as forms of aesthetic mediation between divine and human natures.

Because Hilda represents Hawthorne's experiment with revitalizing Protestantism through Catholicism's material resources, he takes care to emphasize the infiltration of her virginal purity with a novel warmth following her receptivity to the confessional's solace. But what appears to be an incipient transformation of Hilda's character turns out to be merely an

enlargement of a preexisting ascetic Protestant subjectivity.⁴⁵ Having witnessed Hilda's entrance to the confessional, Kenyon challenges her on her apparent perversion from an inherited Protestant innocence through a defection from sacred aesthetics, unaware of her invincible capacity to evacuate the sensual from the sacred: "You were a creature of imagination, and yet as truly a New England girl as any with whom you grew up in your native village," he laments,

If there were one person in the world, whose native rectitude of thought, and something deeper, more reliable than thought, I would have trusted against all the arts of a priesthood—whose taste, alone, so exquisite and sincere that it rose to be a moral virtue, I would have rested upon as sufficient safeguard—it was yourself!
(285)

As a "creature of imagination," Hilda inhabits a world of aesthetic appeal, but as provincial "New England girl," she inhabits a world of ascetic allegiance to a disincarnate divine. She represents, in other words, Hawthorne's desire to have his cake and eat it too, to consume a decadent aesthetics without a spiritual compromise.

But Hilda—unlike Kenyon or Hawthorne himself—entertains as safeguard "something deeper, more reliable than thought," a virginal lack of resonance with Rome's sensuality.⁴⁶ She

⁴⁵ Buonomo treats the change in Hilda as evidence of "the transformation of [her] character," but observes the paradox that "while acquiring the warmth and softness that make her learn, at least, to accept Kenyon's love, she retains nonetheless an adamant sternness of judgment as regards the separation of rights and wrongs," p. 57.

Nathalia Wright makes a similar contention that Hilda "develops in Rome, though not, like Donatello, with loss of innocence. Her moral vision remains virtually unchanged, but by the end of the novel she has passed from maidenhood to womanhood and is ready to marry Kenyon." See *American Novelists in Italy*, p. 159.

⁴⁶ In "Fauns and Mohicans: Narratives of Extinction and Hawthorne's Aesthetic of Modernity," Kristie Hamilton makes the case that "Although she may seem too little changed at the conclusion of the novel for our taste,

can thus artlessly protest, "But what have I done that a girl of New England birth and culture, with the right sense that her mother taught her, and the conscience that she developed in her, should not do?" (285). To reassure Kenyon, Hilda uses a rhetoric he will recognize and reverence, the language of maternal domesticity, with its transference of virginal sensibility from immaculate mother to vestal daughter. Franchot notes that midcentury discourses promoting "maternal nurture" tended to pit "Protestant (especially Unitarian and orthodox Calvinist) 'coldness' against Catholic 'warmth'" (246). Hilda's revitalization, her sudden "flow of spirits" (287), stems not from an infusion of Catholic sensuality but a reconnection with the sanitized tenderness of an imputed domestic mother; she takes on only the "warmth" of the Protestant maternal even as she passes through the portals of a more dangerous Catholic "warmth."

As a result, when Kenyon tests Hilda for spiritual defection by checking her aesthetic preferences, he finds her apparent foray into the "colour" of Catholic worship has in fact left her "love" for "the white light" untouched (284). As bait, Kenyon disingenuously proposes that St. Peter's "ordinary panes of glass" be replaced by "painted windows," saying, "Daylight, in its natural state, ought not to be admitted here. It should stream through a brilliant illusion of Saints and Hierarchies, and old Scriptural images, and symbolized Dogmas, purple, blue, golden, and a broad flame of scarlet" (284). This adulteration of light would then "be just such an illumination as the Catholic faith allows its believers" (284). With a mournful flourish he adds, "But, give

especially when compared with the dynamic Miriam, in fact, Hawthorne takes care to suggest that his pragmatically refashioned but still idealized [Hilda] had been brought to an 'intimate' way of knowing that 'sin' or crime palpably exists and that this 'consciousness' had become a permanent element of her being" pp. 47-48. But Hilda resists transformation precisely because this knowledge remains extrinsic to her own nature and can therefore be repelled without compromising her ideal purity.

me—to live and die in—the pure, white light of Heaven!" (284). In place of this distinction, Hilda, who insists that she "love[s] the white light, too," offers an imaginative "allegory," "The Recovery of the Sacred Candlestick,' which absorbs all colors into an unpolluted white flame: "As each branch is lighted," she imagines, "it shall have a different coloured lustre from the other six; and when all the seven are kindled, their radiance shall combine into the intense white light of Truth!" (288).

Hilda's allegory, which Kenyon heralds as "magnificent," at once reflects Hawthorne's ideal and his imaginative failure. The "intense white light of Truth" purports to absorb, and therefore include and transcend, "the richness of colour" (284). But the result of this purifying of color through consumption, as the allegory itself reveals, proves symptomatically identical with a simple colorless purity. No trace of color remains, only an imagined intensification of a preexisting whiteness. Rome and its richness of color is thus, in Franchot's words, "killed off to unleash the self-purifying mobility of Protestant subjectivity" (356). The enlargement of the "white light of Truth" to include all of Catholicism's beguiling colors, its "purple, blue, golden, and [...] broad flame of scarlet," serves as a [...] conceptual sleight-of-hand, a non-transformative development that mirrors Hilda's untenable trajectory from congenital innocent to sexless wife.

Just as Hawthorne finally resists imagining a colored purity, so he will finally resist the construction of a female sexuality concurrent with piety. Hawthorne, as Herbert rightly argues, insists on "looking upon Hilda's purity as an absolute, kept entirely free of the womanly sexual power [...] that betokens its loss" (128). As a result, even when Hilda undertakes an epic journey through Rome's most notorious "precincts of contamination," a symbolic parallel to her passage through the confessional, she resurfaces both "unbesmirched" (128) and "tenderer than she was" before (*MF* 333), ready to yield to Kenyon's proposal of matrimony. This paradoxically static

maturation of Hilda from girl-child to girl-wife takes the form of what Herbert identifies as "a scenario" that Hawthorne "cannot describe" (128). Because the relation between husband and wife necessarily implies female sexuality, "the testing from which Hilda emerges [...] is explicitly designated as unimaginable" (128).

So far from suggesting that Hilda has descended into the realm of earthy sexuality, the narrator commends to the reader's imagination a narrative of Hilda in an aesthetic afterlife of reunion with artists and their masterpieces "painted in heavenly colors" (351). Safely ensconced above the world which requires its conciliatory powers, art at last finds its ideal viewer. In this realm of substance purged of sensual associations, even the dubious Raphael can take Hilda "by the hand" (351), for celestial art mediates only "higher scene[s]" painted, "not from imagination, but as revealed to [...] actual sight!" (351). Here, finally, Hilda finds the perfect sacred feminine aesthetic, the Virgin Mother she had been looking for: through a glance at Perugino's easel "she discerned what seemed a Woman's face, but so divine, by the very depth and softness of its Womanhood, that a gush of happy tears blinded the maiden's eyes, before she had time to look" (351). Just as "heavenly colors" enjoy no analogue in the human imagination, so Hawthorne at once presents and withdraws this "unimaginable" Woman from the field of representation. She is at once seen and not seen, because not seeable. We can only infer her presence and Hilda's complete resonance with her affect—so complete that a gush of tears forecloses her view.

The hypothetical moment of resonance between "maiden" viewer and Virgin Mother of art secures Hilda's passage from enshrined virgin above the streets of Rome to enshrined virgin mother/wife at home, a softening process initiated by her sojourn through the confessional. The night of Hilda's return to "the actual world" (351), the "lamp beneath the Virgin's shrine burned as brightly as if it had never been extinguished" (352), belying the loss of maidenhood intimated

by Hilda's mysterious desertion and the going out of the shrine's eternal flame. Indeed, so far from having attained the "womanly sexual power" that bespeaks the "loss" of virginity (Herbert 128), Hilda responds to Kenyon's plea for lifelong "guidance" by crying and protesting, "I am a poor weak girl, and have no such wisdom as you fancy in me" (357). Kenyon, of course, maintains his exalted view of Hilda as one clothed "with white wisdom" as with "a celestial garment" (357), counterpart to her enmarbled chastity. The conceptual distance perpetuated by this sanitized aesthetic makes possible the fulfillment of Kenyon's wish to "draw her down" without "sin" to "an earthly fireside" (289), as the simple relocation of her untouchability from a foreign to a domestic space. In the narrator's words, "Hilda was coming down from her old tower, to be herself enshrined and worshipped as a household Saint, in the light of her husband's fireside" (357).

In spite of its hallowed aura, this forecast of Hilda's static future as domestic ornament signals a radical reduction of the powers of the female saint as envisioned by domestic novels' representations of the organic angel, and it clinches the novel's rejection of a transformative feminine aesthetic. Hilda fails to undergo the combined physical and spiritual transfiguration that would mobilize the affect of mature sexuality for religious ends, and liberal Protestant figurations of Christian conversion depended on the female body's capacity to transform and be transformed. Absent the impetus of this trope, *The Marble Faun's* narrative stutters to an inconclusive close, caught between its illusory development and a final settled reality of simple self-preservation.

Franchot observes that of all Hawthorne's works, *The Marble Faun* "has been judged the most ambitious failure of his career" (350). Stern, for instance, contends that the novel comprised an attempt on Hawthorne's part to illustrate the daring doctrine of the *felix culpa* but regressed

into affirmations of facile piety: "*The Marble Faun*," he declares, "was Miriam and Donatello's book, but Hilda and Kenyon inherited the stage and the narrative commitments demanded by an ending" (125). I would argue, however, that Hawthorne's investment in the primacy of Hilda and Kenyon's destiny preexisted any emergent concerns about marketplace viability. Charles Swann provides a useful insight into the novel's narrative structure when he suggests that *The Marble Faun* constitutes at once "a partial figure" and "a finished product" (194), "bearing as it does the signs that it has been laboured over, and that the labour (in conventional terms) has been abandoned" (195). Conceived of as Hawthorne's experiment with revitalizing Protestantism through a Catholic aesthetics centered on the figure of the affective female body, *The Marble Faun's* narrative failure proves a logical extension of its thematic thrust, rather than a contradiction. The exhaustion of its plot signals the collapse, not of Hawthorne's authorial control, but of the conceptual labor of a project whose outcome left him where he began.⁴⁷

The redemptive movement of the novel depended on the spiritual efficacy of the sacred feminine to redirect sexual energies toward a higher purity, reconciling human and divine nature. This figuration, however, proved untenable for Hawthorne against the backdrop of a sexualized and sanguine Rome. As a result, the divergence of two unsustainable storylines find reification at the novel's end, with Hilda and Kenyon destined for a chaste union preservative of aesthetic distance, and Miriam and Donatello destined for permanent exile from each other and Christian community. If, as Donahue asserts, "in his best works, Hawthorne sees redemption for no one" (273), then *The Marble Faun* might well be judged the most ambitious success of his career. For

⁴⁷ Nathalia Wright suggested that the "most damaging flaws in the novel—the episode of Hilda's disappearance and the failure to dispose satisfactorily of Miriam and Donatello—seem [...] to be primarily the result of Hawthorne's desire to insure an atmosphere of romantic mystery." Hawthorne, however, certainly had at his disposal other means of mystifying his narrative than a resort to ostensible "damaging flaws." See *American Novelists in Italy*, p.167.

so far from serving as a reinvigoration of Protestant aesthetics, *The Marble Faun* concludes by imposing ascetic proscriptions onto its Catholic characters. Robert Milder observes of Hawthorne's works generally that "whatever Hawthorne might hypothesize about a higher innocence [...] it is notable that none of his fictive *sinner*s is allowed [...] to find happiness in later life (11).⁴⁸ A certain exile and an uncertain quest for mercy mark the fates of Miriam and Donatello, while a retreat from aesthetic mediation and an accompanying sense of defeat mar Hilda and Kenyon's official happiness.

In the absence of a conciliatory female body, "the figure who emerges with final authority is [...] Hilda" (*Dearest* 269): absent redemption, innocence triumphs over contamination. Miriam, therefore, must follow the prescriptions for penance as set forth by Hilda in the confessional, and her journey toward (potential) forgiveness for sin in the next life dovetails with a journey deeper and deeper into temporal exile. Miriam's final appearance before Kenyon and Hilda in the Pantheon so completes this process of estrangement that Kenyon and Hilda have at first to speculate on the identity of the "figure of a female penitent, kneeling on the pavement, just beneath the great central Eye, in the very spot which Kenyon had designated as the only one whence prayers should ascend" (356). Miriam enjoys no other recourse to the divine than the unmediated opening to white light—no companion, no saint, no Virgin Mother, no Christ.

Her quest for mercy necessitates a radical suppression of the body and its famed beauty; as a consequence, "the upturned face was invisible, behind a veil or mask, which formed part of

⁴⁸ Approaching Miriam's fate from a racial-biological angle, Hamilton similarly notes that "Hawthorne allows his dark-haired [...] mixed-race characters to live, but he leaves them incapable of reproduction." See "Fauns and Mohicans: Narratives of Extinction and Hawthorne's Aesthetic of Modernity," p. 55. In exchange for her survival, the narrative subjects Miriam to permanent abstinence and aesthetic sterility.

the [penitential] garb" (356). Only when "the kneeling figure, beneath the open Eye of the Pantheon, arose [...] looked towards the pair, and extended her hands with a gesture of benediction," do Hilda and Kenyon recognize Miriam with certitude. So far from rushing into their arms in search of a renewed intimacy, however, Miriam adopts the attitude of submission to her fate as outcast that Hawthorne imputes to the painting of Beatrice Cenci when he writes, "not that she appeals to you for help and comfort, but is more conscious than we can be that there is none in reserve for her" (*FIN* 93). Hilda and Kenyon indeed make no offer of help and comfort; rather "they suffered her to glide out of the portal [...] without a greeting; for those extended hands, even while they blessed, seemed to repel, as if Miriam stood on the other side of a fathomless abyss, and warned them from its verge" (357).

Miriam, whose transformative sensual body has ushered Donatello into "the world of sin, sexual guilt, and death" (Vance 123), can neither redirect his fallen passions nor accommodate their mutual desires by way of a marriage grounded in fleshly love—a union that would involve a sacralizing of Miriam's sexuality that the novel declines to envision. Thus when Kenyon takes the part of initially authorizing their companionship, he does so in terms of radical proscription, saying "Take heed; for you love one another, and yet your bond is twined with such black threads, that you must never look upon it as identical with the ties that unite other loving souls [...] There would be no holy sanction on your wedded life" (251). The implicit mention of sexual intimacy sets Donatello "shuddering," and Miriam "also shuddering" (251), as they adopt a deportment of radical self-containment. Donatello may have acquired a higher intellectual nature as a result of his fall into sin, but this fall remains circumscribed by the implacable fact of his contamination.

Not in spite of but because of his deepened human capacity for sin and love, Donatello and Miriam by the story's conclusion have already undergone separation from one another. Kenyon anticipates and in fact prescribes this ultimate segregation when, after blessing their companionship "for mutual elevation and encouragement towards a severe and painful life," he adds one final consideration—that "If ever, in your lives, the highest duty should require either of you the sacrifice of the other, meet the occasion without shrinking" (352). Donatello and Miriam instinctively "shrink from happiness" (251) as the corollary of human intimacy, specifically sexual intimacy, and prove obedient to Kenyon's challenge to sacrifice one another for the sake of "the highest duty." The conclusion of the novel leaves them stranded apart in ambiguity and isolation: "For, what was Miriam's life to be? And where was Donatello?" (358). Cordoned off from the narrative by virtue of their irremediable contamination, Miriam and Donatello move to the periphery of a Protestant gaze directed beyond, rather than through, the colored windows of Catholicism, for "Hilda had a hopeful soul, and saw sunlight on the mountain-tops" (358).⁴⁹

Just as Miriam and Donatello must forgo every material resource in their effort to vertically apprehend the divine, so Hilda and Kenyon, upon reaching the end of their sojourn through "The Land of Picture," relinquish the role of aesthetics in worship as a perversion of direct ascetic contemplation of an abstract God. As they walk in the final chapter through the Pantheon, prior to their encounter with Miriam, Kenyon notes the solemnizing effect of the "aperture in the Dome—the great Eye, gazing heavenward" (354) and directs Hilda's gaze to the mossy pavement beneath. In response, Hilda turns his attention to an aesthetic of uncorrupted

⁴⁹ See Franchot for Hawthorne as "voyeur narrator" who "images Roman Catholicism as the secret interior of his fiction," but who himself "wants not only to stay outside but to look outside" p. 357.

light: "I like better,' replied Hilda, 'to look at the bright, blue sky, roofing the edifice where the builders left it open [...] Look at that broad, golden beam—a sloping cataract of sunlight—which comes down from the aperture upon the shrine, at the right hand of the entrance!" (354-5). The couple then investigate whether the sunlight's "strong illumination" of the shrine signals the divine inspiration of its accompanying picture. Not only does the icon instead reveal itself "a picture little worth looking at," but an unfortunate peasant unwittingly directs his prayers to a "very plump and comfortable tabby-cat" sleeping amongst the shrines' candles (355). This combined evidence of an absurd material misdirection of human adoration prompts Kenyon to "seriously" announce,

Then Hilda [...] the only place in the Pantheon for you and me to kneel is on the pavement beneath the central aperture. If we pray at a Saint's shrine, we shall give utterance to earthly wishes; but if we pray, face to face with the Deity, we shall feel impious to petition for aught that is narrow and selfish. (355)

To do otherwise than confront the invisible "face to face" comprises, Kenyon concludes, a scenario "very tempting!": namely, "the delight" Catholics take "in the worship of Saints" as a "canonized humanity" ready to patronize their sinful indulgences (355). In the very moment Kenyon sums up Catholic aesthetics as venal and seductive, Miriam makes her appearance to confirm the grim consequences of a misdirected gaze.

The holding out of a veiled Miriam's hands in a combined gesture of benediction and repulse (357) dramatizes Hawthorne's Protestant subjugation of Rome's counter feminine aesthetic. Transformative body circumscribed by an opaque seal, Miriam discloses only enough flesh to ward off her aesthetic successor from the "fathomless abyss" of sensuality. Miriam at once forbids further recourse to Catholic art and sanctions Kenyon and Hilda's reduction of

sacred aesthetics to domestic ornament. Rather than representing a transfer of Miriam's transformative powers onto Hilda's New World purity, the gesture creates an iconic "moment of stasis [...] reached by the pressure of opposites" (Swann 211). In this moment Hawthorne forcibly rectifies the imbalance of power resulting from the confrontation of unequal feminine aesthetics, as Miriam relinquishes through concealment the power of influence that Hilda never had.

The subjugation of Miriam operates as a substitute for the transformation of Hilda and completes the novel's regressive structure as a kind of "de-conversion narrative" (Franchot 259), a retreat from prospective conciliatory aesthetics. By superimposing its own heritage of ascetic proscription onto Rome's representative irresistible woman, Protestantism rejects the logical trajectory of its emerging interest in an affective aesthetics centered on the female body.

Brigitte Bailey has pointed out that,

In spite of [the] habitual polarization of a Catholic Italy and a putatively Protestant United States, tourist writings suggest that under the surface of this opposition the example of "Romanism," as an organization that shaped a community through powerfully consolidating aesthetic experiences, spoke to an evolving concept of U.S. as a nation which was attempting to affectively bound community, secured through a national "religion." (69)

In *The Marble Faun* as tourist fiction, the breakdown of this prospective imitation triggers a breakdown in the "national imaginary," "marked" in the "antebellum period" by "a turn to the visual" (Bailey 69). Vance explains how midcentury Americans conceived of Rome as "a city with no future," and therefore "antithetical to what America was and (in all ways except aesthetic) to dreams of what it might become" (xx). Because America's "dreams of what it might

become" as national community relied on the power of conciliatory aesthetics that Rome seemed at once to consummate and degrade, the failure to appropriate that power disrupted its futurity-centered self-conception.

Benedict Anderson has argued for a "strong affinity" between national and religious "imaginings" (18), and that the genre of the novel "provided the technical means for 're-presenting' the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation" (30). For the United States, the burden of millennialism, with its drive to immanently reconcile the spiritual and material worlds, served as the lynchpin of a nascent antebellum national identity,⁵⁰ and the trope of the organic angel as both subject and agent of spiritual transformation afforded a concrete means of envisioning this vertical and horizontal consolidation of interests. Stripped of capacity either to convert or be converted, Hilda as failed organic angel empties out the heart of this national imaginary, supplanting the prospect of development with an uneasy blankness—the future as exile between rival unsustainable interpretations, between Rome, a "city with no future" (Vance xx), and the United States, a nation with an unimaginable one. Swann reflects on the absence of an imagined future within the novel as a perplexing anomaly, saying, "What *The Marble Faun* does lack is, oddly, any real notion of the future [...] Despite the fact that the action takes place in the very recent past, there is virtually no consideration of a future history" (218). But this structural and thematic privation follows necessarily from the novel's retreat from a liberal Protestant millennial vision, where aesthetic mediation provides the means of advancing into a spiritually and materially transformed communal life.

The representational strength of the organic angel lay with her dramatized capacity "to establish community," in contrast to the ethic of "fortified solitude" set out by Emerson and

⁵⁰ Stern observes that "the America of the mind amounts to a vision of millennialism," p. 4.

other Transcendentalist authors of nonfiction.⁵¹ In *The Marble Faun*, however, the dramatization of aesthetic power results in just such a "fortified solitude," with no communion envisioned within or beyond the domestic space. For even as he asserts Hilda and Kenyon's expectations of happiness through repatriation, Hawthorne evacuates both the land of their leaving and the land of their return, in a profoundly melancholy meditation that introduces and overshadows the novel's final paragraphs:

And, now that life had so much human promise in it, they resolved to go back to their own land; because the years, after all, have a kind of emptiness, when we spend too many of them on a foreign shore. We defer the reality of life, in such cases, until a future moment [...] but, by-and-by, there are no future moments; or, if we do return, we find that [...] life has shifted its reality to the spot where we deemed ourselves only temporary residents. Thus, between two countries, we have none at all, or only that little space of either, in which we finally lay down our discontented bones. (358)

In the same breath that he pictures his protagonists on the verge of returning to their homeland to set up a household, Hawthorne forecloses the prospect of home itself, and by extension community, syntactically grafting his own despair onto his characters' purported "human promise." Hawthorne indeed can barely finish positing Kenyon and Hilda's prospects before he undercuts them as hopelessly untenable, so that the proposition "life had so much human promise in it" falls in the same passage, and ostensibly with respect to the same subjects, with the remark

⁵¹ See Franchot, p. 227: "Transcendentalism was to practice an ideologically purified action of assertion that would protect the self from mendicancy. But the weakness of such fortified solitude lay in its inability to establish community."

that "by-and-by, there are no future moments." Though Hamilton suggests that "At last this paler, less passionate, but now 'sturdier' couple [...] are prepared to turn their steps toward their manifest, if not untroubled, destiny" (50),⁵² this destiny proves not so "manifest," after all.

Conclusion: The Civil War

The dissolution of an imaginable future speaks and corresponds to an additional significant omission in the novel. In his 1990 introduction, Brodhead points out that "*The Marble Faun* was written on the eve of the American Civil War, and was contemporaneous with the Lincoln-Douglas debates and John Brown's planning of his famous raid"—"a history," he observes, "so thoroughly absent from the book that one might regard its exclusion as one of the book's active aims" (x). Brodhead explains how "the intensely politicized slavery conflict that many of his contemporaries found morally exhilarating Hawthorne felt as sheer historical nightmare" (Intro x). Thomas Woodson, editor of *The French and Italian Notebooks*, similarly notes that "the agitation over slavery in America" caused Hawthorne to "shrink from his native land" (907). It comes as some surprise, then, that *The Marble Faun's* preface avowedly pronounces the United States as free from the burden of history, and Hawthorne enters only one oblique reference to the country's impending fratricidal violence into the narrative.⁵³

But the looming absence of the "actualities" (*MF* 4) of contemporary history plays a key role in the self-advertised untenability of the novel's conclusion. Set against the ancient backdrop of Rome, Hilda as representative American innocent can exude an aura of New World naiveté,

⁵² In *Roman Holidays* Martin and Person note that Hamilton "views the impending marriage between Hilda and Kenyon more positively than most critics have done, particularly when she concludes that they learn a new, modern aesthetic through their Roman experiences," p. 4.

⁵³ See *The Marble Faun*, pp.4 and 113.

the same aura that would prompt Henry James to envision Hawthorne as "strolling through churches and galleries as the last pure American—attesting by his shy responses to dark canvas and cold marble his loyalty to a simpler and less encumbered civilization" (qtd. in *FIN* 935). But once the decisive act of repatriation approaches, awareness of an already-compromised national innocence rushes in to usurp the nuptial optimism attending Kenyon and Hilda's destiny, stranding the authorial consciousness "between two countries." If the religious aesthetics of the one, in Hawthorne's mind, facilitated a cycle of seduction and bloodshed, the other had long forfeited its claims to a special access to the divine prerogative. Shumaker sums it up best when observes that "We never really see Hilda and Kenyon in America because the country for which they departed would never exist" (83). Unlike Hilda, Protestant America could not even at least reassert the boundaries of its own innocence. Absent innocence, absent redemption, it remained for Hawthorne to wander ambiguously between desire and despair.

In *Hawthorne, Melville, and the Novel*, Richard Brodhead argues that the "study of form involves consideration not so much of what happens as what sorts of things can happen" (10). *The Marble Faun*, for its part, provides a study in what sorts of things cannot happen in the antebellum Protestant imagination, at the meeting of two conflicting but mirrored aesthetics of conversion. That religious aesthetic least anchored in material representation cannot risk change, even though precisely the pattern for Anglo-Saxon "desire of Italy is [...] yearning for change and emotional transformation" (Martin and Person 1). As a consequence, in Hawthorne's foreign novel the transformative features that characterized a liberal Protestant aesthetic centered on the trope of the organic angel contract into a simple principle of resistance. Across their aesthetic pilgrimage, Hilda and Kenyon not only fail to apprehend the sought-for vitality of their historical 'Mother' religion, they effectively empty out the embryonic aesthetic life of their own. In the

end, Italy serves once again as "a reminder of what the founding fathers had meant to leave behind them on their way to the New World" (Buonomo 18).

IV. HOLY SEDUCTION IN MELVILLE'S *PIERRE*

When Hawthorne stages an American male's encounter with magnetic female influence in Rome, the unifying function of the organic angel dissociates into the competing attractions of the light woman and the dark woman, the ornamental angel and the hapless, earth-bound seductress. *The Marble Faun's* setting abroad enables Hawthorne to preserve an unqualified correspondence between the angelic Hilda and the purified spirituality of the New World, purported to originate in the spiritual innocence of nature in contrast to the corrupt civilization of Rome.⁵⁴ Hilda's "natural" innocence," however, never integrates with a magnetic eroticism, so that even as Kenyon and Hilda prepare to return to America, that return constitutes an abdication of the converting powers of the mature female body, the premise of the organic angel. Kenyon and Hilda return to America as the only and ideal intersection of "nature and natural civilization" (Jehlen 15), but at the cost of bracketing the power of the sexual body as incommensurable with purified "nature" in general and female nature in particular.

Eight years earlier, Melville had similarly dramatized an American male's competing desires for contrasting women, the golden-haired Lucy and the dark-haired Isabel. But Melville's *Pierre* takes as its point of departure the idealized American estate of Saddle Meadows, and, as a result, the novel's devastating invocation of lust redounds onto both "nature" and "nature's nation." The 1850s sentimental novel postulated a preexisting natural harmony that saw its

⁵⁴ Myra Jehlen sees this tendency to treat Rome as "historical" and the United States as "continental," rooted in the land, as a persistent feature of American myth-making. See *American Incarnation*, p. 29.

climax in the flowering of American Protestant culture. In *American Incarnation*, Myra Jehlen argues that "Americans saw themselves as building their civilization out of nature itself": by "[f]using the political with the natural," they "imagined an all-encompassing universe that in effect healed the lapsarian parting of man and his natural kingdom" (3).⁵⁵ The organic angel, as a refined and refining outgrowth of nature, came to serve in these novels as an emblem of natural and therefore uncorrupted civilization, the United States as the democratized (universally accessible) "kingdom" of heaven on earth. Her ties to the earth's body legitimated and sanctified the body of the nation as a spontaneous expression of the harmony between natural processes and divine will.

Rather than undercut this consonance between nature and divinity, as mediated by the attractive female, Melville exploits it to confound the antebellum vision of a fundamentally benevolent universe: in *Pierre*, the origins of the organic angel in nature, and by extension, in nature's God, becomes the problem, as neither nature nor the supernatural return the hero to a purified ontological ground. Like Hawthorne, Melville structures his novel around rival influential females, but in the case of *Pierre* both women advertise their capacity to purify the titular protagonist's desires, and with them, his estate. Likewise, in the end, both women prove avatars of an identical ontological paradox—the coincidence of disinterested benevolence and proprietary desire, of charitable and sexual love. The trope of the organic angel, designed to mediate between primal innocence and supernatural grace, cleaves in *Pierre* into mirrored figures mediating the same perverse confluence: "nature" as both physical phenomena and

⁵⁵ See Jehlen's explanation of her use of "man" in this context to "represent the species," p.1. For my purposes, this gendered "universal" pronoun underscores the specific role of the organic angel as the reconciliation of fallen "man" with nature and nature's God.

human inclination proves a conduit to moral perversity, not divine purity, combining at once the highest impulses and the lowest material actions.

Jehlen identifies Melville's *Pierre* along with Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* as "arguably their authors' most troubled works" (19), and this contingency manifests in the malformation of narrative shape.⁵⁶ The stunted narrative trajectory in both novels derives from their introduction of female figures who denote a unified continuity between natural desire and supernatural grace, but who fail to complete the process of sentimental conversion for the male protagonists. But where Hawthorne effects a separation of sexual and spiritual affect in the form of the etherealized Hilda, a move which provides the novel its token "happy ending," Melville ruthlessly subjects his hero to escalating degrees of the same irreducible mixture of sexual and spiritual passion—a paradox he links to national origins. By staging the bifurcation of the organic angel at home, in the "nation that was, above all other nations, embedded in Nature" (Miller 201), Melville forecloses the possibility of flight to an alternate ontological, political, or theological ground—and thereby paralyzes the narrative trajectory of *Pierre* as well as that of the United States.

In the novel's first chapter, Melville goes to great lengths to establish Pierre Glendinning as a natural aristocrat, heir to America's special provenance in the "kingdom" of nature itself. Using the protagonist as a metonymy for the nation, the narrator announces that "In the country [...] Nature planted our Pierre, because Nature intended a rare and original development in Pierre" (13). The narrator carefully interpolates Pierre's development into the body of the

⁵⁶ Both novels undercut their own narrative trajectory and end with an inconclusive abruptness that frustrated reader expectations—in Hawthorne's case so much so that the outcry compelled him to reluctantly pen a postscript with at least a modicum of explanatory power. Melville offered no such palliative for *Pierre*, a book which notoriously foreshadows its own incompleteness and the resultant public discrediting of its author.

landscape itself, noting it "had been [Pierre's] choice fate to have been born in and nurtured in the country, surrounded by scenery whose uncommon loveliness was the perfect mould of a delicate and poetic mind" (5). Redundantly "planted" in nature by "Nature," Pierre in his "natal lot" (5) represents the flowering of a vital, organic culture, his "delicate and poetic mind" the rarefied product of that culture. The authenticity of Pierre's refinement derives from its origins in a primitive aristocracy; the narrator traces Pierre's legacy in the paternal estate of Saddle Meadows back to "three Indian Kings, the aboriginal and only conveyancers of those noble woods and plains" (6). The Native American "cyphers" on the estate deeds of ownership serve to ratify the Glendinning line as a perpetuation of Native American intimacy with the land—sanctioning the heirs as both offspring and proprietors of nature.

Nature, however, as the narrator will wryly remark, proves an "ambiguous" (13) progenitor; and even as Melville composes lavish idylls on the beneficence of "rural light" (5), he locates a necessary violence at the heart of the national legacy. The Glendinning estate's very title, "Saddle Meadows," blends the pastoral with the martial: in an early description of Pierre's "proudest patriotic and family associations," the narrator lightly references "an Indian battle [that] had been fought, in the earlier days of the colony," in which "the paternal great-grandfather of Pierre, mortally wounded, had sat unhorsed on his saddle in the grass, with his dying voice, still cheering his men in the fray" (6). Where the great-grandfather warred with Native Americans during colonial days, the grandfather had, during Revolutionary times, "for several months defended [...] against the repeated combined assaults of Indians, Tories, and Regulars" (6). Pierre's ancestors may have obtained the ratifying ciphers of Indian chiefs, but this transmission culminates a violent expropriation of Native American landholding and protracted efforts of self-preservation.

Melville does not, however, suggest that this precondition for America's national sovereignty undercuts its purchase in nature; rather, he presents Christian refinement as grounded in a "natural" benevolence that unfolds directly from this "natural" self-interested violence. In other words, Christian and specifically American Protestant culture as Melville depicts it does indeed evolve from an organic connection with nature, but that organic connection comprises an elemental struggle for proprietorship over natural resources. This paradox emerges most poignantly in Melville's characterization of Pierre's grandfather, "grand old Pierre" (30), as both ruthless military champion and Christian gentleman par excellence.

Melville's portrait of the grandfather combines the savage and the civilized within a disturbing stylistic wholeness. The grandfather emerges as a figure of profound integrity, an integrity that allows for, in fact necessitates, a correspondence between exploitation and benevolence, obscene violence and tender affection. If, "in a night-scuffle in the wilderness before the Revolutionary War, he had annihilated two Indian savages by making reciprocal bludgeons of their heads," in fact "all this was done by the mildest hearted, and most blue-eyed gentleman in the world [...] a forgiver of many injuries, a sweet-hearted, charitable Christian, in fine, a pure, cheerful, childlike, blue-eyed, divine old man" (30). Twice "blue-eyed," "childlike," and pure," old Pierre takes on the stereotypical features of the sentimental uncorrupted innocent, and the muted language applied to his actions imitates this playful simplicity, as if making "reciprocal bludgeons" of two heads served as a kind of game. The narrator furthermore insists on the correspondence amongst these terms, calling old Pierre one "in whose meek, majestic soul, the lion and the lamb embraced—fit image of his God" (30). Melville's characterization of old Pierre, though satirically edged, does not rely on a simple strategy of exposing distinctions

between an ideal tenderness and a real brutality; instead, the ideal and the real lock together, mutually implicating one another as correspondent without resolving their contradiction.

This paradox, however, eludes the youthful Pierre, who imagines his inherited landscape in terms of a unified field of benevolence. The proprietary pleasure Pierre takes in the estate of Saddle Meadows operates through a sublimation of the relationship between possession and self-interested action: the very notion of inheritance suggests a natural or fated transmission of property independent of any willful action on the part of the heir. Jehlen contends that in the formation of America "the ideology of liberal, democratic individualism reached maturity as no longer the historical dispossessor of past rulers but the natural possessor of its own world" (8-9). Because Pierre has not himself battled to obtain Saddle Meadows, his ownership appears "natural" in the sense of historically nonconflictive: "in Pierre's eyes, all its hills and swales seemed as sanctified by their very long uninterrupted possession by his race" (*P* 8). Pierre's sentimental imagination recreates ownership as ahistorical, transmuting three generations into a "very long uninterrupted possession."

This transcendence, in turn, allows Pierre to conceive of material possessions as an aesthetic medium for enlarging his affective life, rather than as an object of conquest. In this vein, the narrator pictures Pierre's imaginative tie to the land in terms of an eroticized tenderness, rather than domination, saying, "The fond ideality which, in the eyes of affection, hallows the least trinket once familiar to the person of a departed love, with Pierre that talisman touched the whole earthly landscape about him [...] Pierre deemed all that part of the earth a love-token, so that his very horizon was to him a memorial ring" (8). Pierre sees in Saddle Meadows a predestined perfect union of private desire and uncontested inheritance, an ideal marriage arranged by nature and sealed with a "memorial ring." This memorial ring places the land outside

the reach of consummation as an object of desire and so outside the range of competitive interests; it belongs (has always belonged) as much to the past, the "departed love," as to the future, and so invites fulfillment only in the form of expanding, unconsummated desire.⁵⁷

Pledged to the land, Pierre need do nothing but expand the limits of his desire in a process of ecstatic, infinite wooing.

Depicted in terms of an animating suspended eroticism, Pierre's relationship with the land finds a mirrored expression in his courtly-love relationship with his mother Mary.⁵⁸ This "romantic filial love" (5), the narrator suggests, partakes of "That nameless and infinitely delicate aroma of inexpressible tenderness and attentiveness which, in every refined and honorable attachment, is contemporary with the courtship [...] but which, like the *bouquet* of the costliest German wines, too often evaporates upon pouring love out to drink, in the disenchanting glasses of the matrimonial days and nights" (16). The narrator goes so far as to propose the diffusion of erotic sentiments into every human relation, saying, "this softened spell [...] seemed a glimpse of the glorious possibility, that the divinest of those emotions, which are incident to the sweetest seasons of love, is capable of indefinite translation into many of the less signal relations of our many chequered life" (16). In this remarkable passage, the narrator celebrates the eroticization of the mother-son relationship as a solution to the problem of marital eroticism's temporality and sexual telos. Because filial eroticism (presumably) forecloses "that climax which is so fatal to

⁵⁷ Jehlen speaks to the ultimate paralyzing effect of Pierre's post-conquest world, saying "If Pierre—like the first generation of American sons [...] is transfixed by the past, it is in part because the past, in Saddle Meadows and in America, is also the future," p. 193.

⁵⁸ Mary Glendinning's name at once underscores and appropriates a destabilization of family relations implicit in the Christian myth of the virgin birth, which allowed for a woman to give birth to a son who was also simultaneously spiritual father and lover.

ordinary love," it ensures the perpetuity of attraction and so potentially restructures all human relationships around an affective warmth that overflows into benevolent action.

To have one's instinctive passions naturally accord with all that is also beneficent anticipates for the narrator the experience of heaven: Pierre and his mother's attachment "seemed almost to realize here below the sweet dreams of those religious enthusiasts, who paint to us a Paradise to come, when etherealized from all drosses and stains, the holiest passion of man shall unite all kindreds and climes in one circle of pure and unimpairable delight" (16). Here Melville encapsulates the project of 19th century religious sentimentalism, to "realize here below" an essential correspondence between the movement of spontaneous human desire and a democratic, divinely-sanctioned fulfillment. An "etherealized" version of complex marriage, the narrator's vision allows for a harmonious integration of self-seeking human passion with self-giving divine love—because romantic attachment finds no terminus in sexual consummation ("that climax which is so fatal to ordinary love"), it can redound infinitely from one object of desire to another without "impairment" and without creating rivals for affection.⁵⁹

The estate of Saddle Meadows from this angle recreates Sylvester Judd's vision in *Margaret* of a spiritualizing circulation of erotic desire through cultivated land and "natural" aesthetic objects, including attractive persons. Life at Saddle Meadows reflects what Lori Merish terms a "pious materialism" (91), the antebellum conviction that America's rising economic prosperity and increasing consumption of material goods comprised a spontaneous segue from the nation's primitive origins to its millennial destiny. At the root of America's evangelical

⁵⁹ In *Empire of the Mother*, Mary P. Ryan describes how antebellum free-love movements spawned directly from the sentimental commitment to "giving romantic love a wider range." John Humphrey Noyes, for instance, founder of the utopian Oneida Community, advocated complex marriage as a means "to counteract the disruptive exclusiveness of marital love," p. 87. The "filial romance" at Saddle Meadows represents a less radical version of the same ethos.

prosperity, Merish identifies an evolving confidence in "the 'civilizing' power of an array of mediating material forms—including luxury commodities and the bodies of 'refined' gracious women" (2). Pierre's idyllic manor and filial courtship serve as mirrored images of this naturalized aesthetics in which all objects of desire serve to arouse and (apparently) ennoble the protagonist's emotional life.

Pierre and his mother's eroticized but asexual relationship resonates in this way with the purified erotics of the organic angel; Mary Glendinning's actual maternal relation to Pierre, however, limits her potential role as agent of conversion. Because the womb of Pierre's inception cannot also function as the portal of his transformation, a younger, sexually-viable candidate for his affections promises to play the role of organic angel, drawing the "profane" love of male sexual desire "toward the heaven in [her]" (4). Lucy Tartan, to whom Pierre becomes engaged as a matter of course, typifies an organic aesthetic perfection, one which the narrator lightly satirizes, saying, "owing to the [...] provisions of dame Nature, there always will be beautiful women in the world [...] yet the world will never see another Lucy Tartan" (23-4). Her cheeks, we learn, "were tinted with the most delicate white and red, the white predominating. Her eyes some god brought down from heaven, her hair was Danae's, spangled with Jove's showers; her teeth were dived for in the Persian Sea" (24). At once a "transcendent beauty" (24) and entirely modest of her charms (25), Lucy enjoys a power over Pierre that partakes of rarefied nature; as the narrator reports, "it was among the pure and soft incitements of the country that Pierre had first felt toward Lucy the dear passion which now made him wholly hers" (26). Lucy in effect represents an extension of Saddle Meadows as Pierre's natural inheritance, a conflation the narrator suggests by insinuating her body into the landscape, and vice versa: "On both sides,

from the hedges, came to Pierre the clover bloom of Saddle Meadows, and from Lucy's mouth and cheek came the fresh fragrance of her violet young being" (33).

Unlike in Judd's *Mons Christi*, however, the aestheticization of nature in Pierre's world of Saddle Meadows only leads to increasingly rarefied expressions of desire for the physical body—not to spiritual fulfillment beyond it. Because Lucy's force of attraction at this stage only conducts Pierre further into what he already possesses, Lucy also lacks the power to initiate a spiritual transformation in the protagonist. In spite of Pierre and the narrator's prolific allusions to heaven and the heavenly in the context of Pierre's romance, this heaven appears decisively as the heaven "in" rather than through Lucy (4). When Pierre and Lucy take a morning sojourn into the country, for example, the narrator highlights Lucy's celestial appeal as a function of overwrought sexual desire: after "by sweet shock on shock, receiving intimating foretastes of the etherealest delights on earth," Pierre falls on his back and, gazing into Lucy's eyes, declares, "Thou art my heaven, Lucy; and here I lie thy shepherd king, watching for new eye-stars to rise in thee" (36). Lucy seems to present access to the "etherealest delights on earth," but, as the narrator has previously suggested, those "etherealest delights" terminate in a "fatal" climax—fatal because reaching the telos of desire within the material body rather than beyond it.

Pierre has an omen of the immanent and exclusionary structure of erotic love when he makes a pilgrimage to the "holy ground" of Lucy's bedchamber to retrieve her artist's portfolio. Crossing the room, Pierre "caught the snow-white bed reflected in the toilet-glass" and "For one swift instant, he seemed to see in that one glance the two separate beds—the real one and the reflected one—and an unbidden, most miserable presentiment thereupon stole into him" (39). Although the narrator does not venture to unpack this "miserable presentiment," the duplicate beds suggest the fate of Pierre and Lucy's lofty, ritualized romance in the primal act of sexual

intercourse—the "fatal" drink of those "disenchanted glasses of the matrimonial days and nights (16). In addition, the image clearly foreshadows Lucy's death-like faint upon the bed when Pierre makes a sacrifice of their impending marriage to secure a future with Isabel—the white shrine of the bed become a shroud for "so fair a victim" (183). The mirrored bed thus doubly undercuts Pierre's sentimentalized world where erotic desire transports the adorer beyond material limits and thus outside the reach of competitive interests.

This problematic trajectory of erotic desire toward an exclusionary, material consummation disrupts the novel's most stereotypical portrait of spiritualized female eroticism, which takes place just after Mary Glendinning volunteers to sanction Pierre's wedding. In what the mother drily calls "A very beautiful tableau" (58), Melville positions Lucy's body at the threshold of the Glendinning home, her luminous flesh acting as fulcrum between heaven and earth: "Lucy just upon the point of her departure, was hovering near the door; the setting sun, streaming through the window, bathed the whole form in golden loveliness and light; the wonderful, most vivid transparency of her clear Welsh complexion, now fairly glowed like rosy snow" (58). The light so wholly interfuses Lucy's frame that it begins to pivot her and her lover's gaze toward heaven, for Pierre "almost thought that she could only depart the house by floating out of the open window [...] All her aspect to him, was that moment touched with an indescribable gayety, buoyancy, fragility, and an unearthly evanescence" (58). A scene which closely parallels tableaux of Eva's luminous, transparent form in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*,⁶⁰ nevertheless leads ultimately not "out of the open window" into a sentimental contemplation of the divine, but rather to the protagonist's disturbed reflection on his role of sexual conquest: "I to wed this heavenly fleece?" he protests, "Methinks one husbandly embrace would break her airy

⁶⁰ See Chapter 5, pp. 223-4.

zone, and she exhale upwards to that heaven whence she hath hither come" (58). Sexual consummation as Pierre imagines it collapses spiritual possibilities into the strictures of the body and so necessitates the divinized Lucy's escape to a suitably infinite realm.

Because sexual consummation seems to foreclose the possibility of eroticism opening onto a spiritual plane, Pierre's imminent prospect of intercourse with Lucy diminishes her transformative power over him.⁶¹ The more proximate their relationship appears to conquest, the further it removes Pierre from that sense of boundless expansion that characterizes his sentimental affective life. The beneficent mutuality of their wooing seems suddenly marred by an ugly self-interest in the act of claiming Lucy's body, prompting Pierre to characterize marriage as "By heaven [...] an impious thing!" (58). What Melville suggests that Pierre fails to recognize, however, is that self-interest already structures the sentimental attachment Pierre experiences as purely benevolent. Only because Pierre "inherits" Lucy and Saddle Meadows without visible contest can he interpret his claims over them as an inevitable outgrowth of nature's bounty rather than as proprietary action.

In her exploration of the antebellum culture of sentiment, Merish describes how "sentimental sympathy promotes a deeply felt psychic investment in proprietary power over objects of love," a phenomenon she terms "sentimental ownership" (4). An "eroticized formation of proprietary and political desire" (4) sentimental ownership relies on a distinction between "instrumental" and "sentimental" property—the former designated for use and consumption and

⁶¹ Merish suggests that exposure of the naked female body "signifies the end of women's transforming potential," p. 65, inasmuch as it collapses the spiritualizing distance that purports to translate male desire beyond the body.

the latter for love (21). Sentimental possession thus manifests as disinterested condescension, concealing the contest of power that creates the conditions for unbounded tenderness.⁶²

Ultimately, Melville's portrait of the sentimental refinements of Saddle Meadows mocks the sublimation of the relationship between affective attachment and proprietary power. Mary Glendinning, for instance, as the operative maternal figure of the novel ought to represent the soul of disinterested affection; instead, she secretly cherishes Pierre's erotic attachment as evidence of her sexual dominance. Although an icon of cultured grace, Mrs. Glendinning turns out to approve of a marriage between Pierre and Lucy because she believes herself to have a proprietary hold on his affections, illustrated by his "docility": "His little wife, that is to be, will not estrange him from me," she muses, "for she too is docile,—beautiful, and reverential, and most docile [...] How glad am I that Pierre loves her so, and not some dark-eyed haughtiness [...] who would be ever setting her young married state before my elderly widowed one, and claiming all the homage of my dear boy" (20). Hidden within Mary Glendinning's affective hold over Pierre lies a calculated aggression, a territorial will to preserve sentimental ownership which the narrator links to the violence of the nation's origins. Following her speech, the narrator remarks

⁶² Pierre's grandfather stands out as a case study in the dialectics of sentimental ownership. The lavish attention he bestows on his horses reflects "a fantasy of intimate possession" (see Merish, p. 4) that belies any utilitarian function: according to old Pierre, "no man loved his horses, unless his own hands grained them." He "keep[s] Christmas with his horses," greets them as "his very honorable friends" each morning, and never "mounts" his "saddle-beast [...] without first asking leave," pp. 30-31. In the same way that Pierre envisions his equine possession in terms of voluntary emotional exchange, so he imagines his slaves as bound to him by strictly affective ties: "Woe to Cranz, Kit, Douw, or any other of his stable slaves, if grand old Pierre found one horse unblanketed or one weed among the hay that filled their rack. Not that he ever had [...] any of them flogged [...] but he would refuse to say his wonted pleasant word to them, and that was very bitter to them, for [...] all of them, loved grand old Pierre, as his shepherds loved old Abraham," p. 30.

how, "Her stately beauty had ever somewhat martial in it; and now she looked the daughter of a General, as she was, for Pierre's was a double revolutionary descent" (20).

Mary Glendinning's articulation of a rivalry implicit in the circulation of erotic desire thus ramifies onto Melville's presentation of the primal struggle for the "natural" possession of American land and resources. The benevolent landscape which offers itself up like a bride to Pierre's gaze represents a combined family and national legacy of elemental conquest and cultured sentiment, a paradox that will not manifest to Pierre until his discovery of a disenfranchised half-sister Isabel. Pierre will then attempt to purge his estate by heroic self-sacrifice—only to discover that, like his grandfather a martyr to the expansion of territory, his most benevolent gesture coincides with the ruthless expansion of territorial affections. As Melville depicts it, the passion sufficient for ecstatic sacrifice entails self-interested desire for possession.

Even before Pierre's sentimental world disintegrates, the novel forecasts the primacy of violence in the American experiment with benevolent expansion.⁶³ After ominously announcing that "while thus all alive to the beauty and poesy of this father's faith, Pierre little foresaw that this world hath a secret deeper than beauty," the narrator introduces the "one hiatus" in the "sweetly-writ manuscript" of Pierre's life: "A sister had been omitted from the text" (7). This

⁶³ Merish identifies this experiment as "America's 'civilizing mission'—a complex ideological configuration which legitimated U.S. imperial expansion across the continent and overseas [...]" p. 92. Inasmuch as the national myth argued for America's function as the implementer of a divinely-sanctioned democracy, appropriation of territory and resources by the United States could always appear under the guise of spreading universal access to those assets and their implicit spiritualization at American hands. The racial paternalism that bolstered American slavery operated within this same paradigm: only through enslavement on American soil could peoples of African descent obtain access to the nation's spiritual resources.

omission Pierre immediately conceives of in terms of a yearning for a rite of passage through benevolent violence: "'Oh, had my father but a daughter!' cried Pierre; 'some one whom I might love, and protect, and fight for, if need be! It must be a glorious thing to engage in a mortal quarrel on a sweet sister's behalf!'" (7). Pierre's fantasized crusade on behalf of a sister implies a contrast with, for instance, an imagined contest with a rival in the interest of securing his sweetheart Lucy; a sister would call forth what he imagines as a passionate yet disinterested sacrifice and so make him a worthy son of his heroic ancestry.

Sexual disinterest in the case of the sister purifies in Pierre's mind the act of violence, a violence whose tender overtones weave it into a larger project of sacrificial benevolence. This compound of aggression and altruism the narrator locates squarely in nature, remarking "This emotion was most natural" (7) and elsewhere highlighting Pierre's impulse as the overflow of natural inspiration: when "[Nature] lifted her spangled crest of a thickly-starred night [...] ten thousand mailed thoughts of heroicness started up in Pierre's soul, and glared around for some insulted good cause to defend" (14). But the filial dimension of Pierre's romantic fantasy does not, Melville hints, negate the proprietary structure of its mobilizing desire; what Pierre "did not at that time entirely appreciate," the narrator points out, is that "much that goes to make up the deliciousness of a wife, already lies in the sister" (7). Here again Melville eroticizes a filial connection in order to underscore an implicit configuration of self-interest, the desire to appropriate the "deliciousness" of the object of charitable action by demarking an affective territory. In fact, as the movement of the novel will disclose, it is the very altruistic properties of Pierre's fantasy that exponentially intensify the will to affective expansion.

Absent the occasion to break actual new ground in his paternal estate and so reincarnate his colonial and Revolutionary ancestors, Pierre craves a sentimental reenactment of their

heroism. Jehlen identifies Pierre's predicament as that of antebellum Americans generally, who found themselves trapped within a vision of the nation as already incarnating the telos of history; "by presenting itself as the fulfillment of the past," she argues, the Revolution "left its children no future but the fulfillment of the founding vision" (197-8). Because historical process within the American context "did not mean transformation but expansion" (Jehlen 9), Americans could only seek to fill out their legacy—to effect what had already been accomplished and claim what had already been secured. Up to this point, Melville makes clear, Pierre has not filled out the legacy of those benevolent imperial giants, his founding fathers: the diminished stature of the grandson finds the pockets of his grandfather's military vest still "below his knees" (29). Pierre yearns to reenact the defining gesture of America's formation through territorial expansion that only encloses one's natural, predestined inheritance. But because Pierre already inhabits a completed ideal world—the utopian civilization of Saddle Meadows—he lacks the catalyst for action, the "insulted good cause to defend," the "sister" in need of rescue.

Although at first Pierre imagines merely expanding on his paternal legacy, once he identifies "seams in the construction of Saddle Meadows" (Otter 207), he seeks a spiritual transformation of his inheritance. Reckoning with his father's affair and abandonment of his illicit offspring, Pierre's half-sister Isabel, forces Pierre to confront the "secret" of destructive self-interest at work in the "beauty and poesy of his father's faith" (*P* 7), and thus create a vacuum for the role of organic angel as divine intercessor. Lucy, of a piece with Pierre's suddenly illicit—because unshared—heritage, cannot effect the reintegration of his fallen estate with heavenly dictates. Instead, Isabel will serve as the touchstone between earth and heaven that triggers his spiritual conversion and launches his benevolent program of Christian democracy. Because she compels him to enact a purified version America's benevolent project,

Isabel seems to provide the means for transitioning Pierre beyond a rarefied naturalized aesthetics into a spiritual one—as Pierre will formulate it, from "Lucy" to "God" (181). Isabel's converting power, however, ultimately derives from the same "nature" as Lucy and the luxury estate; it accordingly provokes not transformation but ecstatic reenactment of the same ontological perversity: the self-interested structure of benevolent passion. Nature, Melville suggests, cannot lead the way out of itself—it can only escalate its own insoluble antagonisms.

I have suggested that *Pierre* opens with a variant of the aesthetic utopia with which Judd's *Margaret* concludes; the material world of Saddle Meadows—whether as artistic relics, the cultivated environment, or attractive persons—comprises a seamless circuit for nonconflictive desire. While Margaret's evolution from child of nature to messianic icon provides the momentum for Judd's novel, once she completes her function as organic angel by reconciling nature and Christianity, in a real sense all that remains is an endless, ahistorical affective expansion. The epistolary conclusion of *Margaret* signals this breakdown in plot, as Judd creates a mere simulation of movement through kaleidoscopic impressions of the same transcendent moment. This is the predicament of stasis with which *Pierre* opens.⁶⁴

The spark for the narrative life of *Pierre* comes from its chronological reversal in the presentation of the organic angel. *Pierre* moves from the refined aestheticism of Lucy to the raw organicism of Isabel, and from utopia into history, a regression which seems to create a space for Isabel to unfold into the messianic transformer of Pierre's marred legacy. It is the very revelation

⁶⁴ Jehlen suggests that "the plot of *Pierre* develops from mobility to stasis," p. 194; I would contend, however, for an envelope structure of stasis, mobility, stasis, with the opening action so stylized as to evoke a still-life portrait. See for instance the opening paragraphs of *Pierre*, which depict nature in a state of "wonderful and indescribable repose," p. 3. In "Pierre and the Non-Transparencies of Figuration," Michael D. Snediker goes so far as to argue, in response to these paragraphs, that Pierre constitutes a "purely aesthetic protagonist," p. 223.

of Isabel, however, that initiates Pierre's fall into history; her emergence represents the return of the "dispossessed" of Saddle Meadows, the resurrection of its status as the site of "intense political, patriarchal and sexual anxieties" (Otter 173). The unacknowledged love-child from Pierre's father's seduction of a beautiful impoverished French immigrant (*P* 76), Isabel appears anonymously at the margins of the estate, eking out her survival through manual labor and driven by emotional hunger to claim her rightful place in the Glendinning family.

Isabel makes her first appearance in the novel as a repressed memory, resurfacing to disrupt Pierre and Lucy's transparent love-relation. Just as Pierre completes a paean to Lucy's celestial attributes, the latter suddenly grows tearful and terrified, pressing Pierre to again relay the story of "that face," that "mysterious, haunting face, which thou once told'st me, thou didst thrice vainly try to shun" (37). Pierre in response curses "the hour" he "acted on the thought, that Love hath no reserves" and bared the secret of his encounter to Lucy (37). Isabel's face harbingers the disruption of Saddle Meadows' blissfully transparent—because perfectly harmonious—relations by privatizing barriers. Lucy promptly intuits the face as a challenge to her proprietary claim over Pierre's affections and declares, "Thou must be wholly a disclosed secret to me; Love is vain and proud, and when I walk the streets, and meet thy friends, I must still be laughing and hugging to myself the thought,—They know him not;—I only know my Pierre" (37). By casting her relation to Pierre in terms of a possessive sexual conquest, Lucy describes a hidden boundary within their heretofore unqualified exchange of sentiment; her affective life can expand through Pierre only insofar as she retains exclusive absolute access to his interior person: "Did I doubt thee here," she ventures, "could I ever think, that thy heart hath yet one private nook or corner from me;—fatal disenchanting day for me, my Pierre, would that be" (37). Pierre, however, much to his own horror, finds himself unable to pledge perfect future

transparency (37), just as the occasion for the memory prompted him, for the first time, to conceal his true feelings from his mother (48).

Isabel's face provokes a response of affective entrenchment in both Pierre and Lucy because it destabilizes the ontological order on which their "disinterested" wooing rests. This order belongs to sentimentalism's eroticization of Christian charity or "Love" as both origin and end of the natural world. In its simplest formula, sentimental ontology suggests that—originally and ultimately—only the beautiful exists, and that beauty, as the material expression of charity, can only always conduct the adorer into communion with a beneficent nature and nature's God. Eros, within this schema, serves "naturally" as the most powerful material expression of divine charity, and beauty (including and especially of women) always bespeaks the benignant ground of existence.

Shortly before the introduction of Isabel's face, Melville delivers a parody of the New Testament chapter on love as "the greatest of these" (1 Cor. 13.13) in which he satirizes this picturesque vision of romantic love as the ultimate beneficent force. Love, the narrator pronounces, "is both Creator's and Saviour's gospel to mankind, a volume bound in rose-leaves, clasped with violets, and by the beaks of humming-birds printed with peach-juice on the leaves of lilies" (34).⁶⁵ A charming gift-book, wrought with the most rarefied instruments of nature, comprises the new sentimental "gospel," and it follows that beautiful women make such a

⁶⁵ Tracing the recurrence of the rose imagery through the early part of the novel, William B. Dillingham argues that the motif alludes backward to the Wars of the Roses—a protracted civil conflict in Britain in the 15th century—and forward to the impending American Civil War: "Love," he observes, "may be 'a volume bound in rose-leaves' [...] but when roses are associated with bloody civil strife, that is more ominous than sentimental," p. 223. Dillingham's analysis highlights one of the many ways Melville saturates his sentimental rhetoric with allusions to elemental violence.

gospel's most efficacious evangelists: "Love is this world's great redeemer and reformer," the narrator expounds, "and as all beautiful women are her selectest emissaries, so hath Love gifted them with a magnetical persuasiveness, that no youth can possibly repel" (34). William Braswell notes Melville's use of "the word *love* in a very broad sense, so as to include not only the affection of lovers, but also the spirit of beneficence reputed [...] to be an animating principle of the universe" (213, author's emphasis). More precisely, Melville describes the "affection of lovers" as the preeminent expression of the "spirit of beneficence," playfully reproducing the trope of the attractive woman as the quintessential missionary. Product of a natural world already anchored in divinity, this organic angel mediates at once a "Creator's and Saviour's gospel to mankind."

Because within the sentimental purview nature and divinity thus perfectly align, elemental antagonism and its resulting miseries move beyond the periphery of the created world. The narrator lays the basis for this theodicy by declaring that, "All things that are sweet to see, or taste, or feel, or hear, all these things were made by Love; and none other things were made by Love" (34). This characterization of love asserts a simple distinction between comforting and harsh realities that demands redemptive action on the part of love while disclaiming its role in the production of the latter: "Love made not the Arctic zones, but Love is ever reclaiming them. Say, are not the fierce things of this earth daily, hourly going out? Where now are your wolves of Britain? Where in Virginia now, find you the panther and the pard?" (34). Here the redemptive action of love finds its metaphorical equivalent in the "benevolent" expansion of Western civilization, returning the reader to the complicated picture of violence underpinning old Pierre's estate. The image of the "Arctic zones" points the reader still further backward, to the "inhumanities" (130) established with the origins of the earth itself. By loudly disclaiming the

role of "Love" in the creation of the adverse facets of nature and human life, Melville thus calls out the question begged by its own omission—that of the origins of the "natural" inhospitableness and hostilities of the earth.

Melville's parodic treatment of sentimental ontology sets the stage for its subversion in the form of an irreducibly conflicted organic angel, Isabel. The disruptive power of Isabel's face derives from its yoking of primitive beauty with primordial suffering, so that Pierre "seemed to see the fair ground where Anguish had contended with Beauty, and neither being conqueror, both had laid down on the field" (47). Pierre first encounters Isabel while patronizing a local sewing society hosted on the Glendinning estate, and the sight of her face and sound of her scream of recognition awakens Pierre to a repressed perversity at the core of existence, some "fearful gospel" (43) of irresolvable conflict. The narrator's contemplation of the face dwells on its disorienting mergence of contradictions: "ever hovering between Tartarean misery and Paradisaic beauty [...] such faces, compounded so of hell and heaven, overthrow in us all foregone persuasions, and make us wondering children in this world again" (43). Merging misery and beauty, hell and heaven, Isabel's representative visage seems to cut the filial line of benevolent paternity, leaving the "wondering" children to likewise wander, fatherless, having lost the clarity of their own origin.

In Isabel, Pierre in effect encounters a grown-up child-Margaret,⁶⁶ an orphaned innocent of nature whose strange/estranged language seems to signal her liminality between the divine and human and her capacity to mediate between them. Sacvan Bercovitch cites *Margaret* as a

⁶⁶ There are good reasons to read Judd's novel alongside *Pierre*. Melville in fact borrowed the 1845 edition of *Margaret* in the summer of 1850 ("*Letters*," p. 377), which Sacvan Bercovitch notes was republished in the same year of *Pierre*'s composition, p. 264.

source in Melville's prodigious layering of allusions to "Romantic assertions about an original relation to nature" (264) but does not explore any inverted resonance between Margaret and Isabel, who likewise experiences a development of consciousness freed from the pressures of human custom. As Isabel confesses to Pierre, "I have had no training of any sort. All my thoughts well up in me" (123). But where Margaret's liminal status serves as a conduit within a benign natural and benevolent supernatural order, Isabel's entraps her at the interstice of competing and corresponding impulses, an electric compound of attraction and hostility that can only facilitate a conversion to "mystery" as the inarticulate, non-benevolent ground of existence.

Isabel from the outset emits an apparently "supernatural light" (43), which—unlike the rarefied lucidity of Lucy—partakes of an unrefined organicism that seems to collapse the stages of the organic angel's development from child of nature to spiritualized woman. During two consecutive visits to Isabel's quarters, Pierre listens to her halting and disjointed rehearsal of a psychosomatic awakening that parallels Margaret's, but whose primitive expression persists in the adult Isabel.⁶⁷ As a result, although physically matured, Isabel in her integration with the flux of elemental energies persists in more closely resembling the child Margaret than the picturesque heroines of *Mons Christi* and *Saddle Meadows*.

Both Margaret and Isabel as children open onto a largely undifferentiated consciousness of the natural world. Margaret's earliest memories bespeak a diffusion of shared sentience and sustenance, an effortless mingling of discrete natures: "I used to sit here in my merry childhood and think all was mine, the earth and the sky. I ate my bread and cider, and fed the ants and flies. Through me innumerable things went forth [...] and my jocund heart kindled the twilight"

⁶⁷ Of herself Isabel remarks to Pierre, "I have always been, and feel that I must always continue to be a child, though I should grow to three score years and ten," p. 148.

(313).⁶⁸ Isabel as a child likewise has difficulty distinguishing herself from other phenomena, subject to the "fancy that all people were as stones, trees, cats" (122). Margaret's consonance with nature further manifests through the intercessory capacity of animals—in the dog Bull whom she insists can shield her from the devil (71) and in the bear who shelters her as one of its own cubs, a creature of whom she "was no more afraid than if it had been her own Bull" (292).

In the case of Isabel, however, a violent contradiction inheres in her consonance with nature, a chilling antipathy among people, stones, trees, cats. In her dreamy recollection of inhabiting a "wild, dark house" removed from civilization, Isabel remarks on her fear "lest the ghostly pines should steal near me, and reach out their grim arms to snatch me into their horrid shadows" (114). In endeavoring to partake of bread and wine, the archetypical meal and counterpart to Margaret's bread and cider, Isabel suffers a savage repulse from the human tenants: "I went up to them, and asked to eat with them, and touched the loaf. But instantly the old man made a motion to strike me, but did not, and the woman, glaring at me, snatched the loaf and threw it into the fire before them" (116). Isabel does not even manage to engage the physical contact of the old man's strike, and, desperate for "some intimacy," seeks out the house cat. She endeavors to communicate by calling the cat's name, but it "only gazed sideways and unintelligently." When Isabel persists in her calls, the cat "turned around and hissed," driving her outside the house where she cannot even rest on a stone, for "its coldness went up into [her] heart" (116). Isabel, humans, stones, trees, cats seem to correspond in their material existence, yet their correspondence contains an integral mutual repulsion.

⁶⁸Regarding *Pierre's* prolonged treatment of "the theme of Isabel and mystery," F.O. Matthiessen unhappily concluded that "some of its less controlled elements may have been stimulated by Sylvester Judd's rhapsodic descriptions of his heroine Margaret, whose shadowy childhood memories are not unlike Isabel's," p. 524.

Not until "a beautiful infant" comes into her care does Isabel register human consciousness as unique in its experience of attraction to "Beauty" alongside "Sadness" (122), the same duality that manifest in her face will mesmerize Pierre (107). But this discovery of "the sweet idea of humanness," far from constituting a breakthrough into an awareness of an underlying beneficence, intensifies the horror of the antipathies within nature: as Isabel recites to Pierre, "Somehow I felt that all good, harmless men and women were human things, placed at cross-purposes, in a world of snakes and lightings, in a world of horrible and inscrutable inhumanities" (122). Melville's complicated imagery divulges layer after layer of divergence within continuity: these "cross-purposes," like the snake's "fire-fork" of a tongue, and the flash of lightening that "split some beautiful tree" (122), all stem from the same root—nature's preexistent irreducible antagonisms. The knowledge that Isabel lacks, but will come to fear and at last declare when she "recognizes her noxious effect upon Pierre" (Dillingham 229), lies in the duality of her own "humanness" as contiguous with the surrounding "inhumanities" (*P* 123). Where Margaret finds herself from infancy nurtured in the bosom of sympathetic nature, and encounters as extraneous and revocable the cruelties of human customs, Isabel originates from within a preexistent duality of nature itself, which Pierre will uncover as their shared heritage. Because, for Margaret, evil lies extraneous to a purely benevolent human nature originating transparently from benevolent divinity, she can reconcile already compatible human and divine natures by expunging the contradiction of sin. Isabel, by contrast, cannot escape the antipathies inherent in her consonance with nature, nor can she conduct Pierre beyond them.

Isabel transports Pierre to a plane of existential ecstasy which he mistakes for a divinely-inspired conversion but which in fact represents an escalation of tensions and attractions implicit in nature itself. As Isabel recounts her gradual awakening to the knowledge of possessing a

mortal father, she accompanies the narrative with melodies on a guitar which she calls both "human" (125) and "mother" (149). Isabel's "magical" (150) mother-guitar incarnates her ontological volatility; as Isabel summons the instrument, it plays of its own accord, throwing off sparks that set her "tossed tresses" agleam "like a tract of phosphorescent midnight sea" (150). These paranormal displays suggest to Pierre's mind something "not [...] entirely produced by customary or natural causes" which "[binds] him to her by an extraordinary atmospheric spell" (151). Isabel seemed to him "to swim in an electric fluid [;] the vivid buckler of her brow seemed as a magnetic plate" (151). Melville's depiction of Isabel as electromagnetic converting agent draws on the "conceptual scheme" of the German Romantics, for whom "the term 'love' was extended beyond the human realm to all modes of cosmic connectivity, including the natural forces of gravitation and electromagnetism" (Abrams 297). In M. H. Abrams' treatment of Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound," for instance, he observes that the "earth's enhanced energy manifests itself in a heightening of electromagnetic force and its radiated heat and light—those forces which in Shelley's metaphysics are the spiritual correlatives of the attractive and life-giving powers of universal love" (307).

Rather, however, than denoting a divine endowment in Isabel to effect Pierre's conversion to "universal love," the cosmic static in *Pierre* bespeaks her entrapment at the interstice of elemental attractions and repulsions. As Pierre falls under Isabel and the guitar's combined enchantment, he hears the circulating chant, "Mystery! Mystery! / Mystery of Isabel! / Mystery! Mystery! / Isabel and Mystery! / Mystery!" (150). This "Mystery of Isabel" comports with her function as an organic angel, resembling, for instance, the mysterious source of Cummins' Gertrude's entrancing qualities. But in the case of Gertrude, while the immediate source of her influence—whether natural or supernatural—remains subject to speculation, her

"mystery" proves a transparent one in its tendency to promote aspirations to holiness in her admirers. Isabel's appeal, by contrast, seems to partake at once of divinity and diabolism,⁶⁹ consecrate and converting to ambiguous forces. This spiritual irreducibility Melville roots in the body itself, so that Isabel as the unqualified "natural" woman will inspire the pathos of both lust and charity.

Melville sets up a tableau of Isabel that harks back to Lucy's threshold apotheosis but which compounds rather than clarifies the insolubility of Isabel's moral essence. As Isabel, in the presence of Pierre, kneels impulsively with her guitar before an open window, her voluminous black hair "tent-wise invested her whole kneeling form" and "completely muffled the human figure" (149). Shrouded rather than elucidated by her "unrestrained locks," Isabel's body undergoes sacralization without a corresponding interior illumination: "To Pierre, the deep oaken recess of the double-casement, before which Isabel was kneeling, seemed now the immediate vestibule of some awful shrine, mystically revealed through the obscurely open window, which ever and anon was [...] softly illumined by the mild heat-lightnings and ground-lightnings" (150). The "heat-lightnings and ground-lightnings" suggest not a heavenly diffusion of holy light but the superficial play of the "earth's enhanced energy" (Abrams 307); they do not penetrate Isabel's body but only enhance its obscurity.

Facing away from Pierre with the electrical lights before her, Isabel's position heightens Pierre's attention to the indecipherable surface of her body, rather than mediating a posterior light—unlike with Lucy, Pierre does not see an apparently divine light shine through her but only an immanent light play upon her. These surface lights afford no means of transcending matter

⁶⁹ Richard Brodhead observes of Isabel that "In the weird rituals in which she conjures voices from her guitar and glows with phosphorescent light she operates, in effect, as a witch," p. 228.

through the "double-casement" of Isabel's body; instead, they mutually implicate: as the narrator observes, "the physical electricalness of Isabel seemed reciprocal with the heat-lightnings and the ground-lightnings nigh to which [the spell] had first become revealed to Pierre" (151). Rather than serving as a "living icon" whose lucid physicality translates the adorer from a rarefied material world into a sphere of spiritual light, Isabel binds Pierre to a perpetual circling of the enshrined object, entralling in its cosmic charge.

Isabel's electric organicism creates an illusion of the possibility of transcendence, but in fact unleashes what Pierre comes to regard as "an extraordinary atmospheric spell—both physical and spiritual" which becomes "impossible for him to break" (151). The supernatural aura of Isabel's body derives from its compound of magnetic and antagonistic forces that Melville traces to the primordial conditions of natural existence. As an organic angel, Isabel's rootedness in the elements indeed intensifies her transformative powers, but those powers can only mutate her convert into fresh incarnations of an irreducible ontological perversity.

Isabel's blended embodiment of beauty and sadness inspires Pierre's conversion to heroic Christian charity because, as Melville depicts it, erotic passion and filial pity mutually intensify. Eros, with its proprietary drive to possess, and pity, with its impulse to sacrificial nurture, fuse for Pierre in a euphoric spiritual epiphany that masks its bipartite motive. That this problematic proves so comprehensively devastating in the novel stems from Melville's invocation of the sentimental correspondence between natural and supernatural principles. Put simply, by locating the path to the divine in nature, sentimental theology forfeited any alternate ontological ground. Because Pierre's compound of disinterested and self-interested passion extends backward into nature itself, no "supernatural" inspiration can purify it. In the same way, because the nation's dual commitment to evangelical and economic expansion springs from its very hallowed colonial

and Revolutionary beginnings, no subsequent movement to recover a purified "true" mission applies.

In seeking to compensate his illegitimate sister for her life-long economic and emotional deprivations, Pierre attempts to effect just such a purification of his paternal legacy in its perverse combination of disinterested charity and sexual passion. As a child Pierre hears from his Aunt Dorothea that in the days of his father's youth "there arrived in the port, a cabin-full of French emigrants of quality;—poor people [...] who were forced to fly from their native land," among them "a beautiful young girl" (75). Pierre's father, "with many other humane gentlemen of the city, provided for the wants of the strangers, for they were very poor indeed, having been stripped of every thing" (76). A rumor spreads among the friends of the elder Pierre that he has fallen in love with the beautiful lady, and they attempt to dissuade him from marriage for social and economic reasons. He finally abandons his attentions to the emigrants, and shortly thereafter his suspected paramour vanishes—but not before his cousin appropriates Pierre's expression "as a wooer" in a secretly drawn portrait (76-77), the suppressed counterpart to a portrait of the elder Pierre as a "middle-aged, married man" (72-73). Subsequent to his reception of the letter from Isabel which indicates their shared paternity, Pierre reapproaches the earlier portrait of his father, which he has enshrined in his closet, out of his mother's reproachful sight.

His eyes now illuminated with an "unchastened light," the youthful father provokes Pierre with the suggestion that the wooing portrait conveys, not simply an identity prior to that of the sainted household patriarch, but rather one contiguous with it—not merely a contradiction, but a correspondence: "Pierre, believe not the drawing-room painting; that is not thy father; or, at least, is not *all* of thy father. Consider in thy mind, Pierre, whether we two paintings may not make only one" (83, author's emphasis). The "mournfulness" of Isabel's face proves "not

inharmonious" with the "merriment" of his father's; rather, "by some ineffable correlativeness, they reciprocally indentified each other, and, as it were, melted into each other" (85). Isabel's features of combined grief and beauty disclose the secret combination that made the father's duplicity-within-wholeness possible: the self-interested structure of benevolent passion. The revelation of this paradox prompts Pierre to cry aloud "that wonderful verse from Dante, descriptive of the two mutually absorbing shapes in the Inferno": "Ah! how dost thou change, \ Agnello! See! thou art nor double now, \ Nor only one!" (85). Haunted by the irreducibility of his father's representation into either simple unity or division, Pierre attempts an absolute purgation of his moral, physical, and cultural inheritance through total sacrifice.

Most critics focus on the self-deception involved in Pierre's decision, after his moving encounters with Isabel, to forfeit his fiancé and inheritance to take up residence with and support her under the guise of marriage. Higgins and Parker in particular in *Reading Melville's Pierre*, their book-length treatment of Pierre's religious idealizations as repression, consistently trace his translation of sexual passion into spiritual ecstasy. But treating this self-deception as a factor in the religious impetus behind the novel's composition allows for a fuller understanding of the relationship between the two halves of the novel, a connection Higgins and Parker diminish by approaching the novel strictly as a mangled "psychological" study in repression rather than a "socio-ontological" foray (Stern 164-5). By contrast, highlighting the crucial fact of Pierre's combined benevolent and erotic motivations throws into relief the novel's era-specific preoccupation with the Christian ideal of disinterested love as reconciler of human divine natures, alongside a renewed emphasis on the spiritual efficacy of beauty and the innocence of natural desire.

Elizabeth Barnes helpfully retains the tension of Pierre's genuine moral "frustration," which stems from "the fact that his greatest love is also his greatest crime" (19). David Reynolds similarly observes that "most of the wrongdoing in *Pierre* results from [...] seemingly Conventional virtues" (160)—adding that "Throughout the novel, pure love and virtuous motives always give rise to illicit love and conflict" (161). But Pierre's motives with regard to Isabel do not parse neatly into lust and "pure love"—rather, as Brodhead explains, "his feelings are both genuinely disinterestedly noble and genuinely sexual" (235) and "not [...] simply a sexual desire in disguise" (235). Early critic John Freeman perhaps captured Pierre's predicament with regard to Isabel best when he observed that "incestuous passions seize him *when he most pities her*" (114, my emphasis).

From the outset, Pierre's interested and disinterested love comprise mutually intensifying aspects of the same impulse, so that his conversion to "a Christlike ethic of sacrificial love in his acknowledgement and rescue of Isabel" (Brodhead 229) coextends with his fall into perverse passion. Reynolds confirms that "Pierre is indeed a radical democrat in his [...] sympathy for the poor and oppressed" (293) and Milton Stern concedes that "Melville finds no fault with either the fact or the intentions of Pierre's heartfulness, for it is basic and necessary" (190). Pierre suffers a truly agonizing crisis in anticipation of his exchange of one set of loves for another; the trouble lies with his undertaking's compounding of self-interest and sacrifice. As Elizabeth Dill observes, "Lust, violence, and democracy comprise a single thematic pull in the incestuous attraction" (709) Isabel holds for Pierre. As a result, instead of his radical, heart-driven democracy serving as recompense to the ghosts of the "dispossessed" that haunt the legacy of Saddle Meadows (Otter 207), the Pierre's effort to purge America's flawed evangelical enterprise

simply reinstates it in a new form, leaving, as Pierre will himself lament, "Corpses behind" and "the last sin before" (*P* 206).

The slow formulation of Pierre's decision to rescue Isabel at the expense of all established material and domestic prospects involves the gradual realization of his heretofore innocent Eden as compromised at every turn, a realization that intensifies his determination to act as the sacrificial victim and purify his world. Foremost, in his own mother he discovers the deadly self-interestedness of a love he had taken to be unconditional: "Love me she doth, thought Pierre, but how? Loveth she me with the love past all understanding?" (90) The agonizing recognition that an attempt on his part to introduce Isabel to his mother to be received as a daughter would prompt her to reject them both with "scornful horror" doubles in Pierre the crisis of orphanhood: "now to me is it, as though both father and mother had gone on distant voyages, and, returning, died in unknown seas" (90). Neither father nor mother have proved recognizable mediators of divine love or charity, "the love past all understanding" in its comprehensive benevolence; as a consequence, neither proves a fit parent for Pierre's mission to raise Isabel up from her lowly condition regardless of the cost to himself.

But even as he inwardly censures his mother for her self-interested love, Pierre misses the beginnings of his own reenactment of both maternal and paternal mixed motives: "She loveth me, ay;—but why? Had I been cast in a cripple's mold, how then? Now, do I remember that in her most caressing love, there ever gleamed some scaly, glittering folds of pride" (90). In the conclusion of the same chapter, the narrator will knowingly remark on Pierre's own correlative motive, "Was not the face [of Isabel]—through mutely mournful—beautiful, bewitchingly? [...] How, if accosted in some squalid lane, a humped, and crippled girl, hideous girl should have snatched his garment's hem, with—'Save me, Pierre—love me, own me, brother; I am thy sister!'"

The narrator's succeeding exclamation, "Ah, if man were wholly made in heaven, why catch we hell glimpses? (107), ramifies most obviously onto Pierre's secreted self-interest as the glimpse of hell; however, it also doubly ramifies onto providence as creator, first, of the tainted origins of the man "made in heaven," and secondly of the hypothesized girls' condition of squalor and deformity.⁷⁰

This subtle indictment of providence intensifies in the meditation that follows, which contemplates the general human predicament of desire and its predilection for corruption. The accusation implicit in the narrator's complex reflection redounds first onto Pierre's father and finally backward onto the divine Father as the progenitor of human nature:

Why in the noblest marble pillar that stands beneath the all-comprising vault, ever should we descry the sinister vein? We lie in nature very close to God, and though, further on, the stream may be corrupted, by the banks it flows through, yet at the fountain's rim, where mankind stand, there the stream infallibly bespeaks the fountain. (107-8)

The opening rhetorical question ties back to the elder Pierre's enshrinement at the heart of Pierre's youthful religion, where "in this niche of this pillar, stood the perfect marble form of his departed father; without blemish [...] Pierre's fond personification of perfect human goodness and virtue" (68). As Crimmins explains, his father stands in relation to Pierre as "a quasi-apotheosis that confuses God and father in such a way that the imperfection of Pierre's deceased father reverberates theologically" (444). The narrator's conclusion—that "further on, the stream

⁷⁰ Melville spiritual biographer William Braswell observes that, in contrast to many of his contemporaries, including Emerson, "Melville's distress over evil in the world can hardly be overemphasized as an influence on his reasoning about the Deity," *Melville's Religious Thought*, p. 25.

may be corrupted"—seems at first to exonerate the sentimental view of nature and nature's God as transparently pure, with the "banks" of human custom standing in as the force corrupting congenital innocence.

The assertion, however, in its convoluted symmetry, in fact undercuts the very explanation it seems to endorse. For, it is "at the fountain's rim" that "mankind stand"—*there* "the stream infallibly bespeaks the fountain." The transition from "we lie" to "mankind stand" suggests movement parallel with the stream which "further on [...] may be corrupted"; instead, however, the movement corresponds with stasis, returning "mankind" to the fountain's rim/bosom of God and nature, which underlies both the "natural" innocence and the "natural" corruption. Crimmins argues that "the putative taint" of the elder Pierre's "premarital affair, and Isabel the unacknowledged daughter, severs piety from purity" (444); in fact, however, the affair reveals the "putative taint" to be fatally and originally coextensive with piety. As a consequence, in his effort to purify his Christian inheritance, Pierre will instead aggravate its contradictions to the point of approaching the commission of incest—"a sin anomalous and accursed, so anomalous, it may well be the one for which Scripture says, there is never forgiveness" (*P* 206)—and finally of following through with murder and suicide.

Having espied "the sinister vein" of self-interest work in his biological parents, Pierre turns for support to an alternate cultural representation of the uncorrupted fountain of divine benevolence, the minister Reverend Falsgrave. Critics, taking among other cues his name, have almost uniformly condemned Falsgrave as a simple representation of religious hypocrisy, ultimately departing on this point from the narrator's own conclusions, in calling him a "really amiable and estimable person" (166). Willard Thorp, for example, speaks of Melville's distaste for Falsgrave's "worldly hypocrisy" (195) and Stern concludes that Falsgrave "reveals what he is

supposed to believe, and reveals that he does not live according to that belief" (191). In his effort to test the religious integrity of Falsgrave's character, Pierre abstractly poses the question of his own position, whether in the case of a seduction "the legitimate child should shun the illegitimate," and charges Falsgrave to offer his opinion of what "would have been our blessed Savior's thoughts on such a matter" (101). Falsgrave declines to answer the question directly as a mouthpiece of Christ or of the church; instead, he declares that "Millions of circumstances modify all moral questions" (102). Stern points to this withholding as evidence of Falsgrave's "cowardice," saying, "he cannot find a solution which is compatible with the realities of humanity and also compatible with the appearance values of his benefactress," Pierre's mother (190).

But the symbolism attached to Falsgrave points to a deeper problem than inconsistency between appearance and ideal; it brings to light rather a contradiction within the ideal. At the moment Mr. Falsgrave insists on the import of moral contingencies for each situation, "the surplice-like napkin dropped from the clergyman's bosom, showing a minute but exquisitely cut cameo brooch, representing the allegorical union of the serpent and dove" (102). The exposure of the union of serpent and dove, a contradiction within a correspondence, occurs through the falling away of the "surplice-like napkin," itself a figure of intersection within cross-purposes. Falsgrave as such evinces the kind of contradictory integrity demonstrated by Pierre's grandfather, "in whose meek, majestic soul, the lion and the lamb embraced—fit image of his God" (30).

Pierre's—and the critics'—mistake lies in seeing Falsgrave's reticence as a simple product of his patronage rather than a comment on the inevitability of competitive interests. Pierre in consequence believes that he himself can transcend the social structures that compromise

Falsgrave's position and will into existence a purified microcosm of democracy. In a profoundly antinomian gesture he therefore determines to set himself up in the minister's place as the conduit of God's voice, saying, "I must seek [counsel] direct from God himself, who, I now know, never delegates his holiest admonishings. But I do not blame thee, I think I begin to see how thy profession is unavoidably entangled by all fleshly alliances, and can not move with godly freedom in a world of benefices" (164).⁷¹ In preparing to undertake a divinely-sanctioned mission of benevolence independent of the "world of benefices," Pierre imagines himself reenacting the Christian atonement through a sacrifice wholly unstructured by the demands of self-interest. Falsgrave's cameo, however, in its combined evocation of innocent sacrifice in the lamb and sensual passions in the serpent,⁷² resists the misguided simplicity of Pierre's vision.

Pierre's religious enthusiasm typifies American confidence in its millennial role and the deity who sponsors it—a confidence that leads Pierre to place his trust in a beneficent outcome to his benevolent enterprise: "Is Love a harm?" he inquires rhetorically, "Can Truth betray to pain? Sweet Isabel, how can hurt come in the path to God?" (159-160). As Pierre envisions it, God has

⁷¹ Crimmins condemns Falsgrave on the same terms as Pierre, saying, "Christian law finds itself beholden to material ownership, and its material alliances corrupt its spiritual ideals," p. 446. He then goes on to quote Pierre's conclusion regarding Falsgrave's moral entanglement but without exploring the problem of Pierre's own misguided mission. See pp. 446-7.

⁷²Melville offsets his description of Falsgrave's "open benevolence" and "excellent-heartedness" with suggestions of his refined sensual pleasures in the company of the Glendinnings. As in the case of Pierre's grandfather, whom Melville characterizes as a "noble, god-like being, full of choicest juices," Falsgrave thus emerges as the embodiment of a voluptuous gentility. This paradox surfaces during a moment when Pierre speculates on the integrity of Falsgrave's moral character and feels "the gentle humane radiations which came from the clergyman's manly and rounded beautifulness." Melville's imagery here subtly harks back to the grandfather with his "life's glorious grape" that "swells with fatness"—the epitome of sentimental decadence. See *Pierre*, pp. 30, 31 and 98.

inspired his plan to suppress Isabel's paternity and flee with her to the city under the false pretense of marriage. This move, he believes, will maximize his own sacrifice while minimizing, as much as possible, that of his mother, who may cherish untouched her revered image of her deceased husband. Pierre forcefully represses, however, the cost to Lucy; in the midst of "his scheming thoughts," the narrator explains, he "had substituted but a sign—some empty x —and in the ultimate solution of the problem, the empty x still figured, not the real Lucy" (181). Even as Pierre rejoices in the prospect of re-enfranchising Isabel, he enacts a corresponding sacrifice of Lucy's material and emotional future. Only his confidence in the absolute disinterestedness of his course mobilizes him to sever ties with Lucy as the paradoxical counterpart to his heroically democratic gesture.

Gradually, however, Pierre begins to awaken to a terrible realization: he is in love with his sister Isabel. And it is his passion for sexual possession that has animated his benevolent enterprise from the beginning. Having sacrificed mother, sweetheart, and estate on the altar of his purifying gesture, Pierre begins to suffer the influx of "horrid anarchy and infidelity in his soul," as memory restages the contradictions within his act of benevolence. The "heart-proscribing" words of his mother in disowning him (206), the "echoings" of Lucy's "agonizing shriek 'My heart! my heart!'" (206) as he pursued as infallible the dictates of his own heart, which "heaven itself, so he felt, had sanctified with its blessings" (167), combine with a frightened "recurrence to Isabel, and the nameless awfulness of his still imperfectly conscious, incipient, new-mingled emotion" (206). Having trusted in sentimental fashion the dictates of the "earnest heart" (167) as "divine inspiration" (160), Pierre encounters with bewilderment the collateral damages of his sacrifice: "Lo! I leave corpses wherever I go! [...] Can then my conduct be right? Lo! by my conduct I seem threatened by the possibility of a sin anomalous and

accursed, so anomalous, it may well be the one for which Scripture says, there is no forgiveness" (206). In his attempt to create a democratic redistribution of resources, Pierre has only succeeded in replacing material decadence with the moral decadence of incestuous passion. Not even by rejecting the paternal birthright secured by lust and violence, by literally disinheriting himself from the material fruits of America's expansion, can Pierre shed the self-interest implicit in the nation's founding.

Melville composes an explicit if complex representation of this irreducible paradox in the form of a pamphlet Pierre picks up and reads while journeying with Isabel to the city. The reading of the pamphlet occurs at a pivotal point in the novel, marking its shift away from the fallen sentimental world of Saddle Meadows and towards an urban environment characterized by the harsh realities of poverty. Melville creates an elaborate preface to the excerpted pamphlet in which the narrator abstracts from Pierre to a predicament that underlies the characterization of Pierre and the impetus for the novel from the beginning: the West's conspicuous confluence of illicit wealth and aspirations to Christian charity. "Sooner or later in this life," the narrator propounds, "the earnest, or enthusiastic youth comes to know, and more or less appreciate" a "startling solecism" unique to Western benevolent imperialism: "That while, as the grand condition of acceptance to God, Christianity calls upon all men to renounce this world, yet by all odds the most Mammonish part of this world—Europe and America—are owned by none but professed Christian nations, who glory in the owning, and seem to have some reason therefore" (207). Here Melville lays out most unequivocally Pierre's personal predicament as a function of a larger cultural and ultimately theological paradox—How "the greatest real miracle of all religions, the Sermon on the Mount" (207), should give rise to the "glorious gospel [...] as from the "Mount" which characterizes the grandfather's portrait (30)—and the exploitative practices of

a nation whose "glorious grape [...] swells with fatness" (31). Through the mechanism of the pamphlet's logic, Melville will lay at the door of American millennialism—its pursuit of heaven on earth—the "strange, *unique* follies and sins" (213, author's emphasis) of American expansionism.⁷³

The pamphlet, titled "Chronometricals and Horologicals," develops a conceit around the concept of human wisdom as "horological," or relative time, and divine wisdom as "chronometrical," or absolute time, based on the metaphor of a ship attempting to maintain its time keeping permanently according to Greenwich, in spite of its having sailed on to China: "thus, though the earthly wisdom of man be heavenly folly to God," the pamphlet declares, "so also, conversely is the heavenly wisdom of God an earthly folly of man" (212). The effort on the

⁷³ Ascertaining an authorial relation to the logic of the pamphlet certainly constitutes a formidable task, and critics differ widely in their assessment of its relevance and import, some seeing it as an object of Melville's moral disgust and others as the key to resolving Pierre's ethical dilemma. Dillingham, for example, sees it as "an excellently illustrated restatement" of Pierre's personal problems, "his impulsiveness where there should be moderation, his angry determination to defy the world, where he should exercise benign expedience, and his blindness to his own deepest motives, where there should be intimate self-understanding," p. 207. Dillingham goes so far as to conclude that the pamphlet comprises "essentially a handbook of survival whose principles, as far as they go, parallel Melville's own convictions," p. 233. Higgins and Parker in their co-authored treatment of the pamphlet similarly suggest it offers a timely but unheeded warning to Pierre, pp. 254, 264, and Braswell contends that "If Pierre had thoroughly comprehended and had acted in accord with the teachings of [the] pamphlet [...] he would have escaped disaster," p.81. Samuel Otter by contrast remarks that the pamphlet's "advice is endorsed neither by the narrator's comments nor by Pierre's subsequent actions," p. 251, and in his individually authored article "Plinlimmon and the Pamphlet Again," Higgins considers the pamphlet to be Melville's critique of "nominal Christianity," p. 225. I would argue, however, that the pamphlet resists a simple distinction between "nominal" and authentic Christianity, rather calling into question contradictions implicit in both sentimental and orthodox Christian ontology.

part of human beings to live chronometrically, or in imitation of Christ as the wisdom of God, "is, somehow, apt to involve those inferior beings eventually in strange, *unique* follies and sins, unimagined before" (213). As an allegorical analogue the pamphleteer then references the "story of the Ephesian matron," which describes how the self-sacrificing impulses of a widow determined to permanently mourn at the coffin of her deceased husband lead to a sexual encounter with a sympathetic guard in the presence of the corpse itself.⁷⁴

The story of the Ephesian matron reenacts the dynamic of disinterested self-sacrifice and sexual self-interest as mutually intensifying, a dynamic which the writer then explicitly connects to a larger ontological problem: "where is the earnest and righteous philosopher, gentlemen," he inquires rhetorically, "who has not been struck with a sort of infidel idea, that whatever other worlds God may be Lord of, he is not Lord of this; for else this world would seem to give the lie to Him, so utterly repugnant seem its ways to the instinctively known ways of Heaven" (213). Referencing again the "chronometrical conceit," the pamphleteer then insists, however, that "this world's seeming incompatibility with God, absolutely results from its meridional correspondence with him" (213). For, "it follows not from this, that God's truth is one thing and man's truth another; but [...] by their very contradictions they are made to correspond" (212). The proper moral conclusion, then, to be derived from this correspondence-within-contradiction consists in the abandonment of the pursuit of benevolent sacrifice, in the rule that "a man [...] must by no means make a complete unconditional sacrifice for himself in behalf of any other being, or any cause, or any conceit"; instead, a "virtuous expediency" comprises "the highest desirable or attainable earthly excellence for the mass of men" (214).

⁷⁴ See Dillingham, pp. 225-226 for the background to the pamphlet's allusion.

Rather than simply serving as a critique of Pierre's self-interested sacrifice or its own logic which undermines the sacrificial enterprise altogether (Otter 190), the pamphlet "describes a problem that fascinated Melville throughout his career: how contradictions are made to correspond" (252).⁷⁵ The pamphlet brings to the fore the problem of correspondence-within-contradiction which sentimental discourses on love resolved by positing an original and recoverable pure correspondence between nature and divinity. Citing Christ as an instance of chronometrical revelation that cannot be emulated by "inferior beings," the pamphleteer by contrast displaces reconciliation between human and divine natures indefinitely into the future, saying, "When [men] go to heaven, it will be quite another thing. There, they can freely turn the left cheek, because there the right cheek will never be smitten. There they can freely give all to the poor, for there will be no poor to give to" (214). As Higgins rightly observes, this perspective hardly represents Melville's own attitude toward the poor (224-5). The pamphlet, therefore, can be best understood as raising a point that implies religious infidelity (the "horrible idea" that "whatever other worlds God may be Lord of, he is not the Lord of this") and providing a

⁷⁵ In *Reading Melville's Pierre*, Higgins and Parker describe interpretation of the pamphlet as a "Janusian difficulty for readers of *Pierre*," who must take into account Pierre's being "judged from the stance of absolute Christianity at the same time that absolute Christianity is judged in the light of the horrors that follow any attempt to put it into practice," p. 118. In effect, the pamphlet generates a kind of mind-bending triangular vision by sustaining a simultaneous critique of oppositions that ought to provide a corrective distinction for each other but do not—a correspondence within contradiction that comprises the very subject of the text. The logic of the pamphlet's complacent moderation and the logic of Pierre's absolute sacrifice cannot correct one another because within their visible contradiction lies a less obvious correspondence—they both fail to reconcile nature and divinity within a purely beneficent whole.

spurious solution that leaves divine benevolence—and the myth of the American millennial mission—intact only because no longer accessible at all.

When Pierre first struggles toward a resolution with regard to Isabel, he conceives of it in summary as a choice between "Lucy or God" (181), between self-interested satisfaction and Christian charity. In the terms set out by the pamphlet, Pierre imagines that by embracing Isabel he will effect an alignment between human and divine wisdom, between his heart and the divine will. Instead of breaking free from self-interest into charity, however, Pierre finds himself deeply plunged into both, a deadlock which at once prevents his abandonment of Isabel (as an escape from eros) and the consummation of his lust (as a rejection of charity). The ecstasy of his intense emotional connection to Isabel thus doubles as the torment of an inexorable ontological and ethical paradox. Over time, the fusion of sexual passion and filial care that ensures Pierre's ongoing proximity to Isabel fuels a deadly rage at the terms of his desire, his inability to transcend its origin in both pity and lust. Isabel as organic angel thus indeed ushers Pierre into accord with nature and the supernatural—but in so doing makes an atheist of her most ardent convert.

Pierre cannot finally possess Isabel because sexual intercourse would collapse the tension between sacrifice and desire that characterizes his love for her. Instead, the objects of Pierre's eroticized benevolence shift and multiply: Lucy travels to the city and joins Pierre's household in the guise of a "nun-like cousin" (310, 311) to double and invert the terms of the choice, Lucy or God (Isabel), and/or Isabel or God (Lucy), signifying the infinite regression of the contradiction between interested and disinterested love. Believing herself agent of redemptive resolution to Pierre's mysterious dilemma, Lucy instead compounds to the point of absurdity his filial-erotic interests, placing already cross-purposed desires onto cross-purposed objects. Her reappearance

as an organic angel mediating divine love to Pierre in the same conflicted terms as Isabel brings to an end the possibility of a conventional resolution to the narrative.

As Milton Stern points out, "Lucy duplicates exactly in relation to Pierre what Pierre did for Isabel" (157)—but she does so in inverted terms. Where in taking Isabel nominally as wife Pierre sought to disguise a platonic connection through a sexual one, Lucy suggests the disguise of an erotic connection through a platonic one. Writing to her erstwhile sweetheart whom she believes to be embroiled in a marriage solely through the goodness of his heart, Lucy proposes her admission to the household on duplicitous terms, saying, "Let it seem, as though I were some nun-like cousin immovably vowed to dwell with thee in thy strange exile" (310). The mirrored arrangements depend on an ecstatic sense of divinely-ordained mission; like Pierre, Lucy pleads her case in terms of supernatural imperative, announcing, "I feel that heaven hath called me to a wonderful office toward thee" (310) and—more dramatically, "God himself cannot stay me, for it is He that commands me" (311). Lucy's confidence that her desire to territorially demarcate Pierre's affections coincides with the "call" of "heaven" signals her assent to the terms of sentimental possession: without ever consummating her passion for Pierre, she may nevertheless enjoy a boundless expansion of her proprietary power over him. In fact, her forfeiture of the instrumental possession of his body creates the conditions for her ecstatic expansion of power, mirroring Pierre's "sacrificial" appropriation of Isabel's heart.

Lucy rightly intuits the sacrificial impulse that prompted Pierre to rescue Isabel and in some measure restore her birthright, but she places her faith in the purity of that act of benevolence as unmixed with erotic desire. Unbeknownst to Lucy, erotic desire mediated Pierre's charitable love for Isabel, and when Lucy offers herself up as a sacrifice on the altar of an eroticized celibacy, she introduces the same deadlock of self-interested "unselfishness":

Our mortal lives, Pierre, shall henceforth be one mute wooing of each other [...] till we meet in the pure realms of God's final blessedness for us;—till we meet where the ever-interrupting and ever-marring world can not and shall not come; where all thy hidden, glorious unselfishness shall be gloriously revealed in the full splendor of that heavenly light; where [...] she, *she* too shall assume her own glorious place, nor take it hard, but rather feel the more blessed, when, there, thy sweet heart, shall be openly and unreservedly mine. (310, author's emphasis)

In the terms set up by Lucy's letter, the practice of celibacy on earth will find erotic consummation in heaven; erotically-charged sacrificial love in time paradoxically leads to a spiritualized sexual exclusiveness in eternity. For Lucy, privatizing barriers persist into and in fact intensify in the afterlife; the only difference consists in their evoking pleasure rather than resentment from the ostracized. Heaven, she intimates, will resolve as extraneous the problem of competing loves, but only because there Isabel will "feel the more blessed" to discover the absolute disinterestedness of Pierre's attachment.

Lucy's vision of a spiritualized love triangle contrasts notably with that of Jane Girardeau's in Judd's *Margaret*,⁷⁶ where the latter imagines herself "the servant" of both her fiancé and his deceased beloved Margaret:

[Gottfried] seemed for his devotion to Margaret Bruneau, purer, greater, diviner. He and Margaret constituted to [Jane's] mind a delightful company. She entered a magic circle when she came into their communion. She became one of a glorious trio. Then she saw herself interpreted and symbolized in Margaret; and acted as a conjuration to bring that delightful vision from the shades. (109)

⁷⁶ See Chapter 1, p. 207.

The Jane/Margaret/Gottfried "magic circle" instantiates the sentimental millennial vision of a completely harmonious hotbed of unconsummated erotic passion. Unlike Lucy, Jane anticipates the dissolution of discrete material boundaries that preclude universal access to the beloved object; she looks forward to absolute identification among subjects and objects of desire. Far from seeking Gottfried's heart to be "openly and unreservedly" hers, Jane entertains an ardor whose original fascination derives precisely from Gottfried's romantic attachment to Margaret (106). Pierre also appears to Lucy "purer, great, diviner" for his devotion to Isabel, but only because Lucy imagines that devotion to be categorically distinct from his emotional subjection to her own womanly powers.

With Lucy transformed from his erstwhile predestined sweetheart into "yet another incestuous lover" (Dill 728), Pierre proves unable to resist her newly supernaturalized eroticism. Following the excerpted letter from Lucy, the narrator adopts Pierre's ecstatic naiveté in a protracted meditation that figures Lucy as the incarnation of divine radiance: "When [...] man [...] suddenly is brushed by some angelical plume of humanity, and the human accents of superhuman love, and the human eyes of superhuman beauty and glory, suddenly burst on his being; then how wonderful and fearful the shock!" (311). With the complicit character of his own motives daily driving Pierre nearer to despair, a refined woman's gesture toward celibate intimacy presents itself as an alternate ontological ground. Lucy's proposal in effect renews Pierre's conscious belief in the possibility of an "absolute motive" (316): "For infallibly certain he inwardly felt, that whatever [...] her secret and inexplicable motive, still Lucy in her own virgin heart remained transparently immaculate, without shadow of flaw or vein" (317). Higgins and Parker point out how, from a psychological perspective, Pierre's infatuated response to Lucy's letter of self-invitation seems to nullify the periodic insight he has demonstrated into the

sexual undercurrent of his idealized attachment to Isabel ("Reading" 262-3). But because Lucy's proposition derives from the last stronghold of iconographic purity—the "transparently immaculate [...] virgin heart"—Pierre confronts the illusion of unmixed moral essence as from an untried angle.⁷⁷ And it is for this reason that Lucy—far from serving as "a mediating principle that strives for health and peace," (231) as Milton Stern has argued—collapses the last marble pillar of Pierre's ideological temple.

In order to join Pierre's household, Lucy reenacts Pierre's comprehensive immolation of material prospects by spurning a suit of marriage proffered by Pierre's cousin Glen, heir to Pierre's forfeited Saddle Meadows. And as with Pierre, her totalizing sacrifice seems to plunge her beyond the bounds of human nature into the immediacy of divine will. "In vain" does her mother assault the citadel of Lucy's bizarre resolve to take up residence with her married former fiancé and his new wife: "To all this, Lucy [...] replied in the gentlest and most heavenly manner [...] What she was doing was not of herself; she had been moved to it by all-encompassing influences above, around, and beneath" (327). On the one hand, Lucy's allusion to "all-encompassing influences above, around, and beneath" suggests her confidence in the combined benevolent sanction of natural and supernatural powers; on the other hand, it ominously harks to the same perverse mixture of "heaven" and "hell" that activates Isabel's "supernatural" aura (43).

Parallel with her letter to Pierre, in the presence of her mother Lucy articulates her sacrifice in terms of a boundless expansion of proprietary power: "Concerning the loss of

⁷⁷ By contrast, Pierre has no difficulty imagining self-interested motive on the part of his cousin Glen, who might with Pierre's absence approach Lucy "as a deeply sympathizing friend, all wishful to assuage her sorrow, but hinting nothing, at present, of any selfish matrimonial intent," p. 288.

worldly wealth and sumptuousness [...] these were no loss to her, for they had always been valueless. Nothing was she now renouncing; but in acting upon her present inspiration she was inheriting everything" (327). In keeping with the ethos of "pious materialism," Lucy values material goods strictly for their affective content; she therefore conceives of her exterior dispossession as an exchange for absolute interior possession of Pierre, whom she identifies as "all the world, and all the heaven, and all the universe to me" (311). But the dynamics of sentimental ownership allow Lucy to construe her most aggressive act as simultaneously her most retiring: "She looked for no reward, the essence of well-doing was the consciousness of having done well without the least hope of reward" (327).

Lucy's defiance of conventional values in favor of an apparently heaven-instigated benevolent mission completes her transformation into an organic angel whose spiritual command rivals that of Isabel. Once, Lucy's rarefied natural beauty transported Pierre to the limits of solely erotic arousal; now, her transfigured aspect transports him beyond "natural" experience into a state of ecstatic adoration:

The mere bodily aspect of Lucy, as changed by her more recent life, filled him with the most powerful and novel emotions. That unsullied complexion of bloom was now gone, without being in any way replaced by sallowness [...] as if her body indeed were the temple of God, and marble indeed were the only fit material for so holy a shrine, a brilliant supernatural whiteness now gleamed in her cheek. (328)

Lucy's body appears to have closed the gap between nature's most exquisite expression—"That unsullied complexion of bloom"—and matter as sheer medium of celestial light. With her "chiseled statue's head" she has morphed into Hawthorne's purified marble sculpture, purged of

sensual flesh tones. Unlike with Hawthorne's Hilda, however, Lucy's bleached aesthetics corresponds with a powerful magnetic charge that comes to exceed that of her dark-haired counterpart, so that Lucy's voice can inadvertently trigger a "submissively-answering note" from Isabel's magic guitar (328); and the elemental Isabel herself, "without evidence of voluntary will," yields to Lucy's overpowering magnetism by falling "on her knees before Lucy" and making "a rapid gesture of homage" (328).

The competing magnetic charges of Isabel and Lucy spark a contest of erotic power that Lucy gradually comes to dominate by virtue of her transparently disinterested aura, a transparency made possible by her serene confidence in her hold over Pierre. Believing that Isabel poses no challenge to her proprietary conquest, Lucy in turn makes no effort to lay claim to Pierre: she "seemed entirely undesirous of usurping any place about him, manifested no slightest unwelcome curiosity as to Pierre, and no painful embarrassment as to Isabel" (337). Lucy's transparent altruism, however, comprises the more irresistible erotic force: in spite of her evident indifference, "more and more did she seem, hour by hour, to be somehow inexplicably sliding between [Pierre and Isabel], without touching them" (338). Lucy's genuine relinquishment of sexually possessing Pierre paradoxically suffuses her with a supernatural force of attraction and, therefore, of affective control. Pierre experiences this force as "some strange heavenly influence [...] near him, to keep him from some uttermost harm," while "Isabel was alive to some untraceable displacing agency" (338). Merish contends that in sentimental texts "becoming civilized"—and I would argue here "supernaturalized"—"entails a willing renunciation of power over others, cast in bodily terms, and marks the sublimation of aggression into sympathetic desire" (3). By ceding her rights to Pierre's sexual body, Lucy renders her erotic interest "untraceable," exponentially increasing its power.

In spite of Pierre's implicit trust in Lucy's simplified essence, the mounting pressure of competing and conflicted affective demands drives him toward madness. He encounters bifurcated versions of his own moral character in Lucy and Isabel, who hail him as angel in human form, and Lucy's brother and erstwhile fiancé, who pronounce him a "monster" (335, 340). But Pierre, having at the point of his conversion been at once moved by pity and prompted by sexual passion, refuses to move beyond the irony this entails. In the novel's concluding chapter, having been sentenced to death by hanging for the flagrant murder of Glen Glendinning, Pierre stubbornly laments, "Had I been heartless now, disowned, and spurningly portioned off the girl at Saddle Meadows, then had I been happy through a long life on earth, and perchance through a long eternity in heaven!" (360). Instead, he determines to burn forever in the friction produced by the sentimental paradox; in place of harmonized human and divine love, "Now, 'tis merely hell in both worlds" (360). But even in his defiant engagement with the perverse terms of existence—"Well, be it hell"—Pierre cannot escape the urge to self-purification from the conflicting desires mediated by the sexual body. In the midst of his savage bravado, he throws out a piteous demand for altered ontology, saying, "But give me first another body! [...] I long and long to die, to be rid of this dishonored cheek" (360). When Isabel and Lucy, mirrored couplings of his perversity, seek entrance to the prison cell, he cries out in desperation, "Away!—Good Angel and Bad Angel both!—For Pierre is neuter now!" (360). By the conclusion, as Stern as argued, Lucy and Isabel collectively represent "Good Angel and Bad Angel both" (179), each an erotic agent who converts Pierre to a holy enterprise that, in turn, awakens untapped reservoirs of self-interest.

Having played the role of organic angel, Isabel and Lucy encounter the horrific results of their supernaturalized influence. Lucy, upon discovering Isabel's status as sister, not charity-wife,

"shrunk up like a scroll, and noiselessly fell at the feet of Pierre" (360). With her body itself wholly staked on the premise of her unchallenged proprietary power, Lucy withers at the word of a rival celibate love-interest. Finding her dead, Pierre turns to Isabel as the first and final embodiment of an irreducibly compromised ontology, crying, "Girl! wife or sister, saint or fiend! [...] in thy breasts, life for infants lodgeth not, but death-milk for thee and me!" (360). Pierre cannot isolate out the wife from the sister, nor the saint from the fiend; he can only by means of violence force them together into eternal stasis. The most explicitly sexualized action of the novel thus proves a gesture, not toward consummation and harmony, but rather towards a permanent irresolvable antagonism: "seizing Isabel in his grasp" and "tearing her bosom loose, he seized the secret vial nesting there" (360). As Isabel collapses from the effects of the poison, "her whole form sloped sideways, and she fell upon Pierre's heart, and her long hair ran over him, and arbored him in ebon vines" (362). *Pierre's* concluding tableau pictures a suffocating superimposition of body upon body, rather than sexual release. Isabel falls *upon* Pierre's heart, her hair runs *over* him, and *arbors* him, transfixing him in the deadlock of irreconcilable desires. Pierre's dying look of "scornful innocence" (362) attests to his refusal to renegotiate the terms of the sentimental contract, which assured that following the heart would lead to God.

With *Pierre*, Melville parodies the sentimental investment in the purifying force of sacralized female beauty and with it, the construction of a benevolent nation through exploitation and consumption. When Lucy's brother Fred encounters the horrific scene on the prison cell floor—among the double-suicides the body of his beloved sister—he returns the novel to its haunted colonial beginnings, crying "Oh, my God, my God! Thou scalpest me with this sight!" (362). The violent aftermath of Pierre, Isabel, and Lucy's faith in the "redeeming influence of affective feeling" (Barnes 80) marks them simultaneous victims and villains in the ongoing

enterprise of American benevolence, and harks back to the at once seamless and contradictory representation of the elder Pierre's Christianity. To an audience who relied on novels to reenact a national narrative of millennial resolution through the harmonizing of interests, Melville offered in *Pierre* only "an untimely, timely end;—Life's last chapter well stitched into the middle" (360).

Conclusion

From the martial Christianity of the Puritans to the sentimental humanism of the 19th century evangelical, Melville retells the narrative of American expansion as an irreducibly compromised experiment in staging heaven on earth. He furthermore dramatizes this problem in the most intimate terms possible, in the sphere of private conversion and sentimental sympathy. Melville rightly intuited the ramifications that spiritualized eroticism contained for the national narrative; the contradictions of desire thus picture in *Pierre* a fundamental theological and political paradox that Melville saw at the heart of the nation's millennial aspirations. Enmeshed in the self-interested benevolence of its original mission as "a city upon a hill," the America of *Pierre* endlessly recycles its rituals of self-purification through natural and supernatural revelation, determined to reconcile private desire with divine mandate. By undercutting these rituals at their most sacred juncture—the body of the organic angel—Melville produced a comprehensively devastating exposé of American ideals.

V. RACIAL AESTHETICS IN STOWE'S *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN* AND HARRIET WILSON'S
OUR NIG

Mid-19th century novelists experimented with the figure of the organically good woman as the mediator between divine beauty and human desire, a "living icon" whose attractive incarnation enabled a continuity between fleshly and spiritual devotion. In depicting the conversion and spiritual maturation of these exceptional women, antebellum novelists devised, with more or less success, a variety of strategies for intersecting erotic and spiritual appeal. Chapters 3 and 4 of this project chronicled the deliberate breakdown of this crucial affect into competing principles of lust and holy love, manifested by a splitting or twinning of the organic angel trope. The last chapter in this study also features a pairing of spiritual icons in the abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—but one that reveals the racialized constraints implicit in the peculiar embodiment of the organic angel. Finally, I conclude the study by exploring how the failed development of a black heroine in a black-authored bildungsroman exposes the cultural costs of essentializing racial and gender-specific bodies.

In her positive manifestations, the organic angel "catches men's eyes" even as she "directs their thoughts to heaven" (Adams 97, 107) where embodiment will safely dissolve into spirit. Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1859 novel *The Minister's Wooing* deploys such a living icon in the character of Mary Scudder, whose romancing of her childhood sweetheart results in his last-hour conversion. While *The Minister's Wooing* encapsulates Stowe's liberal aesthetic of Christian conversion, its vision of eroticized spiritual efficacy founders at the borders of the black female

body. Candace, African American servant of Mary Scudder, also plays the role of evangelical female witness, but Candace's appeal derives from oral testimony and maternal succor, over and against her aesthetically abject body. Humbly self-proclaimed as "poor, ole, foolish, black, [and] wicked" (349), Candace corrects and strengthens her white counterparts' faith, but through a contrast rather than consonance of her moral and physical attributes. In a novel centered on the complementarity of erotic and divine attractiveness, Stowe's restriction of Candace's spiritual influence suggests the hidden racial configuration of the organic angel.

Composed seven years earlier, Stowe's wildly popular antislavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) outlines the contours of her normative racialized outlook on Christian conversion. The racial topography of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* illustrates how the concept of "blackness" pressurized the dominant culture's liberal aesthetic of divine womanhood and reveals the limits of antebellum commitment to the paradigm of an eroticized evangelical feminine. Midcentury racial ideologies of the body ensured that the black female would be the one figure Stowe and her mainstream audience could not imagine as iconographic spiritual intermediary, and this exclusion had far-reaching cultural ramifications. As Harriet Wilson would demonstrate in her 1859 novella *Our Nig*, racialized religious aesthetics left the black female conceptually trapped within the boundaries of her body.

The trope of the organic angel depended on a purported convergence of moral and physical attractiveness predicated on bodily transparency; blackness, however, tended to return the white imagination to the surface of the body as opaque, rather than a tissual medium housing the divine. While Stowe and her white contemporaries disagreed widely on the metaphysical significance of blackness, their formulations of that significance all rested, implicitly or explicitly, on the assumption that blackness was a stamp of physical degradation, and as such

precluded an aesthetic correspondence between soul and body as both expressive of "God's image."⁷⁸

In contrast with its body wedded to racial blackness, the African soul remained susceptible to the same spiritual cleansing that could make all souls "blackened" by sin "white as snow." This "soul-body dichotomy"⁷⁹ undergirded the theology of racial paternalism, which held that the subordination of physically and morally degenerate Africans paved the way for their spiritual rescue under the enlightened influence of white Christians. Southern Christian apologists for slavery thus justified slaveholding on the premise that "the severity of the African servant's interior and exterior condition" (Earl 18) demanded the institution as a purifying "school of chastisement" (qtd. in 20). In her *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe would at once attack slavery as a horrifying misdirection of white paternalism and canonize the view that the "chastisement" of slavery comprised the black race's singular contribution to salvation history.

Rather than challenging the essential inferiority of physical blackness, Stowe would work in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* within the framework of this argument for the noncoincidence between black body and soul. Southern apologists' foregrounding of African slaves' suffering bodies as instrumental in their salvation laid the groundwork for what Jean Fagan Yellin has described as

⁷⁸ Historian David Brion Davis traces back to ancient times a "strong inclination to equate slaves with ugliness and dark skin, wholly apart from the reality of their appearance," p. 50. These purported marks of servility and hard labor combined with long-standing European associations between blackness and moral depravity to encumber the black body in the white imagination with a complex host of negative connotations. In a tableau of the black child Topsy, for instance, Stowe points to "toil and vice" as twin progenitors of African physical topology. See *UTC* pp. 262-3.

⁷⁹ Riggins R. Earl, Jr. identifies the "soul-body dichotomy" as the "fundamental theological and ethical problem [...] of slave masters and slaves during institutional slavery," p. 4.

Stowe's "transvaluation" of racial stereotypes (136), a valorization of lowliness drawn from New Testament theology.⁸⁰ Within Stowe's schema, black bodies call forth and disseminate a special kind of grace, not through an attractive mediation of divine light and beauty (as does the "living icon") but through the disfigurement and debasement of already-bject flesh.

Stowe's racialized vision of evangelical iconography, however, created a double-bind for representations of divinized black womanhood. On the one hand, the black woman's exterior, construed as both unattractive and opaque, barred her from occupying the role of an organic angel whose attenuated body interfused erotic attractions with divine charisma. On the other hand, for black females the brutalization of the flesh under slavery often went hand in hand with sexual exploitation, a crime which, in the 19th century imagination, tended to collapse distinctions between "polluted" body and "polluted" soul. Placing a black woman in the iconic role of the crucified African thus risked a dissolution of the crucial boundary between black body and whitened soul, a comprehensive blackening that would obliterate Stowe's racialized aesthetic of redemption by contrast.

It is an Uncle Tom, then, rather than an Aunt Chloe, who figures as the representative African saint, and an Eva, rather than a Topsy, who functions as the novel's Southern organic angel. As scapegoats for the slaveholding South, both the organic angel and her black counterpart undergo an expiatory martyrdom, but where the delicate white child Eva's converting power derives from interior sufferings that decrease corporeality, Uncle Tom's derives from exterior torture that relentlessly exposes and exploits his black embodiment.

⁸⁰ In the *Key*, Stowe would remind her audience that "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of this world to confound the things which are mighty," p. 41.

The necessity for these paired suffering icons implicitly underscores the failure of the organic model of conversion—with its faith in human nature's irresistible attraction to a picturesque Gospel—to address the kind of resistance to sentimental appeals that Stowe encountered in subscribers to slaveholding ideology. The image of the gentle and forgiving Uncle Tom's torments called forth an avenging deity outside the pale of a liberalized antebellum Christianity and the moral universe of sentimental authors like Judd and Cummins. By suffering the kind of bodily mortification that Christ suffered, Uncle Tom brought back the shock of evil and the threat of hell to the genre of genteel popular fiction.

Perhaps no single work of the decade more sharply deflated Stowe's metaphysics of race than Harriet Wilson's black-authored 1859 novella *Our Nig*. This thinly-sketched autobiographical fiction takes as its point of departure the birth, maturation, and attempted conversion of Frado or "Our Nig," indentured mulatta servant of an abusive white Northern family. While *Our Nig*, like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, engages the genres of the female bildungsroman and the conversion narrative, it frustrates the hope of dramatic movement entailed by maturation and conversion. The sentimental aesthetic of conversion could only countenance a black girl's development as the radical suppression of her body in the interest of the soul, but because Frado's mistress works to actively "blacken" her by verbal, physical, and sexual abuse, Frado lacks the means of escaping into a transcendent "white" interiority. Instead, Frado's attempts to anchor her identity in a prospective afterlife predicated on a white interior force her ever deeper into the ramifications of her body as black and female. Rather than experiencing racial blackness as a given metaphysical essence, Frado suffers it as a socio-cultural imposition fueled by economic demands for her laboring body. In response, she rejects the racialized Christian narrative that separates out souls and bodies and chooses to

inhabit her body as the full extension of her existence. The apocalyptic horizons of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* thus contract in *Our Nig* into an experience of unrelieved temporal abjection, throwing into relief the covert costs of hallowed white womanhood.

"Are there two Christs?" William Lloyd Garrison would query in his 1852 review of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (qtd. in Sundquist 15), the novel that would make its author "the single most powerful voice on behalf of the slave" (Hedrick 234). While Garrison was reacting to Stowe's apparent relegation of a sacrificial Gospel only to full-blooded black males, in contrast to whites and mulattos, his comment accurately illuminates the novel's bipartite soteriological structure, divided not only along racial but gender lines. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* does, in fact, explicitly present "two Christs"—both passive sufferers and both representative figures of the power of sentimental conversion. These figures, however—the white, frail girl-child Eva and the large, powerful black man Uncle Tom—stand as aesthetic counterpoints in Stowe's self-conscious revision of the Christian narrative.

In case any among her readership missed the cues in the novel proper, in her *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* Stowe explained the character of "gentle Eva" as an "impersonation in childish form of the love of Christ" (51). While other midcentury sentimental novelists like Sylvester Judd and Maria Cummins would experiment more boldly with female Christ-figures whose love combined the moral and sexual appeal of fully embodied womanhood, Eva subsides to the absolute corporeal minimum in Protestant sentimental iconography; her progressively disembodied femininity stages a seamless recession of sacral flesh into luminous spirit. A foreshortened version of the organic angel, Eva undergoes no conversion process at all because her physical maturation remains incomplete; instead, her immaculate body, including its incipient sexual dimension, simply recedes until divinity and soul intersect at death.

Stowe provides a brief glimpse of Eva's nascent womanly endowments that encapsulates how the erotic typically plays out in the sentimental 'economy of grace,' which relies on the intercessory power of the female body to secure and redirect erotic admiration toward spiritual ends. In chapter XXIII, titled "Henrique," Stowe introduces the character of Eva's cousin, a boy his father describes as "a devil of a fellow, when his blood's up" (390) and one who in Eva's presence cruelly chastises his mulatto servant Dodo. Initially, Eva tries to reason with Henrique but finds it "vain to try to make her handsome cousin understand her feelings" (389). Only after modestly redirecting attention to herself as the desirable mediate object does Eva succeed in initiating Henrique's change of heart, a change of heart Stowe clearly links with romantic infatuation.

The tableau of the budding attachment takes shape through the eyes of Augustine and Alfred, Eva and Henrique's respective fathers. As Eva and Henrique return from a horse ride, Augustine exclaims, "Look here, Alf! Did you ever see anything so beautiful?" and Stowe invites the reader to share the men's perception, saying, "in truth, it *was* a beautiful sight" (original emphasis). The narrator's rendering of the scene accentuates the role of erotic admiration in intensifying the sway of Eva's angelic beauty:

Henrique, with his bold brow, and dark, glossy curls, and glowing cheek, was laughing gayly as he bent towards his fair cousin, as they came on. She was dressed in a blue riding-dress, with a cap of the same color. Exercise had given a brilliant hue to her cheeks, and heightened the effect of her singularly transparent skin, and golden hair. (394-5)

Eva's beauty for an instant takes on the characteristics of a mesmerizing physical vitality: her "transparent skin" mediates the "brilliant hue" of blood flowing from vigorous exercise, and the

perpetual whiteness of her garments gives way to richness of color. Alfred announces the erotic implications of this representation by exclaiming, "Good heavens! what perfectly dazzling beauty! [...] I tell you, Auguste, won't she make some hearts ache, one of these days?" (395). Eva's "singularly transparent" skin here doubles as an erotic and spiritual tissue; she may effectually win hearts by virtue of her emergent capacity to "break" them. By doubly embedding Eva within the male gaze—object of Henrique's attention as perceived through paternal eyes—Stowe "heighten[s] the effect" of Eva's spellbinding physiognomy, her transparent skin and golden hair. And Stowe unveils the telos of this heightened effect in the subsequent paragraphs.

Henrique, obtuse to Eva's rational objections to his treatment of Dodo, yields instantly to Eva's emotional request, mediated through eroticized beauty. When Eva concludes, "At any rate [...] dear Cousin, do love poor Dodo, and be kind to him, for my sake!" the boy replies, "I could love anything, for your sake, dear Cousin; for I really think you are the loveliest creature that I ever saw!" (396). Henrique, the narrator reports, "spoke with an earnestness that flushed his handsome face," and Eva received "it [the earnestness] without even a change of feature" (396). Here the figure of the beautiful female functions to refract erotic excitement into agapic generosity, natural desire into Christian service, as Henrique pledges to "love" Dodo because Eva is the "loveliest creature." Eva's evident self-possession in a sensual moment signals her ability to purify and redirect Henrique's infatuation toward conversion, to win hearts rather than breaking them.

Unlike the conventional organic angel whose increasing spiritual influence corresponds with the process of sexual maturation, Eva's eroticism intensifies by virtue of her body's approaching absence, and Stowe reserves her ultimate spiritual efficaciousness for the realm of memory. This implicit trajectory surfaces in Eva's reply to Henrique's pledge of devotion: "I'm

glad you feel so, dear Henrique! I hope you will remember" (396). Appealing to her own future absence proves a marked refrain that corresponds with Eva's increasing spiritual prowess as death approaches: "When I am dead, then you will think of me, and do it for my sake" (403), she declares to St. Clare, and the imminence of her absent body initiates "a sort of judgment vision" that presages his conversion (404). On her death bed, surrounded by plantation slaves, Eva will inscribe the plan of salvation within the frame of her impending departure, saying, "I have something to say to you, which I want you always to remember. . . . I am going to leave you. In a few weeks you will see me no more—" (418).⁸¹ Eva's articulation of her future absence, like Stowe's use of the dash, works to heighten her future presence-in-absence; by making herself absent while present, Eva ensures she will be forever present when absent. The barrier between body and spirit breaks down, so that just as the near-absent body mediates the spirit, the spirit will mediate the effects of the once-present body. The narrator lays out the function of this exchange, when she identifies the character of Eva with "the peculiar charms of the one who *is not*" (original emphasis). "It is as if heaven," she expounds, "had an especial band of angels, whose office it was to sojourn for a season here, and endear to them the wayward human heart, that they might bear it upward with them in their homeward flight" (383). The "wayward" heart, with its earth-bound inclinations, falls under the spell of the angelic body, which seals the heart's natural endearment for supernatural ends.

The angelic body signifies the soul's most attenuated house; Eva's approaching death therefore manifests through a triangulation of thinness, transparency, and light, as the body

⁸¹ Eva's phrasing conspicuously echoes Christ's forecast of his impending death, "A little while, and ye shall not see me [...]" This declaration follows an explanation of the expedience of his bodily departure as clearing the way for the Holy Spirit. See Jn. 16.16 and 16.7, *King James Version*.

makes visible its own interior, the soul. And the more visible the sacral interior of the feminine body, the greater its capacity to penetrate hearts. An intimate moment between Eva and Uncle Tom illustrates this sublime convergence, as the feminine body gains access to the heart by signaling its own evacuation. In one of the many instances where Eva pronounces her forthcoming departure from the earth, "The child rose, and pointed her little hand to the sky; the glow of evening lit her golden hair and flushed cheek with a kind of unearthly radiance, and her eyes were bent earnestly on the skies. 'I'm going *there*,' she said, 'to the spirits bright, Tom; *I'm going, before long*'" (382, original emphasis). Even as Eva emphatically directs her own gaze and Tom's toward "the skies," she calls to his mind the thinning vestiges of her body, whose affect pierces him: "The faithful old heart felt a sudden thrust; and Tom thought how often he had noticed, within six months, that Eva's little hands had grown thinner, and her skin more transparent [...] even now that fervent cheek and little hand were burning with hectic fever" (382-3). As the "glow of evening" illuminates the "flushed cheek" which burns "with hectic fever," the body's interior comes to light as divine radiance, an interior fully visible only through the disintegration of that body.

The expiatory death of Eva accordingly involves no surface symptoms of decay; it clarifies and reduces rather than foregrounds the body, rendering it luminous as the rapidly dissolving container of spirit. The portrait of Eva in the chapter subsequent to "Henrique" thus shifts the underlying formation of Eva's transparent beauty from that of lustrous vitality to lustrous disease. She retains the "golden hair" and "glowing cheeks" reminiscent of her ride with Henrique, but she now wears her signature "white dress," and her eyes gleam "unnaturally bright with the slow fever that burned in her veins" (401). The glow kindled by fever serves to heighten

Eva's beauty even as it dissolves that beauty's physical source—a kind of non-corporeal blood-letting that hallows the body it destroys.

Eva's aesthetic crucifixion derives its primary symbolic force through the contrast of color, the flush of the body's internal physiology with the whiteness of pallid flesh, a whiteness that coextends with and collapses into the white light of the soul's radiance. The narrator describes Eva lying on her deathbed awaiting the arrival of the plantation slaves, "her crimson cheeks contrasting painfully with the intense whiteness of her complexion, and the thin contour of her limbs and features, and her large, soul-like eyes fixed earnestly on everyone" (417-8). What chiefly remains of Eva, her metonymic eyes, and her augmenting redness and whiteness, highlight the climax of the racially white body's disintegration into the spiritual whiteness of the soul, the last vestige of physicality comprising the fever that only white skin can show. Eva's practice of clothing herself in white moves here from figurative to literal, just as, in the hymn she shares with Uncle Tom, the "bright spirits" are figuratively "robed in spotless white" but literally pure spirit (382). Eva's white skin serves as the middle term in a volatile emblematic progression from white clothing to white spirit, as, within Stowe's sentimental aesthetic, figurative and literal, material and spiritual, cross-signify and interpenetrate. The "beautiful world" (418) characterized by bright spirits robed in white filters seamlessly backward into the biological processes of death, extending to the very garment worn by the angelic body. Thus beauty and whiteness, clothing, the flesh, and the spirit, all mutually implicate and reinforce one another, coalescing into a racially specific theological aesthetic contingent on the concept of a spiritual body.

Even as she sacralized the white female body in particular, Stowe set out in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to affirm an equality of souls across racial lines, the potential for every converted soul to

"become an angel" in the afterlife (415). Only a minority of mid-century white Americans actually argued against the existence of any soul inhabiting the black body⁸²; this position, after all, nullified the extensive foreign mission projects funded by churches across the nation and undermined the pro-slavery contention of divinely-ordained white paternalism.⁸³ Nevertheless, the viability of the African's soul as competitive candidate for "the beautiful world" warranted emphasis because, in the mind of midcentury white Americans, the black body worked as counterevidence against its spiritual interior, obscuring rather than advertising the soul's existence. A body conceived as opaque, unattractive, and blighted, obtruded upon the Protestant sentimental aesthetic, with its investment in the natural revelation of divine beauty. As Stowe and other well-intentioned whites defended the spiritual dignity of the black person, they accordingly felt compelled to oppose it to a given physical degradation—the African conceived as "God's Image, though cut in ebony" (qtd. in *Figures* 8-9).

By the time Stowe composed *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852, a systematic body of discourse had grown up around the concept of essential racial difference (Tawil 9) and taken hold at a

⁸² Earl identifies a strain of white Southern anthropology he terms "naturalism," which tended to classify "the slave with the lower species of primates such as the orangutan." Southern naturalists commonly posited "that slaves of African origin were mere animated bodies without souls," *Dark Symbols*, p. 11.

⁸³ Slaveholding clergy often stressed the responsibility of their fellow plantation owners to make the Gospel accessible to their slaves. One slaveholding minister, for instance, in 1851 exhorted his fellows that "If we are under obligations to study to promote the welfare and happiness of our slaves, viewed simply as animals and our *property*, how much greater is our responsibility when we view them as *immortal beings*," qtd. in Breeden, p. 229, author's emphasis. Even a rabid anti-abolitionist slaveholder would write in 1857 that in spite of their inferiority in "mind and character" slaves "have a soul to be saved or lost," qtd. in Breeden, p. 233. As Stowe depicts it, even the congenitally cruel Marie St. Claire, when pressed on the point, concedes both that God created the black girl Topsy and that she could, "as well as" any white person, "become an angel," *UTC*, p. 415.

popular level as common sense assumptions. In terms of racial aesthetics, pseudo-scientific analysis combined with longstanding cultural associations of the color white with purity and transcendence to enthrone the Euro-American profile as both prototypical and climactic in terms of human evolution.

In Stowe's 1855 *First Geography for Children*, for instance, she lays out for the benefit of the young a strictly aesthetic and purportedly objective assessment of racial phenotypes. Coupled with an illustration depicting the busts of five racial types, Stowe's description aligns the concept of racial others with bodies that interpose their differences between the (white) viewer and the ideal attractiveness of the Anglo-Saxon.⁸⁴ In a prefatory remark, Stowe states that "The middle and best-looking is one of the European race," adding, "As we belong to that race, I need not describe it" (174). All of the deviations from this model prove implicitly unfortunate, as when Stowe appends that "there are some" of the Indian and African races that "look as well as the European race excepting their dark skins" (175). Self-evidently the archetype of human beauty, the Anglo-Saxon requires no physical description at all; only the "specimen" (174) of the racial other necessitates a foregrounding of every bodily characteristic, each an obstacle to the perception of a naturalized symmetry: if only the foreign races could shed their deviant features, Stowe implies, they too could body forth the quintessential human phenotype.

While slaveholding in the 1850s was confined to the South, the racialized hierarchy Stowe delineates in *First Geography* took hold of the whole nation, with ideology and aesthetics fusing at a subconscious level. Because abolitionists and anti-abolitionists operated under a

⁸⁴ Stowe's divisions mirror 18th century classifications of the human species into Caucasians, Mongolians, Ethiopians, American Indians, and Malays. Davis notes that the "last five [sic] [four] groups had supposedly diverged from or degenerated from the original form set by the Caucasians," p. 76. See *Inhuman Bondage*, p. 75-76.

shared set of aesthetic and physiological assumptions about racial blackness, those like Stowe "who attacked slavery in fiction portrayed the races in precisely the same terms as those who defended it" (qtd. in Carby 33). Richard Yarborough speaks for many critics when he concludes that Stowe's "commitment to challenging claims of black inferiority was frequently undermined by her own endorsement of racial stereotypes" (25).⁸⁵ I have suggested, however, that in attacking slavery Stowe did not intend to challenge black inferiority per se; rather she undertook to shock a mainstream audience into adopting a radical new ethics based on what they already believed,⁸⁶ that within a fundamentally inferior body resided an immortal soul—and further, that this soul's very impoverished embodiment facilitated its unique susceptibility to spiritual grace.

Stowe's effort to transvalue racial blackness, however, stranded the black female body between two versions of conversion aesthetics, as it could neither mediate divine light nor undergo a sacralizing expiatory suffering. Within the world of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe disabuses the African girl Topsy of the notion that her blackness poses an obstacle to her own conversion; the separability of black body and soul ensure Topsy's viability as a candidate for angelhood in the afterlife. This body-soul schism, intended as redemptive, nonetheless serves to degrade the black female body and assert its incapacity to function as agent of sentimental

⁸⁵Ezra Tawil identifies as "perhaps the most nagging question in the history of Stowe criticism" the "seemingly paradoxical conjunction of a compelling critique of slavery on the basis of a slave's claims to humanity, on the one hand, and some of the most entrenched and precisely formulated racialism in our entire mainstream literature, on the other." See *The Making of Racial Sentiment*, pp. 23-24.

⁸⁶ Earl remarks that the Christian slaveholder "could only say *theologically* that the slave's soul was created in the image of God [...] In no way could this belief change the master's *ethical* understanding of the nature of the slave as body," p. 15.

conversion, foreclosing the possibility of a fictional representation of angelic womanhood in the person of a girl of African descent.

Stowe introduces Topsy in blatantly grotesque terms in order to demonstrate the absolute incommensurability between Topsy's aesthetic deficiencies and her potentially "angelic" soul: (black) body and (white) soul do not match up. Paradoxically, then, Stowe amps up her racial stereotypes in order to humanize Topsy—or better, immortalize her— by insisting on her capacity for salvation, "goblin-like" (351) visage notwithstanding. Via Topsy, Stowe will illustrate that, in the case of the black body, appearance does *not* serve as an indicator of supernatural capacity.

In the chapter titled "Topsy," the titular heroine makes her appearance as "one of the blackest of her race," not only in terms of her skin but her unreadable subjectivity. Her reflective eyes, "glittering as glass beads" deflect access to the soul, and "an expression of the most doleful gravity and solemnity" was "oddly drawn, like a kind of veil," over her face (351). In these introductory passages, narrator and characters join forces to represent Topsy's subjectivity as latent but so incomprehensible and hidden—"so heathenish"— it devolves into objecthood (352). Ophelia, astonished by the spectacle that is Topsy, exclaims, "Augustine, what in the world have you brought that thing here for?" When St. Clare calls for a dance from Topsy with a whistle as for "a dog," the narrator reports that "The black, glassy eyes glittered [...] and the thing struck up [...] an odd negro melody" (352). Just as the narrator reiterates the deflective quality of the glassy, glittering eyes, she reiterates the image of the veil as, when Topsy completes her dance with an unearthly abruptness, "a most sanctimonious expression of meekness and solemnity over her face, only broken by the cunning glances which she shot askance from the corners of her eyes" (352). The face and eyes which ought to mediate the body's interior instead

so effectively block it as to almost collapse the evidence of its existence. Expression conceals rather than reveals, and the eyes prove cornered objects which the light of the interior must escape around rather than through.

The "blackness" of Topsy's body and affect thus represent a positive obstacle to the apprehension of a recognizably human subject within. Those glimpses of human subjectivity—Topsy's "cunning" (351-2) and "drollery" (352)—serve to further materialize her, for, as it turns out, her plans consist of an apparently purposeless pilfering of objects.⁸⁷ In the first two pages of her titular chapter, Stowe characterizes Topsy's appearance and activity as "odd" no fewer than five times (351-2), for Topsy embodies deviation—or, to use a more resonant term, depravity. Her blackness throws her off the interpretive grid of intersubjectivity, thus damning her to an existence outside the sphere of human community, the transparent communion among saints as delineated by sentimental authors like Judd and Cummins. But rather than disputing the black body as thus stamped with abjection, Stowe suggests that its visible lowliness corresponds with a salvific interior lowliness, a self-abasing receptivity to divine beauty as embodied by the organic angel.

Ezra Tawil has observed that "the nineteenth-century discourse of race was never a simple matter of the body's complexion or morphology"; rather, race denoted "a kind of psychological and emotional interior" (11). This interior, Tawil amply demonstrates, revolves around the concept of "impressibility" (167) to "superior" natures, the liability to be strongly and spontaneously influenced by the white race. Stowe will deploy this purported innate racial trait

⁸⁷Part of Topsy's "drollery" consists in ventriloquizes herself as object; to questions about her human and divine origins with, for instance, she responds, respectively, "Never was born," and "I spect I grow'd. Don't think nobody never made me," p. 356.

to repeal the metaphysical implications of Topsy's body, with its stamp of depravity, as impermeable to the divine touch. Topsy will, therefore, be saved, both in spite of her black body, which visually typifies damnation, and because of her "blackness," which ensures her utter moral abjection and attendant susceptibility to, in this case, Eva's mediation of spiritual grace.

Inasmuch as Eva stands as Stowe's conception of the ultimate racial product, "born of ages of cultivation, command, education, physical and moral eminence" (361-2), she represents the human person refined to the point of divinity, a racial essence so purified it approaches autonomy from the body. Topsy stands as racial and spiritual counterpart: "born of ages of oppression, submission, ignorance, toil, and vice" (362), she has accumulated the dregs of mortality. But this very relation between "the representatives of the two extremes of society" (361) Stowe intends to prove redemptive, as Topsy's very abjection creates her vulnerability to spiritual impress.

The failure of a mass conversion on the part of African slaves, Stowe takes care to show in the *Key*, lies with the failure of the white race to embody the Gospel. Should they do so, she suggests, the conversion of the black race would unfold irresistibly, as a result of their tremendous imitative capacity and instinctive response to the beautiful. The "white race," Stowe insists, should "regard their superiority over the coloured one only as a talent intrusted for the advantage of their weaker brother" (56). Instead, Christian society has produced Topsy, "the representative of a large class of the children who are growing up under slavery [...] feeling the black skin on them, like the mark of Cain, to be a sign of reprobation and infamy, and urged on by a kind of secret desperation to make their 'calling and election' in sin 'sure'" (91). In this remarkable passage, although she fails to conceive of an alternate fully-humanizing paradigm, Stowe imagines what it would feel like for one's skin to be separable and entrapping, an external

obstruction that blocks access to eternal life. Unable to escape the implications of the black body, this "class of children" turns to the best alternative—reconciling body and soul by aggressively "blackening" the soul—a familiar situation within Calvinism, when a potential convert might despair of his or her "election" and so plunge whole-heartedly into "sin."

Topsy's misconception that her soul can never escape her skin, and, conversely, that the light of whiteness can never penetrate her skin and reach her soul, comprises the *only* stumbling block between her and conversion; once the sympathetic divinity of the organic angel penetrates her with its illuminating touch, her resistance to conversion collapses instantly and utterly. To Eva's initial appeals to Topsy to be good, the latter replies, "Couldn't never be nothin' but a nigger, if I was ever so good [...] If I could be skinned, and come white, I'd try then" (409). When Eva insists that "people can love you, if you are black Topsy [...] Miss Ophelia would love you, if you were good" (409), Topsy responds with incredulity. In Topsy's mind, as Stowe creates it, blackness as the sign of a natural and permanent state of damnation can no more be thwarted than Calvinism's congenital sinner predestined for hell can overthrow the dictates of God. But Topsy has failed to grasp, according to Stowe, the coincidence of the abject body with an abject soul whose very gift consists of its lowliness, its predisposition to receive grace. Only when she has experienced her own susceptibility to this grace does Topsy begin to countenance the notion that she "can go to Heaven at last, and be an angel forever, just as much as if [she] were white" (410). When Eva extends her divine touch through "her little thin, white hand," Topsy's deflective glassy and glittering eyes dissolve with "large, bright drops," that signal a "ray of real belief, a ray of heavenly love, had penetrated the darkness of her heathen soul" (410).

At this moment Stowe sets up a powerful visual tableau that would resonate across the nation and participate in a proliferation of iconic mementos canonizing *Uncle Tom's Cabin's*

racialized conversion aesthetics.⁸⁸ As Topsy sobs, abased on the ground with her "head down between her knees," Stowe frames above her Eva, "the beautiful child," who "bending over her, looked like the picture of some bright angel stooping to reclaim a sinner" (410). In "Arguing with Pictures," Ellen J. Goldner suggests that Stowe, who stated her intention "to paint pictures" in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* because "[t]here is no arguing with pictures," crafted this scene "to display as a simple and immediately accessible truth the allegory of Christian redemption" (71). For Goldner, the aesthetic force of the image, with its "stark contrast of black and white" (73) counters Eva's verbal message to Topsy that she "can go to Heaven at last and be an angel forever, just as much as if [she] were white" (410). Goldner rightly points out that Stowe's word-picture "is infused with metaphors of darkness and light that call to mind a Calvinist narrative redemption, based not in equality but in opposition and exclusion" (71). I would suggest, however, that for Stowe this allegorical background and Eva's assertion of an egalitarian *afterlife* serve a complementary purpose in highlighting the organic angel's role as a figure of irresistible grace who rescues the immortal soul from its blackened "body of death."⁸⁹ White middle-class

⁸⁸Goldner describes how the novel "stimulated a consumer fad that took up its characters in plays, popular songs, lithographs, children's books, and various sentimental items for the middle-class home," "Arguing with Pictures," p. 72. Goldner further notes that "the image of 'the beautiful child'"—Eva—"was one of the most often reproduced icons," p. 76. In her essay "Stowe and Religious Iconography," Carla Rineer includes a photograph of a painted portrait of Eva and Topsy hung in one of Stowe's guest rooms, which molds the angelic body and benignant face of Eva in a condescending posture over the supplicating face and ebony-black body of Topsy. See p. 197.

⁸⁹Rom. 7.24, *King James Version*.

consumption of this racialized iconography⁹⁰ generated a sense of ownership over the conversion process, a sense that black bodies could be managed by white angels.

The irresistible appeal of Eva as loving white female indeed precipitates Topsy's conversion, and Ophelia notably undergoes her transformation for this role⁹¹ through the transference of her attention from (black) body to (white) soul. Topsy's body on its own resisted a recognition of immortality, but Ophelia "viewed her now through the softened medium that Eva's hand had first held before her eyes, and saw in her only an immortal creature" (443). Through faith, the "softened" or transparent medium, Ophelia achieves a kind of x-ray vision; she sees "in" her *only* "an immortal creature," the receptive soul. And after Topsy receives the first "ray of heavenly love," the narrator likewise desists from any further racially specific characterization. In fact, aside from Marie St. Claire's boorish pronouncement that "she's just so ugly, and always will be" no further physical description of Topsy takes place in the text, as Stowe chooses to further characterize her only through "the softened medium," her journey from faith into female sainthood.

Topsy, the narrator suggests, does become a saint, in time—or so she implies by remarking that "Topsy did not become at once a saint" (443). We learn that Topsy "grew in grace and favor"; that, "at the age of womanhood, she was, by her own request, baptized [...] and showed so much intelligence, activity and zeal, and desire to do good in the world, that she was

⁹⁰ Goldner writes that "Stowe's racialized images became fetishes—magnets for antebellum cultural fascination," p. 73.

⁹¹ When, after Eva's death, Topsy falls back into despair, Miss Ophelia finally touches her and allows "the love of Christ" to body forth in both her words and the tone of her voice; "from that hour," the narrator reports, "she acquired an influence of the mind of the child that she never lost," p. 432.

at last recommended, and approved as a missionary to one of the stations in Africa" (612).⁹² In effect, Topsy would seem to have achieved the status of the organic angel, the end of a process triggered precisely in the same way as, for instance, Cummins' Gertrude, and through almost the exact same conversation—that even "ugly" children can undergo conversion and become "good" and, therefore, lovable. But where the bulk of Cummins' novel then preoccupies itself with the physical manifestation of female sainthood, Topsy's physicality, so emphatically foregrounded in the beginning, disappears completely from view. Even the news of her saintliness arrives secondhand, when the narrator relays, "we have heard that the same activity and ingenuity which, when a child, made her so multiform and restless in her developments, is now employed, in a safer and more wholesome manner, in teaching the children of her own country" (612). We learn what has become of Topsy's former "activity and ingenuity," but not, as in the case of Gertrude, what has become of her body.

Molly Farrell writes that Stowe "cannot imagine [Topsy] as being anything other than a subject trapped in the process of becoming" (265), and I would argue that this entrapment lies with the non-convergence of the black body and the white soul. The process of convergence between moral and physical attractiveness that completes the conversion journey of the organic angel remains stymied in the case of Topsy. Stowe accordingly delimits her converting agency to the instruction of children, of her own race, and in her "own country" (612). By assigning Topsy a ministry to children and in Africa, Stowe forgoes any threatening association of the youthful

⁹² Molly Farrell rightly points out that Topsy is "humanized" in this moment "with a gendered representation"; however, when she states that this description gives Topsy's "physical appearance feminine rather than animalistic features," she overlooks the fact that the reader no longer has access to Topsy's physical appearance. See "Dying Instruction," p. 262.

black female body with illicit sexuality.⁹³ Absent the organic angel's capacity to yoke spiritual charisma with physical charm, Topsy's combined spiritual and sexual maturation proves unrepresentable.⁹⁴

Topsy's racial abjection preconditions her to yield to the influence of the organic angel, but her own body can provide no aesthetic aid to conversion. By contrast, in the figure of Uncle Tom, Stowe advertises the black body itself as instrumental in initiating conversion. Stowe's effort to rewrite the narrative of African enslavement as eschatologically triumphal prompted her to create a redemptive role specific to the black male body as the ideal substrate for public sacrificial punishment. The symbolic power of this role derived from its association with orthodox representations of the crucifixion as a reconciling of human and divine natures through gruesome bodily suffering, rather than attractive coalescence.

Because midcentury liberal Christians had reconceived conversion as a peaceful integration of compatible natures, they tended to find graphic representations of Christ's crucifixion repugnant. Judd, for instance, would have his natural-born saint Margaret dream explicitly of a Christ who "doesn't hang on the cross as he does in the Primer" (167). In his efforts to assert the continuity between human and divine life, Judd would contrast the orthodox notion of an "Atoning Sacrifice," marked by Christ's physical agonies at the crucifixion, with the sentimental celebration of the "Atonement" as a benign "interdwelling" (171). Liberal Christianity's emerging interest in the effeminate beauty and transparency of Christ as "the fairest

⁹³ Recolonization also enables Stowe to sidestep the problem of integrating purportedly inferior and superior races within an egalitarian Christian fellowship.

⁹⁴ Topsy in this regard inversely mirrors Eva, whose life is cut short as she verges onto womanhood— at least in part, I would argue, as a result of Stowe's unwillingness to present a fully matured organic angel in the context of the slaveholding South, where she would be subject to a cross-racial gaze.

among the sons of men" (169) thus both reflected and enabled the sacralization of the white female body with its wholly interiorized sufferings.

In spite of Stowe's reverence for the organic angel, within *Uncle Tom's Cabin* the iconic savagery of the master and abjection of the slave threatens to overwhelm the kind of benign conversion aesthetic dramatized through the life and death of Eva. In the 1850s, proliferating images of the brutal, implacable slaveholder and his brutalized black slaves tested the conceptual force of a bloodless atonement and the paradigm of conversion by sympathetic attraction. The horrific conditions of slavery destabilized the liberal depreciation of human evil and readily synced up with revivalist rhetoric warning of divine wrath and eternal punishment. The American abolitionist movement indeed drew much of its momentum from the prodigious revivals of the 1830s, which demanded instantaneous conversion from specific hell-binding behaviors that, for many Americans, culminated in the problem of slavery as *the* national sin (Davis 251-2).

Slavery had created the conditions for a highly visible body-on-body barbarism that demanded an equally visible corporeal expiation of an appalling crime that tainted the whole nation. Thirteen years after the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in his Second Inaugural Address, Lincoln would make sense of the Civil War's staggering white-on-white bloodshed as the expiation for "every drop of blood drawn with the lash" (qtd. in Arnold 46)—but in 1852 Stowe hoped that the "blood drawn with the lash" could itself provide the expiation. Within this paradigm, in imitation of Christ, the black man's crucifixion would secure forgiveness for the white man's sin of crucifying him.⁹⁵ Even as she petitioned for the end of black slavery, Stowe

⁹⁵ Davis suggests that "much of the meaning of New World slavery" can be summed up in the message "An African's sacrifice is a European saved," *Inhuman Bondage*, p. 59.

thus hallowed the savage dynamics of the peculiar institution as the school of suffering by which the black race uniquely contributed to a preordained salvation plan.

A body magnified first by its blackness and second by its physical chastisement under slavery provided Stowe with an ideal aesthetic base for a conversion iconography rooted in the legacy of the crucifixion. At the same time, however, this inversion of the organic angel trope reintroduced the problem of sexuality as an impediment to the use of bodily aesthetics for spiritual ends. The black female body proved the most resistant to a disarticulation of flesh from lust, for exposure and punishment raised the specter of rape and thereby overtly sexualized the body's abjection.⁹⁶ Rape's penetration of the body's interior furthermore fatally softened the distinction between black body and "white" soul so crucial to racialized sentimental iconography.⁹⁷

Stowe's anxieties about the sexualized slave body ramified differently onto black females, whose eroticism she completely discounted, and mulattas, whose eroticism she highlighted as deadly for slave and slaveholder alike. Stowe had a great horror of the propensity of the attractive slave body to facilitate mutual damnation between rapist and victim; in the context of slavery, erotic endowments could facilitate only an obsessive recurrence to the sexual body, the violation of which, as Stowe depicts it, leads to atheism. In speaking of master-slave relations in the *Key*, Stowe repines, "woman, with her tenderness, her gentleness, her beauty—

⁹⁶ In spite of unconscious or calculated de-eroticization of the black female body on the part of white authors, black women remained strongly associated with "overt sexuality and taboo sexual practices"—not surprising in light of the regular appearance of mulatto children on Southern plantations. See Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*, p. 32.

⁹⁷ Frances Smith Foster notes that within a cultural system conflating sexual purity and sanctity, the black woman's "ability to survive [sexual] degradation was her downfall." See *Reconstructing Womanhood*, p. 32.

woman, to whom mixed blood of the black and the white have given graces perilous to the slave—what is her accursed lot in this dreadful commerce?" (280). Precisely the "graces" attributable to the female saint, "her tenderness, her gentleness, and her beauty," produce the kind of sexual exploitation and mutual spiritual hardening that Stowe pictures between Legree and Cassy. Unable to transcend or redirect the white male gaze, the only redemptive move for the mulatta, the novel suggests, lies with escape. Stowe could thus not risk foregrounding a feminine black body because the combination of abjection and female sexuality could not produce a triumphal icon of blackness. Whether construed as wholly black or as mulatta, the black female could not redirect attention from body to soul; nor could her corporeality be visually exploited without introducing sexual overtones.

Only a black man would be able to bear the full brunt of Stowe's transvaluation of blackness, which rewrote bodily abjection as a figuration of Christological grace. Because the black housing of the white soul could not make visible its interior physiology to create an aesthetically pleasing, symbolic form of compensatory bloodshed, it needed humiliating exposure and laceration to reveal its spiritually efficacious interior. For Stowe, laceration of the black body signified the peculiar gift of blackness—salvation not in spite of but because of relentless abject embodiment. She would accordingly apostrophize with the approach of Tom's death, "this, oh Africa! latest called of nations,—called to the crown of thorns, the scourge, the bloody sweat, the cross of agony,—this is to be *thy* victory; by this shalt thou reign with Christ when his kingdom shall come on earth" (562, author's emphasis). Although throughout the novel Stowe deplores the emotional tortures inflicted by slavery, with its destruction of affective and familial ties, here she cites only mechanical devices of torture, those designed to rend the body and accrue to the surface its interior substance.

The sentimental aesthetic of suffering required that body approach spirit through the dissolution of its corporeality; the black transvaluation of this aesthetic demanded the magnification and rupture of the body. These apparently inverse aesthetics both depended on a feminized subjectivity, suggesting how deeply entrenched the association between femininity and divinity had become in antebellum Protestant culture. The ineffaceable sexual embodiment of the violated black woman had doubly debarred her from epitomizing this association; she could neither usher in the kingdom of heaven on earth through bodily evanescence nor through bodily excrescence as "bleeding Africa" (qtd. in Hedrick 215). But if Stowe could not deploy the icon of the tortured black woman in her transvaluation of blackness, she would nevertheless invest her male icon with the feminized subjectivity that, by midcentury in America, had become a stand-in for the truly Christian disposition. Indeed, Hazel Carby would label Uncle Tom as the one instance of black "true womanhood" in the novel (34), an unsurprising paradox in light of the era's insistence on a harmless, passive Christ as the centerpiece of a peaceful mediation between nature and divinity.

Uncle Tom and Eva share the feminine subjectivity that, in liberal sentimentalism, marked the Christian saint: deeply feeling, visionary, and self-abnegating. This subjectivity stood, on the one hand, in opposition to the masculine, and on the other hand, in opposition to whiteness⁹⁸; the white masculine accordingly emerges in the novel as the indifferent, skeptical, and self-aggrandizing opponent of the Christian ethic. Privileged in every way, the white male could boast no form of abjection or vulnerability that would link him with the Christian reversal,

⁹⁸ Abstracted from the female body, whiteness for Stowe connoted cerebral aloofness; in *The Key* she contends that "the Anglo-Saxon race are a more coldly and strictly logical race," p. 155. Ezra Tawil observes that antebellum Americans saw "dominance" as the "single most consistently described characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon," p. 159. These categories dovetailed with constructions of mercantile masculinity.

"weakness" as "strength." Only vicariously could he achieve entrance into a faith naturally accessible to those endowed with feminized subjectivities. Both racially and sexually dominant, his very privileges rendered him the least liable to 'enter the kingdom of heaven.'⁹⁹ The intersection of whiteness and manhood yields an excess of preeminence that overcomes the spiritual associations of whiteness with the skepticism, materialism, and hard-heartedness connected with a mercantile masculinity.

Uncle Tom, by contrast, has a male body evacuated of masculine subjectivity, and this gap between the powerful body and the vulnerable subject creates a heightened abjection whose appeal complements the aesthetic appeal of Eva. Like Eva, Tom offers his body for consumption on behalf of the guilty white male, but as chattel property rather than object of aesthetic enjoyment. Even before his climactic hour of martyrdom, Uncle Tom can stir his master St. Clare into spiritual reflection by virtue of the debasing contrast between his looming, ineffaceable corporeality and simple, self-effacing selfhood.

Stowe introduces Uncle Tom as the quintessential African male in terms of his physique in order to naturalize his meekness of character as the essential black masculine personality once put in touch with the Gospel.¹⁰⁰ Tom has an impressive male physique, but one which has no

⁹⁹St. Clare, for instance, converts to Christianity only after the combined intercession of three saints—his mother, Eva, and Uncle Tom—and even then, only at the moment of his death; Simon Legree never converts at all. As Curtis Evans points out, "there is no compelling answer to these accounts [of white male unbelief in the novel] unless one takes race and gender into account," p. 506.

¹⁰⁰The aggression of characters like Sambo and Quimbo, Simon Legree's cruel black overseers—and in Stowe's later novel, the titular rebel Dred—thus represent unnatural contortions of the black masculine created by white failure to model the Gospel. Peter Stonely argues that Stowe pairs the "black as humble beast of burden (Tom)" with "the black as ruthless predatory animal (Sambo/Quimbo)," adding that she thereby "submits to a Gothicized

impact on his sensibilities; he has 'a lot' of body, but, stamped by the abjection of blackness, his body affords him no consciousness of male privilege. Rather, the sheer stature of his male body intensifies the absence of its relation to Tom's feminine consciousness: "He was a large, broad-chested, powerfully-made man, of a full glossy black, and a face whose truly African features were characterized by an expression of grave and steady good sense, united with much kindness and benevolence" (68). Here Stowe carefully aligns what at first appears to be a volatile description of black virility with a stabilizing set of benignant virtues, discretely foreclosing intimations of a masculine subject within the male body. Tom's "truly African features" conceal no conflicted will; rather, they conform to a simple predisposition to serve. In the instance where Tom rescues Eva from drowning, the narrator reiterates his physical prowess as "broad-chested" and "strong-armed" (233), but Tom will never wield his body in any act of resistance or aggression. Rather, he perpetually places it in postures of submission—lowering it to demonstrate humility, shoulder burdens, or receive punishments.

Stowe invests this feminized deployment of the black male body with an erotic capacity to initiate conversion complementary to Eva's, the latter through the coalescence of body and spirit, and the former through their divergence. In a crucial scene following Eva's death, Stowe illustrates how the meekness of the black male can inspire a salvific affection in the white male breast, paving the way for his redemption from the crimes of slavery. In this instance, Tom, anxious on behalf of St. Clare's well-being, approaches him with an "honest face, so full of grief, and with such an imploring expression of affection and sympathy," it "struck his master" (435).

racism that equates blackness with male, appetitive sexuality and, more generally, with evil," p. 61. Notably, however, both Sambo and Quimbo collapse into tearful penitents at Tom's martyrdom; this suggests to me that their prior stereotypical behavior signifies a malformation of their "true" personalities which surface instantaneously at their conversion.

Tom's "honest face" suggests an uncomplicated subjective transparency, revealing rather than concealing his motives of "affection and sympathy." His expression confirms that he lacks a masculine drive to rectify the power relations between St. Clare and himself. Instead, his whole agency centers on a sacrificial enterprise, guided by a feminized benevolent passion that allows for the propitiative substitution of his body for St. Clare's sins. St. Clare accordingly responds to Tom's affectionate solicitude by placing the weight of his own guilt on Tom's body: "He laid his hand on Tom's, and bowed down his forehead on it" (435). Tom's abased body provides the corrective to St. Clare's exalted intellect, which has blocked his path to sympathy and faith.¹⁰¹

As a converse of the organic angel's aesthetic eroticism, the gap between Tom's imposing male body and his self-abasing sensibilities serves to redirect desire toward faith.¹⁰² In the death of Eva, St. Clare fears he has lost the one mediator between his natural unbelief and the divine gift of faith: "Was all that beautiful love and faith only one of the ever-shifting phases of human feeling [...] And is there no more Eva,—no heaven,—no Christ,—nothing?" (436). Tom cannot, like Eva, mediate Christ through beauty, so he evokes faith in St. Clare by further abjecting his body as he attests to his own direct experience of the divine. Tom falls to his knees and speaks "with fast-running tears and choking voice," and St. Clare "leaned his head on his shoulder, and

¹⁰¹ Stowe makes it clear that St. Clare's resistance to Christianity lies with his too-eminent mind; excelling in reason, he has lost the visionary capacity of faith: "Tom," he says, "I don't believe,—I can't believe,—I've got the habit of doubting [...] I want to believe this Bible,—and I can't," p. 435.

¹⁰²In "'This Promiscuous Housekeeping': Death, Transgression, and Homoeroticism," P. Gabrielle Foreman treats the relationship between Tom and St. Clare as charged with homoerotic desire, pointing out that "male bodies, whoever's souls they are said to house, cannot be erased," p. 62. What makes this scene possible in terms of its pronounced physical intimacy is the fact that Tom's black/male body does not match up with his white/feminine interior; eroticism tends to surface "safely" when overt sexual interaction proves representationally inconceivable.

wrung the hard, faithful, black hand" (436). The role of Tom's maleness here concerns its evacuation of any masculine self-interest or dominance; literally on his knees and holding up St. Clare's head, Tom makes the absolute offer of his body for St. Clare's salvation, saying, "I's willin' to lay down my life, this blessed day, to see Mas'r a Christian" (436). St. Clare's response—"Poor, foolish boy!"—underlines the source of Tom's affective power: the incongruous abasement of his large male body evokes an eroticized pity and an uncomprehending awe. But even in this climactic moment of his living witness, Tom only succeeds in bringing St. Clare "nearer Eva" (438).

Tom does successfully initiate three conversions at his final destination, the hellish plantation of Simon Legree—those of Legree's mulatto mistress Cassy and his two brutal black overseers, Sambo and Quimbo. But these conversions, because triggered at the very heart of slavery's barbarity, require more than mere self-abasement and emotional appeals: they demand absolute physical prostration and a relentless shedding of blood on the part of the black saint.¹⁰³ Tom's death, indeed, occurs as a protracted and bloody process, unfolding as gradually as Eva's wasting disease. Beginning on page 507 with a "shower of blows" and the first of blood trickling down his face, his martyrdom resists conclusion until page 591.

The figure of Simon Legree, the paradigmatic brutal overseer and Tom's murderer, stands at the edge of liberal Protestant aesthetics of conversion. Neither the prayers of his angelic mother nor his saintly slave's abjection create a resonance of desire in his heart. His natural

¹⁰³Tom's martyrdom effects repentant weeping in all three characters, whose initial unbelief derives from differing racial predispositions. As a mixed-race figure, Cassy has an intellectual resistance to belief in a God who has permitted her suffering. Black Sambo and Quimbo have simply had the misfortune of Legree's cruelty imprinting on their impressionable natures. See Tawil, p. 168 for an explanation of black character as "the perfect Lockean substrate."

inclinations pit him against the spiritualization of both beauty and pity, so that he typifies the long-vilified figuration of human nature as instinctively hostile to the divine and deserving of eternal punishment. The key to the sentimental aesthetic—the spiritualization of desire—aggravates rather than alleviates Legree's fear and hatred.

"Cradled with prayers and pious hymns" (528) from birth, Legree, the narrative suggests, merits his damnation because he rejects, once for all, the overtures of sentimental conversion in the form of his saintly mother. Legree's mother personifies the ideology of the 19th century cult of motherhood, which, in its hallowing of the influential maternal body, participates in the celebration of feminine affect central to the organic angel trope.¹⁰⁴ A "fair-haired" and "gentle" woman, who led Legree "to worship and to pray" and "trained her only son, with long, unwearied love, and patient prayers," Legree's mother obtains to what should be the apex of nurturing influence. Legree, however, upon reaching maturity spurns this maternal mediation, and the narrator traces his successful resistance to the "hard-tempered sire" upon whom his mother "had wasted a world of unvalued love" (528)—thereby linking the failures of erotic and maternal affect. Although Legree's mother kneels at her profligate son's feet¹⁰⁵ "in the last agony of her despair" and, on her death bed blesses and forgives him in his absence, her spiritual influence proves insufficient. On the day marked as Legree's "day of grace," heaven presents its most persuasive appeal to his sympathies: "good angels called him" and "mercy held him by the

¹⁰⁴Adherents to the cult of motherhood held that by a kind of spiritualized psychosomatic influence mothers could instill salvation into their children.

¹⁰⁵The image of the kneeling mother points to a feminine affect distinct from that of the organic angel, who derives her power from being beheld and adored, rather than from beholding and supplicating. Notably, after her death Legree's mother manifests as "rising" rather than "kneeling" by his bedside, as she moves from status of pious mother to (in Legree's experience) perverse organic angel.

hand." Legree, the narrator reports, "was almost persuaded," but in the ensuing struggle towards conversion "sin got the victory," hardening his heart to the point that he later throws his supplicating mother "senseless to the floor" (528-9).

From the moment when Legree resists the divine at its most proximate and appealing (good angels and angelic mother), the forces of liberal aesthetic conversion undergo a reversal of effect: "That pale, loving mother,—her dying prayers, her forgiving love" now "wrought in that demoniac heart of sin only as a damning sentence, bringing with it a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation" (529). Her influence safely eroticized following her death, Legree's mother reappears as the ghost of a vengeful lover, her love-token of "long, curling hair" twining sensually in his fingers. The aesthetic object most calculated to seduce him back towards the divine, this blond lock triggers not the salvific recollection of his mother's desirability but terror-stricken recoil. "Often," the narrator reports, "he had seen that pale mother rising by his bedside, and felt the soft twining of that hair around his fingers, till the cold sweat would roll down his face, and he would spring from his bed in horror" (529). By the time he encounters a parallel sacral-sensual token in the "long, shining curl of fair hair" which Eva bestowed on Tom, Legree can only scream "Damnation!" (527) in response.

Legree cannot be saved because, within the paradigm of antebellum liberal Christianity, salvation occurs through the natural human craving after divine beauty. The terror of divine wrath that within the model of orthodox Christianity characterized the natural human response to holiness, in Legree signals an unforgivable capacity to resist the aesthetic and moral appeal of feminine grace. Having followed in the steps of the "hard-tempered sire," Legree is left to the judgment of a vengeful masculine divinity; the transference of the fair, pale saintly woman now mediates only foretastes of eternal fire (259).

The resistibility of Legree's divine mother, with the combined aesthetic and moral appeal of her sacrificial body, anticipates the resistibility of Uncle Tom's feminized self-abasement. Just as Tom offers up his body to be consumed on behalf of St. Clare's salvation, so he proffers the extraction of all his blood for Legree's, saying, "Mas'r, if you was sick, or in trouble, or dying, and I could save ye, I'd give ye my heart's blood; and, if taking every drop of blood in this poor old body would save your precious soul, I'd give 'em freely" (582-3). Legree indulges Tom's offering, shouting, "I'll take every drop of blood he has!" (584), but the visible dispersion of Tom's "heart's blood" can no more convert him than his mother's interiorized agony and bloodless atoning death.

Stowe's dramatization in *Legree* of the theological tenet of unregeneracy, which had provoked considerable anguish in her own life,¹⁰⁶ signals the limit of her emotional identification with slaveholders and, as a corollary, the limit of her belief in their susceptibility to conversion. "There are those," she would remark in the *Key*, "who yet retain the delusion that, somehow or other [...] by a soft, genteel, rather apologetic style of operation, Leviathan is to be converted, baptised, and Christianised" (440). Her exasperation with the "paralysis of public sentiment" (274) on the issue of slavery would prompt her to quote *Othello*, saying, "Never pray more. Abandon all remorse [...] For nothing canst thou to damnation add / Greater than this" (qtd. in 248). The existence and perpetuation of slavery in the United States in the era of the cult of

¹⁰⁶Following her son Henry's death by drowning, Stowe agonized over the question of whether or not Henry died "unregenerate," qtd. in Hedrick, p. 276. She would later lament—especially as it pertained to bereaved mothers—"the awful burden" imposed by Calvinism "of thinking that every person who does not believe certain things and is not regenerated in a certain way *in this life* is lost forever," qtd. in Hedrick, p. 283. The fictive failure of Legree's mother to save her son must certainly have represented the nadir of maternal terror for Stowe. But the material horrors of slavery prompted her to resurrect the eschatological horrors of hell.

feeling compelled Stowe to create the character of Legree as an embodiment of the kind of callousness in the face of the "magic of the real presence of distress" (*UTC* 156) that left her incredulous. In the *Key* she would record the pathetic letter of a slave woman pleading to a church elder that her daughter not be traded South; the woman implored that the owner imagine his own daughter in the same position, ejaculating, "Oh, then you would FEEL!" (236). Stowe followed the letter with the cryptic pronouncement, "The girl, however, was sent off to the Southern market" (236).

The limits of sympathy in initiating either the conversion of the individual heart or social change in the context of slavery prompted the kind of jeremiadical denunciations that punctuate both the novel and its key, on the "heaping up of wrath against the day of wrath" (*Key* 495). Although by isolating out the character of Legree as an object of damnation Stowe would to some extent attempt to create a scapegoat for the worst crimes of slavery, her need to admit of Legree as a product of both regional and national negligence left the borders of that damnation unstable. In a chapter in the *Key* devoted to justifying her characterization of Legree, Stowe would exclaim that "the men who make and uphold [those] laws" that protect the infinite power of the master "think they are guiltless before God, because, individually, they do not perpetuate the wrongs which they allow others to perpetrate!" (69). In this sense, Legree's resilient hard-heartedness served as a frightening metonymy for a "public sentiment [...] utterly blasted and paralyzed" (255). The emotional sensibility at the heart of the sentimental model of conversion thus demanded the return of its own repressed, Calvinism's "theological terror" (Hedrick 215) as the only remaining spiritual feeling that the damned could feel.

The unstable borders of national guilt brought on by a paralysis of sentiment called for an immanent and decisive settling of accounts that would finally distinguish the feeling from the

unfeeling, the elect from the damned. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as Richard Yarborough has argued, Stowe "tapped both a religious and a secular millennial ideology that would view the Civil War as divine retribution" (57). Although in 1852 Stowe still aspired to help stave off the doomsday ramifications of national indifference, the failure of the sentimental aesthetic to convert the slaveholder forecasted the need for a violent disruption of America's narrative of progressive salvation. Decisive resolution of evil by divine judgment, as the dark subtext of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, nevertheless depended on a fundamentally hopeful premise—that such a *deus ex machina* could cleanse the nation of the repercussions of centuries of racial oppression. Seven years after the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the freeborn black woman Harriet Wilson would produce an obscure text that dismantled the millennial narrative and its radical confidence in the possibility of systemic change—whether in this life or the life to come.

In the white-authored 1856 fictitious slave narrative, *Autobiography of a Female Slave* by Mattie Griffith, Christian mulatta heroine Ann attempts to persuade her fully-black counterpart Amy to "Trust in God" (208). Amy, however, obdurately resists Ann's claim that black and white people are equal before God and anticipates the implications of her own soullessness, saying, "when I dies, I'll jist lay down and rot like de worms, and dere wont be no white folks to 'buse me" (508). Ann protests that no abuse will transpire in heaven; rather, "God and His angels will love you, if you will do well and try to get there" (209). But Ann's reasoning proves unavailing; in the end she informs the reader that Amy's "ignorance could not see the difference between the body and the soul" (210).

The writing of anti-slavery activists, including Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, predicated the inherent value of the black person on "the difference between the body and the soul." Predestined to temporal abjection on earth, black persons could nevertheless transcend the

damning corporeality of their bodies by obtaining to the angelic status of white souls in heaven. As Anne would remark on a full-blooded black woman of "tawny complexion": "Her soul was as precious to [God], as though her complexion had been of the most spotless snow" (307). Authors like Griffith and Stowe sought to rewrite racial essentialism in terms of equal spiritual opportunity; both races could achieve the same spiritual eminence but by racially specific means. Either by demonstrating a recognizably white interiority that promises spiritual whitening in the afterlife, or by a mortification of the body so absolute that it is "put to death" literally and metaphorically, the soul within the black body could attain to white angelhood. In either case, the negative essentialist associations of the black body remained intact, including its metaphysical resonance with paganism and implicit damnation. Far from diminishing the symbolic import of blackness, Stowe would in fact increase it by heralding the revelation of its full significance at the Day of the Judgment when the curse of blackness would manifest as the peculiar means to salvation by way of the cross.

In consequence of Stowe's efforts to rewrite racial essences within a hopeful teleology, whiteness and blackness loom large in her novel, expanding beyond temporal boundaries into millennial resolution. But because the vision of redemptive blackness depends on either looking past the black body into white interiority or foregrounding the exploitation of the black male body, it pushed the doubly-cursed black female body¹⁰⁷ to the very margins of significance. For this reason, as Cassandra Jackson contends, "to represent black women's physicality at all [...]"

¹⁰⁷ In *Transforming Scriptures*, Katherine Bassard makes the case for the black female as *triple*-cursed within the framework of nineteenth century theology—as human (curse of Adam), sexualized (curse of Eve) and black (curse of Ham). See pp. 13-16.

was to risk supporting ideological projections of black women as 'only physical'" (157).¹⁰⁸

Harriet Wilson, the first African American female author of a published novel in English (Gates, *Bondwoman* xiii), would dramatize this symbolic entrapment in her 1859 autobiographical novel *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, In a Two-Story White House, North. Showing that Slavery's Shadows Fall Even There.* by "Our Nig." The very circularity of the novel's complete title, bookended by "Our Nig," suggests the suffocating contraction of narrative boundaries, as Wilson presents black female experience policed by the interlocking oppression of race and gender.

Our Nig creates a false hope of dramatic movement, the transcendence of spiritual, physical, and psychological bondage. Critics have wrestled over the proper generic classification of *Our Nig* (Piep 178), to the point that Debra Walker King concludes simply that "the finished product defies categorization" (31). Among diverse genres, *Our Nig* at some level comprises a "young black woman's bildungsroman" (Gardner 242), a fugitive slave narrative spinoff (Carby 43), and a fictionalized conversion narrative.¹⁰⁹ But at the root of each generic borrowing lies its failure of development and resolution in the context of Wilson's adaptation.¹¹⁰ The literary tropes of maturation, conversion, and escape from slavery, naturally often paralleled in early African American writing, in *Our Nig* instead stagnate the protagonist Frado at the center of an "ever-diminishing world" (Lang 64). The forward and upward movement of traditional

¹⁰⁸ Jackson here is drawing on Diane Price Herndl's discussion of 19th century novelists' "difficulty of claiming any physicality at all" for the black woman "without being subsumed by an ideological view that sees black women as *only* physical," "The Invisible (Invalid) Woman," p. 559.

¹⁰⁹ See Elizabeth J. West, "Reworking the Conversion Narrative: Race and Christianity in *Our Nig*."

¹¹⁰ Karsten H. Piep observes that regardless of interpretive approach, "there always seems to remain an unresolvable conflictedness at *Our Nig*'s core," p. 179.

antebellum genres—spiritual enslavement to spiritual freedom, physical enslavement to physical freedom, childhood weakness and vulnerability to influential womanhood—all collapse around Frado. She retains her self-interested anger at injustice, circles continually back to her oppressive host family, and grows progressively weaker and more dependent as she matures.

A key source of *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* power lay with its reinstatement of an apocalyptic horizon that helped usher in the Civil War as a drastic purgation of the national sin of slavery. But for the contracted horizons of Frado as a "free black," a civil war over slavery would alter nothing. Frado, already free, has nothing and nowhere to escape to. Rather, her strength decreases in proportion to her ostensible progress towards maturation and conversion, both of which necessarily imply a possible alterity of condition.

The origin of *Our Nig's* failure to complete any generic evolution concerns Wilson's startling refusal to countenance racial essentialism in any form: not a single racial generalization occurs in the entire book. By rejecting racial essentialism, Wilson deflates any metaphysical significance of the racial body. Blackness, in terms of both nature and the supernatural, "means" nothing in *Our Nig*. By contrast, in terms of socially constructed conditions, it means everything. This transplantation of significance from the metaphysical to the purely social and material realm accounts for *Our Nig* as a profound literary anomaly for its time.

The movement of the midcentury sentimental conversion narrative or female bildungsroman depended on a soteriological framework which involved essentialist racial assumptions. As a result, in *Our Nig*, by rejecting racial essentialism Wilson unmoors her narrative altogether from a linear trajectory. As Karsten Piep explains, "In opting for a simple, episodic storyline that ends where it begins, Wilson deliberately breaks with the linear 'overplot' of the typical 'women's novel' to foreground the 'horrors of [Frado's] condition'" (180). Wilson

chooses to foreground the black female body, the very body subject to erasure in conventional antebellum religious iconography by virtue of its hopeless ties to both blackness and sexuality.

Estranged from its own potentially whitened soul as well as from the saving heroics of Christological sacrifice, the black female body within the dominant cultural ideology exists as pure self-contained physicality, discontinuous with a transcendent spiritual realm. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Topsy's redemption accordingly depends on her capacity to escape that body through its textual erasure, but in *Our Nig*, Wilson refuses to essentialize Frado's body and therefore softens the distinction between (black) body and (white) soul that makes conversion meaningful. The margins of the soul collapse into the limitations of the body, and Frado lives out her experience as a temporal damnation of abuse and neglect, bound to the downward spiral of her bodily fortunes.

Because Wilson refuses to outline a racialized path to transcendence, blackness and whiteness in the novel break down from metaphysical categories into ideological and socioeconomic creations. A number of critics have commented on Wilson's use of ironic inversions to combat racist stereotypes, and these inversions ultimately participate in a larger project of dismantling racial essentialism altogether. Carol E. Henderson, for instance, contends that "Wilson complicates the national identic paradigm associated with the privilege of whiteness through an inversion of the theological and sociological constructs which name 'whiteness' and 'blackness'" (33). Gates similarly speaks to *Our Nig's* "inversion of blackness and evil and good and whiteness" (1), illustrated for example in the contrast between the cruel Belmont daughter Mary and good-hearted Frado. Taken in isolation, inversions of racial stereotypes suggest an effort to work within the framework of racial essentialism—but moral attributes in the novel do not distribute evenly along racial lines, making it impossible to trace a racial genealogy of

character. Frado's black father, for instance, cares devotedly for her mother, while Frado's black husband will abandon her and their child. As Barbara Krah argues, Wilson, "like the trickster," does not "merely substitute one hierarchy for another"; rather, she "deconstructs clear-cut hierarchies altogether" (476).

This distinction is crucial to understanding Wilson's remarkable departure from racial representations in her day. Even African American antebellum writers would frequently draw on the moral and theological binarism between black and white, body and soul (Ernest 221), in racially coded formations such as Frederick Douglass' complaint about "impunity" given "to any one, (no matter how black his heart,) so he has a white skin" (374; qtd. in Ernest 221). Wilson has Jim, Frado's black father, represent himself to her white mother within this logic, saying, "I's black outside, I know, but I's got a white heart inside. Which you rather have, a black heart in a white skin, or a white heart in a black one?" (12). Wilson rejects, however, these kinds of transpositions, which smack of a racist religious construction of discontinuity between the (black) skin and the (white) heart. Instead, Wilson at the outset of her novel establishes "blackness" purely as a function of societal structures, when she depicts Frado's mother Mag as falling under the curse of blackness by virtue of her sexual and social trespasses. In effectually tracing the social blackening of a white woman so comprehensive her abjection proves indistinguishable from racial abjection, Wilson sets the stage for the mulatta Frado's parallel blackening at the hands of her white tormenters.

The first two chapters of *Our Nig* trace the descent of Mag Smith, white mother of Frado, from a "loving, trusting" young woman "early deprived of parental guardianship," to an angry, hostile societal outcast. Triggered by a conventional scenario of seduction and abandonment, Mag's slow descent "down the ladder of infamy" begins irrespective of racial considerations. In

fact, the reader does not even learn Mag's racial identity until four pages into her abbreviated story, at which point she describes to the "kind-hearted African" Jim her state of abjection in terms of bodily contamination: "Folks seem as afraid to come here as if they expected to get some awful disease. I do n't believe there is a person in the world but would be glad to have me dead and out of the way" (9). Wholly prior to her entertaining the "evils of amalgamation" (13) by marrying Jim, Mag has thus already obtained to a racialized status of degradation: she lives in a "hut" by herself, is "above no drudgery" (8), and poses a social threat construed as biological contamination. It only remains for Mag, through "her union with a black," to initiate "the climax of repulsion" which "expelled" her forever "from companionship with white people" (15). "'Blackened' by her 'fallenness' and contaminated by her intercourse with black men" ("Beyond" 197), Mag's character highlights the phenomenal quality of racial categories and anticipates Frado's education into a socially-constructed racial status.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese notes that "[n]ormally the critics who write about mulatto heroines do not include Frado" (42), and I would argue this neglect stems from Frado's own process of progressive racial abjection, which moves her forward on a continuum of "blackness" that corresponds with her perceived economic potential and sexual threat. When Frado, abandoned at age six by her impoverished parents to the tyranny of the white Bellmont household, first encounters the amiable Bellmont son Jack, he remarks, "She's real handsome and bright, and not very black, either" (25). In response to Frado's disruptive evidence of racial whiteness, the despotic Mrs. Bellmont works to activate her latent melanin and thereby confirm her status as black and economically available (and sexually unavailable): Frado thus "was never permitted to shield her skin from the sun [...] Mrs. Bellmont was determined the sun should have full power to darken the shade which nature had first bestowed upon her as best fitting" (39).

Just as the townspeople determine to punish Mag for her transgression of the moral order, so Mrs. Belmont seeks to punish Frado for her racial transgression—the scandal of her having skin "not many shades darker" than Mrs. Belmont's daughter Mary (39). Frado's resilient traces of racial whiteness, then, invoke the more emphatic blackening, a move which underscores the social construction of her racial status. In this sense, as Fox-Genovese points out, Frado's abjection fits within the normative miscegenationist structure for, her "enslavement did follow the condition of the mother" (42). Frado, though of biracial origins, and Mag, though of white origins, "are" black because, for Wilson, blackness results from the cultural superimposition of abjection on any given body.

Mrs. Belmont's escalating insistence on registering Frado's 'essential' blackness neutralizes Frado's ostensible movement towards the physical and spiritual maturation which characterize the domestic bildungsroman. Cummins' Gertrude and Stowe's Topsy both purportedly originate as physically and morally distasteful figures whose transformation stems from an awakened impulse to pursue goodness. Although Gertrude's declared unattractiveness proves something of a sleight of hand and Topsy's domesticated body lies beyond the pale of Stowe's imaginative representation, in both cases spiritual development connotes a material transfiguration, and the two work together to generate the narrative movement. Frado, by contrast, enters the narrative as "a beautiful mulatto, with long, curly black hair, and handsome, roguish eyes" (17), and the more "handsome" (70) she becomes as she matures, the more viciously Mrs. Belmont ravages her body, once vowing, "I'll not leave much of her beauty to be seen, if she comes in my sight" (47). She likewise threatens to "take the skin from her body" (46), as if, in Frado's case, the removal of the compromised mulatto skin would disclose an unequivocally black interior. In keeping with the racial prejudice that construed the black body

as an extension of an essential "black" interior, Mrs. Bellmont attempts to force evidence of Frado's inherent abjection from the inside out. With the blossoming of Frado's sensual appeal and, in turn, religious sensibilities, Mrs. Bellmont forces her back down the steps of growth that mark maturation and conversion narratives.

In Mrs. Bellmont's eyes, mulatto beauty thus proves threatening because it threatens to disguise Frado's interior "blackness" and obliterate the mistress's claims to control of the body. Eroticism and spirituality¹¹¹ for Mrs. Bellmont have no place in the black body, and their appearance in Frado necessitates radical suppression, constant reminders that Frado's "whiteness," whether in terms of phenotype or Christian behavior, has no bearing on her latent abject "nature." Hence, when Frado begins to give evidence at church meetings that "a heavenly Messenger was striving with her" (86) and commences examinations of conscience and a devoted reading of Scripture, Mrs. Bellmont forbids her reading the Bible or further attending church. Mrs. Bellmont, the narrative reports, "did not feel responsible for her spiritual culture, and hardly believed she had a soul" (86). She instructs Frado that "it would do no good for her to attempt prayer; prayer was for whites, not for blacks" (94).

Because Mrs. Bellmont works to force from Frado's body the expression of a racial interior, Frado, like Griffith's Amy and Stowe's Topsy before her, has difficulty believing in the separability of soul from body and therefore receiving the Christian message predicated on that solution to the problem of black bodies. Guided by the tutelage of the good-hearted Aunt Abby, Mr. Bellmont's sister, and the local pastor, Frado "became a believer in a future existence" (84). But her faith concerns the destiny of "all good white people," while she continues to doubt, "is

¹¹¹ Doveanna S. Fulton observes in *Speaking Power* that "Frado's black body and the notion of 'truth' to Mrs. Bellmont are incompatible," p. 46.

there a heaven for the black?" (84). When the kindly minister invites, "all, young or old, white or black, bond or free" to come "to Christ for pardon," this proclamation of spiritual equality "was the message she longed to hear" (85). In this recognition of spiritual equality, of the potential "whiteness" of all souls, lay white antislavery writers' remedy to Mrs. Belmont's brand of racism.

For someone like Stowe, and for the kindly Belmont characters in the novel, the solution to Frado's black body lies with being good, the potential whitening of her soul. As the devout Christian James Belmont gently charges Frado on his death bed, "if you will be a good girl, and love and serve God, it will be but a short time before we are in a *heavenly* home together" (95, author's emphasis). While, I would argue, *Our Nig* does not come out strongly either in favor of or against Christianity, a point critics have argued extensively,¹¹² Wilson does out of hand reject the racialized Christian narrative of transcendence of the black body through interior whitening or exterior suffering. Frado experiences both, but, as she sobs to James after he tells her to "try to be a good girl" (50), "If I do, I get whipped" (51). This disturbing contradiction captures Wilson's challenge to the notion that moral strivings can tap into a metaphysical alterity (the white soul) and trump social conditions. Instead, Frado's abjection increases in proportion to her

¹¹²In *Resistance and Reformation*, John Ernest suggests that *Our Nig* represents the fruits of Wilson's "fully realized and hard-earned Christian perspective," p. 77. Few critics, however, read the novel's treatment of Christianity this positively. Cynthia Davis argues that "Harriet Wilson and her Frado are 'saved' not through religion but through speech itself," adding that they "speak of themselves and their own agony—not of God and His glory," p. 396. In this vein, Barbara Krah notes that "an apologetic tone is entirely missing" from Wilson's "account of Frado's 'un-Christian feelings toward her oppressors,'" which leads her to conclude that "Wilson rejects the conventional image of the pious Christian for herself and her protagonist," p. 473.

whiteness, both racial and "moral," and the antislavery message, while it seeks to undermine the basis for slavery, retains the premise of essential created difference that Wilson rejects.

Wilson's most cogent challenge to the narrative of racial essentialism occurs in a catechetical exchange between Frado and James, in which, after lamenting her condition of perpetual chastisement, Frado inquires, "Who made me so?" James answers, "God," and Frado proceeds to ask after the creator of various individuals, ending with "your mother" (51). James affirms that God made his mother as well, to which Frado concludes, "Well, then, I don't like him [....] Because he made her white, and me black. Why didn't he make us *both* white?" (51, author's emphasis). James can only respond, "I don't know," and remains troubled for several days afterward (51). James' inability to explain why God would create a fundamentally disadvantaged human body whose inherent abjection invited the exploitation of the advantaged race exists as Wilson's implicit critique of a racialized Christianity, of any extra-cultural significance of blackness.

The gospel of the separability of body and soul, for Frado, provides no avenue for a movement towards sainthood; though mulatta, she serves like her mother as a stand-in for the doubly-corporealized black woman cut off in both directions from the sacralization of the body. And unlike Topsy, who can transcend her corporealization at least through the representative disappearance of her body from the text, Frado's body, increasingly brutalized and damaged, becomes heavier and heavier in narrative import. And its foregrounded suffering dramatizes the reason behind the problematic exclusion of the black female body from the racialized Christian heroics of a figure like Uncle Tom.

Uncle Tom's transcendence of his black body depends on the rending of that body so that his blood speaks his saintly interior. The more spectacular his bodily mortification, the more

emphatic his millennial role in illustrating the peculiar spiritual gift of "bleeding Africa."

Authors like Stowe refrained from placing the female body at the center of this scenario for fear of a scandalous interfusion of the exposed body's spiritual power with an invitation towards sexual degradation, a violation of the body that could mutually penetrate the souls of victim and viewer/aggressor. Frado stands at this fatal intersection of gender and race, but not in the terms that Stowe imagined. Frado's exploitation denies altogether the aesthetics of spectacle, with its risk of sensual pollution; her tortures do not expand her body, either efficaciously or perniciously. Instead, they compress and contract her, rendering her at once unreadable and inassimilable through non-spectacular sexualized violence.

Phyllis Cole remarks on the "flatly told episodes" in which Mrs. Belmont wedges open Frado's mouth with a piece of wood as "more disturbing than the grotesque bloodiness of Abolitionist whipping scenes" (38). The sense of horror generated by these scenes exceeds those of spectacle because representations of the flaying of a body purport to exhaust the representation of the torture. In this sense "Abolitionist whipping scenes," though gruesome, suggest a full exposure and therefore containment of pain. Furthermore, the exteriorized torture of the lash invites a contrasting representation of interior immunity, a limit to the victimizer's jurisdiction over the victim: as Uncle Tom declares to Legree, "No! no! no! my soul an't yours, Mas'r! [...] no matter, no matter, you can't harm me!" (508). By contrast, Mrs. Belmont penetrates the body's interior and cuts off any expression of pain, leaving the violation unbounded: on one occasion, "Mrs. B. and Mary commenced beating [Frado] inhumanly, then propping her mouth open with a piece of wood, shut her up in a dark room, without any supper" (35). In another instance, Mrs. Belmont forced "the wedge of wood between her teeth" and "beat

her cruelly with the raw-hide," insisting to Aunt Abby that the wood remain in place until she permit otherwise (93).

Propping a mouth open with wood denotes sadistic intent, and Cassandra Jackson effectively argues for same-sex rape as a strong explanation for "the novel's omissions" (156), including Wilson's prefacing statement, "I have purposely omitted things that would most provoke shame in our good anti-slavery friends at home" (qtd. in 156).¹¹³ If gender and race doubly corporealize the black female body in antebellum representations, rendering it invisible on a spiritual plane, how much more so same-sex rape, an act which Jackson points out was "culturally and legally invisible in the period" (159). Furthermore, by forcing the wood to remain wedged inside Frado's mouth, Mrs. Bellmont creates a visible continuity between her indentured chattel and a material object, implying her limitless jurisdiction over Frado's body.

¹¹³As Wilson does not draw back from graphic representations of torture, it seems unlikely that she could be here referring to anything other than sexual violations. In "Said But Not Spoken," Ronna C. Johnson argues that representations of Mrs. Bellmont's cruelty stand in for a direct indictment of the Bellmont males for patterns of sexual abuse, which she works to decode in the text. While Johnson makes a convincing case for hidden sexual dynamics in the relationships between Frado and the Bellmont men, I do not see any suggestion of the kind of violent transgressions exercised by Mrs. Bellmont. Frado's strong emotional attachment to James in particular suggests that if sexual coercion occurred it did so in a context that forged feelings of affection and dependency. This is not by any means to argue away exploitation, but rather to suggest that Frado herself displaces any resentment towards the Bellmont men onto Mrs. Bellmont. Johnson points out that "white mistresses often brutally punished black women for the sexual transgressions of their white men," p. 109, and it seems likely that Mrs. Bellmont's acts of aggression are attempts to create for Frado an excruciating reenactment of sexual interactions occurring in the household. This would certainly help explain why Frado cannot conceive of being in heaven with James without Mrs. Bellmont's "fiery eyes watching her ascending path," p. 104.

The gaze of Mrs. Bellmont's "fiery eyes" has penetrated too deeply for Frado to stake her hopes on a future extraction of her soul from the abjection of her body. As a consequence, in a truly astonishing passage, Frado chooses to reject and actively resist the trajectory and teleology of the domestic bildungsroman:

Frado pondered; her mistress was a professor of religion; was *she* going to heaven? then she did not wish to go. If she should be near James, even, she could not be happy with those fiery eyes watching her ascending path. She resolved to give over all thought of future world, and strove daily to put her [spiritual] anxiety far from her. (104, author's emphasis)

To "give over all thought of the future world" constitutes an absolute reversal of the thrust of both black and white-authored anti-slavery literature of the period. And Wilson provides no narrative commentary on Frado's decision; rather, she shortly follows this decision with Frado's first gesture of defiance toward Mrs. Bellmont's control of her body: "'Stop!' shouted Frado, 'strike me, and I'll never work a mite more for you'" (105).

Frado's thorough corporealization, her necessity of inhabiting a body whose abjection extends to that body's interior, precludes her successful development along the lines of maturation and conversion. In response, she defies the narrative that separates out the corporeal from the incorporeal, body from soul. As a result, the apocalyptic margins of final judgment collapse into the space of her own private vengeance. When Mary Bellmont dies from a sustained illness, Frado can hardly contain her ecstasy: "S'posen she goes to hell," she tells the horrified Aunt Abby, "she'll be as black as I am. Would n't mistress be mad to see her a nigger!" (107). Rather than using Mary's death to dilate upon the metaphysical significance of Mary's cruelty and the infinite horror of a lost soul, Frado contracts Mary's soul into the boundaries of

her own experience of a damned body. Rather than picturing Mary in the tortures of eternal fire, Frado only imagines Mary being "as black as" she is—as meriting the torturous experience of the body which Frado has unjustly born. As Frado imagines it, Mary's experience of the afterlife is not that of the soul's release from the body into its spiritual fate (however painful), but, horrifically, the soul's entrapment in a humiliating physical badge of depravity. Hell for Mary is simply Frado's life on earth. Mrs. Belmont, likewise, receives a temporal redaction of divine judgment when she dies, as Frado has lived, "after an agony [...] unspeakable" (130). Wilson leaves Frado's impious comments and the Belmont women's temporal punishments to speak for themselves, and together they force an encounter with the costs of denigrating the black female body, even and especially in the interests of the soul. For Frado, as Wilson depicts it, this cost consists in the loss of a spiritual horizon—a loss that Frado embraces because it frees her to concentrate on the increasingly debilitating needs of her ineffaceable body.

Our Nig by no means constitutes a triumphal counter-narrative to sentimental antislavery writing; rather it simply and tenaciously clings in the cracks between the stories of conversions, transformations, and escapes. Frado does not achieve a counter-transcendence through rejecting a metaphysical significance to her black body; her first gesture of defiance toward Mrs. Belmont proves her last. Body broken by years of chattel laboring, even after her indenture she remains sporadically and increasingly dependent on local charity, including the Bellmonts'. Towards the conclusion of the novel, as fiction dissolves into autobiography (Gates and Ellis xxxv), Wilson reveals the ongoing toll of inhabiting a body marked by abjection, as one effort after another towards independence leaves her deteriorating in health and hope. Unable to transcend or barter her exhausted body, Wilson offers her text for consumption in its place (Henderson 40).

Ultimately, for Wilson blackness and damnation are synonymous, and both are what people do to you and take from you.

Harriet Beecher Stowe believed in the power of pictures to indisputably mediate truth, and in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* she composed verbal tableaux that reinforced entrenched cultural assumptions about the degraded attributes of racial blackness. Stowe did not attempt to undermine the notion of black physical inferiority because, like most white Americans of her day, she took black bodies' surface opacity and distinguishing features as evidence of degeneration from the superior Caucasian phenotype. At the same time, however, Stowe believed ardently in the equality of souls across racial lines, and was mortified by what she saw as white exploitation of the vulnerability endemic to racial blackness. She accordingly determined to rewrite the narrative of the abject African race in terms that would herald that people's role in saving not only their own souls from the clutch of depraved bodies but the souls of whites depraved by spiritual blackness. The result of her efforts—*Uncle Tom's Cabin*—celebrates racial abjection as the lowly path to crucifixion and redemption—a path that only one race could take.

This path proved, however, not only racially specific but gender specific. Stowe could not visualize a black female version of redemptive suffering that did not also conjure long-standing associations of the black woman's body with overt sexuality, whether as subject or object of lust. The conditions of Stowe's innovative aesthetic thus barred the black woman from figuring as an agent of sentimental conversion. She could not—like Eva, Judd's Margaret, or Cummins' Gertrude—play the organic angel and mediate the Gospel through the aesthetic and erotic appeal of the flesh. She could, like Topsy, be converted, but this process necessitated a visual banishment of the body, an impossibility in the context of iconic bodily suffering. In this

sense, Stowe's novel created the aesthetic conditions that lead logically to Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*, which follows the fortunes of a young black woman who not only cannot convert others but also cannot herself be converted. What Stowe would perhaps not have anticipated is the way that Wilson would allow her heroine's entrapment to contract the boundaries of the narrative itself, ultimately entrapping the reader in a world whose horizons fail to extend beyond a relentless and mundane struggle for survival.

The sentimental aesthetic of conversion, centered on the naturalized spirituality of the organic angel, itself represented a contraction of narrative possibility, as it confined divine action to beneficent human influence. As Stowe reflected on the tenacious expansion of slavery in a country dedicated, as she understood it, to Christian principles, the hope that liberal Christian aesthetics could effect spiritual transformation across the nation—that a gentle Gospel would irresistibly turn the tide of hearts—grew dim. The all-sufficient influence of the organic angel seemed inadequate in the face of such widespread concessions to the ugly realities of slavery. Because slavery had forced into the foreground the exploitation of black bodies, Stowe developed a racially-specific conversion iconography informed by the power of this disturbing image. Ultimately the dual aesthetics of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would help usher in the kind of savage "divine" reprisal Stowe at once invoked and hoped the novel could forestall, pointing to both the power and the limits of sentimental conversion aesthetics.

But Stowe's crafting of a racialized icon in the figure of Uncle Tom disclosed a preexisting racially-specific construction to the organic angel herself, and therefore to an American Christianity whose race-based theological aesthetic would wreak havoc long after the Civil War. Blackness complicated representations of divinized feminine influence because in the white imagination it typified sexuality absent the sacralizing presence of transparent beauty.

Antebellum novelists experimenting with the power of feminine beauty to effect spiritual transformation had a delicate task in evoking the eroticism of the maturing female body without representing that energy as directed towards sexual ends. For authors like Stowe, the developing black female stood in direct opposition to this projection, in that her body could not be reconfigured as suffused with divine light or stamped with divine beauty—it could only call attention to itself as object. And not as aesthetic object inviting veneration, but as chattel object, inviting sexual and economic exploitation.

This confusion of aesthetics, ideology, and theology dictates the material circumstances and moral possibilities for Wilson's Frado and, by extension, the peculiar narrative shape of the novel. The dramatic movement of the 19th century sentimental novel depended on the maturation and conversion of the heroine, whose role as an organic angel illustrated the consonance of natural and spiritual processes. What *Our Nig* ultimately suggests is that, for the black woman, racialized Christianity can destroy both.

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