THE GEOGRAPHY OF FEELING: CHRISTIANITY, THE NATION-STATE, AND
THE LABOR OF LOVE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY UNITED STATES
LITERATURES

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THE GEOGRAPHY OF FEELING: CHRISTIANITY, THE NATION-
STATE, AND THE LABOR OF LOVE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY
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Recent scholarship on sentimental literature has stressed sentiment’s ability to
forge bonds between individuals. Less observed in the literature is the fact that these
interpersonal bonds depend on detailed literary worldmakings. This dissertation traces
the interdependence of sentimental fiction’s emotions and antebellum evangelical
Protestantism’s landscapes. As they shaped their readers’ emotions, antebellum
sentimental literatures knitted the United States into intimate relation with evangelical
spaces and times such as heaven and eternity. This process, I argue, used literary
sentiment to stake out new territorial and temporal forms through which the nation
could act in the world.

In each of the novels that form my archive, characters feel the right emotions
when they understand their material world as part of a larger religious landscape.
Drawing on work in religious studies and anthropology that emphasizes “the places
where faith and materiality commingle,” as religious historian Leigh Eric Schmidt
puts it, I position these Protestant geographies as important indexes to how readers
learned to experience the objects, settings, and places that composed everyday life.
Chapter one, on Susan Warner’s The Wide, Wide World (1850), follows the multiple
settings—earthly and otherworldly—in which the novel’s characters do the literal and
metaphorical work of washing white clothes. Juxtaposing the spiritual and the
material, Warner inducts middle-class white women in New England and their
ambivalently white immigrant domestics into a joint responsibility to care for and
cherish whiteness. Chapter two, on Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), analyzes the geographic and religious meanings that intertwine in Tom’s death. Stowe’s novel, I suggest, forms white sympathy out of Tom’s comparative assertion that “Heaven is better than Kintuck.” Chapter three, on Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s *The Gates Ajar* (1868), reads Phelps’s novelistic rendering of a material heaven as a significant revision to the temporality of the nation form. Eternity, in Phelps’s novel, becomes a constitutive part of everyday benevolence, a shift that renders national temporality curiously heterogeneous. Together, these chapters offer new perspective on the material and embodied experience of national affect in the antebellum United States.
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Toni Wall Jaudon received a B.A. in English from Amherst College in 2001, an M.A. in English from Cornell University in 2005, and a Ph.D. in English from Cornell University in 2009. She was born in Amherst, Ohio.
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Though this work does not appear here, the Department of English and the Program in American Studies at Cornell University funded research travel to two megachurches in 2005. I look forward to drawing on that archive in the future. The Program in American Studies also generously contributed to my travel to the Seminar in Experimental Critical Theory in summer 2006, where I discovered Charles Hirschkind's work on the senses and religion.

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INTRODUCTION

"The moment we think of the world as disenchanted . . . we set limits to the ways the past can be narrated" (Dipesh Chakrabarty, Provincializing Europe, 89).

In the same year that she wrote Uncle Tom's Cabin, Harriet Beecher Stowe published a short pamphlet entitled "Earthly Care, a Heavenly Discipline." This pamphlet encouraged its readers to consider their "earthly cares" as "an education to fit the soul" for an eternity in heaven (44). The Protestant God, in Stowe's rendering, is not (or not only) concerned to "convert the world, and build up his kingdom everywhere" (49). Instead, Stowe argues, God's care and his agency extend to the trivial "vexations" of everyday life: "unruly" children, neighborhood gossip, furniture "ruined by carelessness in the household" (49, 50). These trials, according to Stowe, are opportunities for the Christian to rely on God for the strength to respond with mercy and grace, and to develop and enact a Christian character. Indeed, such troubles are "ordered" and "permitted by God," according to Stowe, in order to prepare the Christian for heavenly existence (49). Inscribing the daily monotony of responsibilities, slights, and insults in relation to a heavenly future, Stowe resignifies daily cares as meaningful, even valuable, forms of self-discipline that each become "a finished and indispensable link in a bright chain that is to draw you upward to the skies" (53).

If Stowe's remaking of daily cares is an attempt to form a particular Protestant subjectivity, it is also integrally a claim about the nature of the world. Stowe's remaking of earthly cares works by reminding the reader of the connection between heaven and earth, and by changing what this connection means. Daily cares, in Stowe's imagination, should form "a bright chain" connecting the reader-on-earth to a
heaven located above. The purpose of the tract is to encourage the reader to understand the repetitive tasks of daily life within this set of spatial and temporal relations: as occurring on an earth and in a present that is intimately related to a heavenly future. Outside of this primary relation between heaven and earth, Stowe writes, daily cares literally seem to “spring[] ‘out of the ground’” (49). Viewed as disciplinary trials sent by God and as opportunities to experience God’s love, daily cares forge the subject’s connection to a heavenly future, to another time and place.

In recasting earthly cares as heavenly ones, Stowe forges a striking link between white middle-class femininity and an interconnected heaven and earth. As a project of moral and emotional self-formation, understanding earthly cares as heavenly discipline is part of the larger work of the cult of “True Womanhood,” which sought to install “piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity” as the cardinal virtues of the American woman (Welter 152). In Stowe’s pamphlet, this emotional labor takes territorial form. If Stowe’s turn to the afterlife seems at first to read as the standard maneuver of religious thinking—the substitution of an “illusory future” for a “real present,” as Nina Baym defines the central purpose of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s The Gates Ajar—read in the context of the wealth of pamphlets, sermons, gift books, poems and novels about heaven that captured public attention in the mid-nineteenth century it appears as a crucial move to rethink the intersection between the white feminine self and the material world. For the defining characteristic of the heaven described by sentimental Protestantism in the mid-nineteenth century was its continuity with and resemblance to the real present of the domestic and sentimental literatures of the period. In exhorting her female readers to consider life as a middle-class mistress a “heavenly discipline,” Stowe situates this process of subject formation within what we might call a sentimental Protestant geography, one that encompasses
both heaven and earth.¹ The question that opens this project is what forming white middle-class women had to do with making heaven a place like earth, and what this conjunction meant for the development of U.S. nationalism in the nineteenth century.

A New Heaven and a New Earth

By the time that Stowe wrote her pamphlet, popular conceptions of the Protestant heaven were in the midst of a dramatic shift in form and quality. To understand the significance of the Protestant heaven at mid-century, we need first to look back at the history of heaven in U.S. Protestantism and in Protestant practice generally.² Religious historians Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang describe the heaven of the Reformation period as “theocentric,” focused entirely on God and his holiness:

According to this [theocentric] model, heaven is for God, and the eternal life of the saints revolves around a divine center. The saints may be involved in an everlasting liturgy of praise, they may meditate in solitude, or they may be caught up in an intimate relation with the divine. Worldly activities earn no place in heaven. At the end of time the earth either is destroyed or plays a minor role in everlasting life. Heaven is fundamentally a religious place – a center of worship, of divine revelation, and pious conversations with sacred characters. (178)

¹ I use geography instead of cosmography here because I wish to emphasize Protestantism’s work on the earth. I discuss the etymology of geography below.
² Because of the centrality of Protestantism to U.S. nationalism (and because of the common elision of “Christian” into “Protestant” in nineteenth-century women’s fiction), this project focuses on Protestant visions of heaven. As this dissertation expands into a book manuscript, I expect it will take a more comparative focus. The major scholarly works on the Protestant heaven are Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang’s Heaven: A History, Philip Almond’s Heaven and Hell in Enlightenment England, and Jeffrey Burton Russell’s A History of Heaven: The Singing Silence.
Eminent Protestant divines such as Calvin, Luther, and the Puritan theologian Richard Baxter drew sharp divisions between heavenly life and earthly life. For these Protestants, heaven was “the opposite of earth,” radically other to daily human life in the present (McDannell and Lang 178). This concept of heavenly alterity remained current among U.S. Protestants through the beginning of the nineteenth century. Late eighteenth- and early-nineteenth century New Light Calvinists—the intellectual, spiritual, and sometimes familial descendants of Jonathan Edwards—wrote about heaven as an abstract, dematerialized space of intellectual contemplation. The transition from earthly life to heavenly life was a transition from matter to spirit. Of all-encompassing importance in this heaven was the divine Godhead, so impossibly holy and pure that even the redeemed could hardly bear to approach Him. Left behind with the redeemed subject’s body were all of the material cares and investments that marked daily life on earth. Heaven was so radically other to everyday life on earth that it was essentially inhospitable to humanity. Writing in the early nineteenth century, Calvinist clergyman Nathaniel Emmons wrote that “there is nothing which God requires men to do in this life in order to go to heaven that is harder to be done, than to be willing to be in heaven” (qtd. in Douglas 222).

The mid-nineteenth century saw a wealth of literary and theological challenges to this abstract heaven. As the popular religiosity of the Second Great Awakening supplanted the Calvinist emphasis on predestination with an emphasis on proper feeling and free will, so the theocentric Calvinist heaven gave way to one more fitted to human wants, desires, and needs. Central to this transition was the new genre of consolation literatures, a constellation of tracts, poems, gift books, mourner’s manuals, stories, and novels designed to teach their readers how to properly grieve. Theologically, consolation literatures drew on an eighteenth-century undercurrent of
resistance to the Calvinist theocentric model. British Nonconformist Isaac Watts, most famous in U.S. culture for his hymns, expanded the theocentric model to accommodate “enduring human needs” (207). Where the Calvinist model stressed the irreconcilability of heaven and earth, Watts used his sermons and hymns to describe their similarities. Arguing that “the earth reflected the glories of heaven,” Watts treated “the great variety of riches and pleasures” that “God gave the world” as a foreshadowing of heavenly life (McDannell and Lang 207). In Watts’s heaven, the redeemed would survey “planetary worlds besides that which we inhabit,” reporting on their discoveries to their fellow saints (qtd. in McDannell and Lang 209). Most influential in the transition from a God-centered to a human-centered heaven, however, was the Swedish theologian Emanuel Swedenborg, whose writings sought to draw heaven into close proximity to earth. “Rather than viewing heaven as the structural opposite of life on earth,” McDannell and Lang suggest, Swedenborg saw it “as a continuation and fulfillment of material existence. Heaven possesses a material character which gives it a sensuous quality” (183).

This newly sensual heaven became accessible to nineteenth-century readers through its participation in what Shirley Samuels has called “the culture of sentiment.” Encompassing novels, poems, print culture, and material objects, sentimental culture sought to cultivate proper affective and bodily responses to the world. As sentimental

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3 While “the majority of Christians” during the eighteenth century “took little notice” of Swedenborg and his work, according to McDannell and Lang, “the cultural climate supported the general perspective of his views” (183). Swedenborg’s mystical writings would influence the trajectory of nineteenth-century Spiritualism. While both Harriet Beecher Stowe and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps were influenced by Spiritualism later in their careers, their earlier works treat heaven’s materiality as a concept separate from Spiritualism’s claims about the “other world.” Phelps, in particular, actively sought to distance her rendering of heaven from Spiritualist practice, hoping to render her portrait acceptable across denominational lines.

4 Studies of sentimentalism such as this one are indebted to The Culture of Sentiment’s turn toward race, class, and gender, and also to pioneering works such as Ann
narratives flourished at mid-century, they cross-pollinated with a wealth of popular literatures on grief and mourning. Called consolation literatures, these fictions, tracts, poems, gift books, and mourning manuals sought to teach their readers how to manage and direct their sorrow.\(^5\) When consolation literatures speculated about the material and sensual characteristics of the Protestant heaven, they explicitly patterned their heaven after the domestic novel’s idealized middle-class home. Preserved intact in the transition from life to afterlife were not only the spatial coordinates of domesticity—tidy houses, neat neighborhoods, and beautiful landscapes—but also the sensory experience of domesticity’s world. Thus consolation literatures could imagine, for instance, that dead children in heaven attended heavenly primary schools, or that the mansions promised in John 14\(^6\) would take the form of a snug Victorian cottage complete with flowers growing under the windowsill. In these literatures, Ann Douglas notes, “heaven was apparently as real, as concrete, as Texas,” constructed out of the same solid materials and accessible by the same sensory capacities (214).

This materialism was central to consolation literatures’ emotional pedagogy. Written into fictional narratives, this newly material heaven became part of the imagined worlds that sentimental novels offered their readers, even as it established itself at the heart of white women’s emotional self-cultivation. Sentimental novels not explicitly designed to console drew on the materialized heaven consolation literatures described, and consolation literatures participated in the larger project of emotional

\(^5\) For overviews of consolation literature as a genre, see Ann Douglas’s *The Feminization of American Culture*, chapter six, and Dana Luciano’s *Arresting Grief*, chapter one.

\(^6\) John 14: 2-3: “In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”
subject formation that was so important to the sentimental novel. In the intertwined histories of the sentimental novel and consolation literature, we can see how learning to feel required imaginative access to a heaven like earth.

On What Ground?

Antebellum visions of a material heaven took shape in the context of broad cultural and political interest in geography. Literary historian Martin Brückner records the increasing emphasis early national citizens placed on geographic literacy. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw a flourishing of books, tracts, and primers on the geography of the new nation and the globe in which it was located (Brückner 15). Both Brückner and literary critic Anne Baker read the increasing social interest in geography in the context of U.S. expansion. Religious historian Amy DeRogatis observes the stake evangelical Protestantism had in geographic writing, noting that the surveyors and missionaries who claimed Ohio’s Western Reserve in the early 1800s worked together “to inscribe a set of spatial and moral presumptions” onto frontier space (19). Jedediah Morse, the author of the first major geography of the new nation, was both a minister and a “strong supporter of . . . Protestant home missions” (DeRogatis 19). Harriet Beecher Stowe, likewise, began her literary career by coauthoring an immensely popular geography textbook, Primary Geography for Children, with her sister Catharine. As literary scholars, Brückner and Baker each read popular geographies as articulating ideas about the land and the self that spill over into, and are amplified and resignified by, literary representations of the

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7 Writing about the antebellum period, Baker suggests that geography became a site at which anxieties about U.S. imperialism became apparent. Fears that the nation could become a “heartless immensity” stalked the movement of antebellum borders ever outward, and resistance to empire took the form of calls for firmer boundary lines, for a nation that had a definite shape and character (11-5).
world. Brückner, for instance, points out “the reciprocity of early national geographies and the novel,” observing that geography textbooks often “assumed novelistic properties” while novels replicated and reinforced the information geographies disseminated (15, 176-7). Together, these studies suggest, novels and geography textbooks joined in an attempt “to record, draw, and write the earth,” as the Greek roots of the term geography suggested (Brückner 6).

Each of these texts takes for granted an assumption that The Geography of Feeling questions: that “writing the earth” is an endeavor separate and separable from religious meditations on space and time. What we see in antebellum writing about the Protestant afterlife, however, are a set of lushly described and intimately felt connections between the life one lives and the life to come. The unexamined secularism of much critical writing on the period has naturalized a value distinction between the real material world that geography manuals recorded and the “imaginary” afterlives religions promise. Recently, scholars in anthropology, political theory, and religious studies have begun to question secularism’s narrative of disenchantment, arguing that secularism’s claims about the world have their own histories and participate in relations of power. In this section, I focus on the work of the

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8 Literary historian Ralph Bauer makes similar observations in a transatlantic context, tracing what he calls the “cultural geography” of the colonial Americas back to Cabeza de Vaca’s sixteenth-century writings. Bauer emphasizes literature’s role in crafting relations between the Spanish and British empires as they mapped the “New World.”

9 Crucially, this interrogation of secularism is not in the service of recuperating religion as a political or governmental practice. Scholars working on secularism take varied positions on the viability of secularism; political theorist William Connolly declares that he is not a “secularist” while calling for a reinvigorated pluralism in public life, while Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini meditate on better forms that secularism in the U.S. might take. Increasingly, scholars treat “the secular” not as religion’s opposite, but instead as an epistemological condition governing life in post-Enlightenment Western societies. From this perspective, secularism works to redefine religion as particular and limited, while claiming universality for itself.
anthropologist Talal Asad, whose genealogy of secularism has influenced most scholars in the field. Asad questions the critical truism that secularism offered humanity new and unmediated access to the material world. Instead, he argues, secularism proceeded from a new understanding of the material world—that it was governed by natural laws and divided into "social" and "private" spheres\(^{10}\)—that produced its own imperatives for human behavior. With secularism's redefinition of the material world, human activity could be classified as rational, modern, and enlightened or as atavistic, irrational, and delusional. Below, I will suggest that these suppositions about the world, and their attendant imperatives for the formation of the self, have silently structured the critical discourses on literary afterlives.

For Asad, secularism\(^{11}\) works by redefining space. "[T]he modern doctrine of secularism," Asad writes, reduces "the complex medieval Christian universe, with its interlinked times . . . and hierarchy of spaces (the heavens, the earth, purgatory, hell)" to "a duality: a world of self-authenticating things in which we really live as social beings and a religious world that exists only in our imagination" (194). Secularism, for Asad, is a way of restricting human experience to a "world of self-authenticating things," that is, to the physical world that can be apprehended by the senses.\(^{12}\) The physical world, identified with the globe, becomes the only site at which humans live

\(^{10}\) See, for instance, Asad's suggestion that "[s]ecularism builds on a particular conception of the world ([t]hat it is fundamentally "natural" and "social") and of the problems generated by that world" (191-2). Asad traces the advent of this "natural" and "social" world to the early nineteenth century. Mary Poovey offers an allied account of the advent of "social" space in her *Making a Social Body*, especially chapter two.

\(^{11}\) Asad distinguishes between "the secular"—which he understands as an "epistemic category" of "concepts, practices, and sensibilities" such as tolerance, respect for reason, and commitment to national citizenship that mark certain ways of life as "modern"—and "secularism," which he considers as an essentially political doctrine (1, 16, 14). Secularism thus presupposes the invention of the secular.

\(^{12}\) Asad stresses that the "senses themselves have a history," a concept I discuss in more detail below (193)
and interact. Religious understandings of space and place—such as Asad’s “complex
cultural and religious atrocities,” in which the earth exists in relation to other, equally real
places such as heaven or hell—under secularism are distinguished from the real world.
Secularism remakes the globe as the only site of authentic human activity and
authentic human experience.

One of secularism’s central goals, according to Asad, is to produce this
distinction and its accompanying value judgments. This distinction between a self-
authenticating real world and an imagined religious one rests fundamentally on a
conception of what religion is, where it comes from, and what it is (and more likely, is not) good for:

In the discourse of modernity “the secular” presents itself as the ground from
which theological discourse was generated (as a form of false consciousness)
and from which it gradually emancipated itself in its march to freedom. On
that ground humans appear as the self-conscious makers of History (in which
calendrical time provides a measure and direction for human events), and as
the unshakable foundation of universally valid knowledge about nature and
society. (192-3)

In this reading, religion appears as the product of activity within a pre-existing,
natural, and real world that, implicitly, constrains and invalidates religion’s spatial
claims. Secularism uses this origin story about religion in order to construct the
primary distinction between the real world (accessible to, and binding on, all

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13 Here I bracket important critical discussions about secularism’s varied relations to
cultural and religious atrocities. See Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini’s *Secularisms*
and Charles Hirschkind’s *The Ethical Soundscape* for two discussions of this point.
Part of secularism’s work is to collect diverse beliefs, practices, and ways of life under
the heading “religion,” and thus to facilitate equivalences between them.
regardless of their religious beliefs) and imagined religious worlds. Religious claims to spatiality, in this way of thinking, are products of this world—and this world’s prior corner on the market of “knowledge about nature and society” retrospectively classifies religious spatialities as invalid. Thus religious claims to space, under secularism, always appear as something other than what they claim to be—as “false consciousness,” as stories that people tell to distract themselves from reality, as metaphorical covers for real psychoanalytic effects.

Taken for granted in secularism’s narrative of the real is the complex nature of space itself. Critical geographers such as Henri Lefebvre, Doreen Massey, and Edward Soja have challenged the assumption that space is simply the real world available to the senses. Instead, these scholars insist, space is produced by human activity: by administrative and political decisions to build, tear down, destroy, or protect particular buildings or land masses; by the uses and misuses that people make of their neighborhoods, cities, and homes; and by the narratives that people produce and consume in order to make sense of their lives and their surroundings. What appears to be a static, unchanging backdrop for human interaction becomes, in the work of these scholars, a vital, dynamic, and shifting terrain that plays a crucial role in

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14 In the discourse of secularism, the term “imagined” is marshaled to trivialize religious space—to assign it a location of diminished importance and to sever its connections with the real terrain accessible to the senses. This usage differs from Benedict Anderson’s description of the nation as an “imagined community,” in which the term “imagined” does not carry the same value judgment.

15 The equation of religion with false consciousness is a long-standing inheritance from Marxism. For two examples of U.S. literary scholarship that treats religion as a distraction from reality, see Nina Baym’s introduction to Three Spiritualist Novels and Russ Castronovo’s Necro Citizenship, both of which I discuss below. For an exemplary reading of religion as the ideological cover for psychoanalytic drives, see Marianne Noble’s discussion of The Wide, Wide World in The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Fiction.
constituting subjects and defining their relations to others. Hence Doreen Massey suggests that space is, fundamentally, “social relations ‘stretched out’”—that space materializes the relations of power and affinity that organize human existence (2). Places, for Massey, mark “a particular moment in those networks of social relations and understandings” (5).

For these scholars, places come to be not only by tangible and tactile building projects—the freeway bypasses that divide neighborhoods or the militarized zone that “secures” the U.S./Mexico border—but also through cultural narratives that, as Mary Pat Brady writes, “shape how these places are understood, envisioned, defined, and variously experienced” (7). These narratives often define places through their relations to, and their differences from, other places. The frontier is not the city, though it relies on the city in part for its coherence; the foreign is not the domestic, though the intimate connections between the two animate them both. The subjects understanding of who she is and where she belongs thus depends, in part, on a web of relationships that link and differentiate place from place.

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16 For a helpful overview of this line of inquiry in critical geography, see Mary Pat Brady’s Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies, 6-9.
17 Revising Lefebvre’s work, Edward Soja differentiates between space as it is perceived, conceived, and lived. Perceived space, in Soja’s rendering, is “directly sensible and open, within limits, to accurate measurement and description” (66); it includes physical phenomena such as cities, airports, and roads. Conceived space is “the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, [and] technocratic subdividers;” it is space as it is organized in the service of capital and the relations of production (67). Lived space encompasses perceived and conceived space, designating both the experiential world that artists and activists work to recreate and the systems of representation that determine those experiences. Social space is composed of all of these senses. While most critical geographers would likely differentiate the afterlife from “perceived” space, work in anthropology on the malleability of sense perception problematizes this exclusion. I discuss these theories of sense perception below.
18 For the intertwining of the frontier and the city, see Shelley Streeby’s American Sensations, chapter one; for the interdependence of the domestic and the foreign, see Amy Kaplan’s “Manifest Domesticity” and Karen Sánchez-Eppler’s “Raising Empires Like Children” in Dependent States.
The Geography of Feeling argues that we must understand religious claims to space as part of this dense network of social relations—as a cultural form that, like other narratives, histories, and artistic productions, makes it possible for subjects to experience their worlds and locate themselves within it. The critical conversation in U.S. literary studies has taken the distinction between a secular real world and “imagined” religious worlds for granted. Practically, this scholarship has distinguished religious imaginations (which are held to be particular, local, and relevant only to individual believers or belief communities) from the more capacious-ly understood secular “imagined communities” popularized by Benedict Anderson. Andersonian imaginaries, as imaginaries of the world within secular boundaries, have a force in this world, while religious imaginaries of worlds beyond can be separated out or otherwise rendered irrelevant, or function as ideological distractions from the real conditions in which politics take place. Thus studies such as Russ Castronovo’s Necro Citizenship, to take one example of this tendency, read the afterlife within this secular dichotomy, as a set of practices having their only existence in this world and motivated, implicitly, by this-worldly ends. Castronovo’s readings of works such as Clotel (1853) and “The Slave Mother’s Appeal to Her Infant Child” (1842)—both of which visualize heaven as a space where the dead are liberated—take for granted that the heaven posited in each work is a discursive or ideological effect, while the earth posited in the same work is real, valid, and compelling. Thus Castronovo reads the slave mother’s claim in her “Appeal” that “in the spirit land / My lovely babe was free” (37) as generating an “[e]mancipation [that] occurs when there

19 Under this rubric I would include Russ Castronovo’s Necro Citizenship, along with many of the otherwise compelling works on Christianity and domestic or sentimental fictions. Ann Douglas’s The Feminization of American Culture dismisses heaven entirely, while Amy Kaplan’s “Manifest Domesticity” focuses on national/horizontal geographies to the exclusion of heavenly/vertical ones. I discuss Castronovo below and Kaplan in my chapter on Stowe.
is no subject left to emancipate,” in which “freedom is readily realized because the infant’s life itself lacks realization” (38).

What is striking about Castronovo’s reading is how it recasts the poem’s spatiality—which relies for its emotional claims on a mapping of the infant’s transit between “this world” and the “spirit land”—into a secular conception of “this world” as real and the “spirit land” as an ideological effect. The poem’s vision of the dead infant living freely in heaven becomes, curiously, an absence of both life and freedom, because of the secularist presupposition that the earth is the only scene of real human activity and interaction, and that renderings of heavenly space are not spatial productions but instead ideological attempts to evade the real sphere of human activity. For Castronovo, it follows from the secular presupposition that religious worlds are not real worlds that visions of otherworldly solace, such as the protagonist’s “leap to freedom” in Clotel, would be seen as politically quietistic, and as substituting illusory images for real material conditions.

Troubling Castronovo’s reading, however, is the fact that the value distinction between the real earth and the illusory spirit land is not internal to the poem itself. It is a retrospectively applied perspective, one that has been naturalized by the advance of secularization. Secularization itself was a process, one that was being invented in the nineteenth century, and the advent of the secular failed to erase the experiences that these texts drew on and inspired. To take secularism’s universal claims at face value, in such instances, is to define in advance the import and legacies of the poem’s spirit land. Such a move cuts off from our view a set of spatial and temporal interactions between religious worlds and the ones we know as political, obscuring their significant overlap in the period. As Castronovo observes in his argument about spiritualism as a
form of political quietism, Americans at the mid-nineteenth century were fascinated by the possibility of crossings and interconnections between this world and the “spirit land.” “One senator,” Castronovo writes, “in 1854 introduced a petition signed by 15,000 constituents asking Congress to investigate otherworldly communication. . . . but senators laughed at the idea of asking the Committee on Foreign Relations to establish contact with emissaries from the other side” (109-10). This minor event encapsulates the fractured and contradictory state of the U.S.’s secular nationalism. On the one hand, the names on the petition attest to both a cultural understanding that there was a real other world available to be communicated with, or that such an other world was at least possible. On the other hand, the senators’ derision toward the idea that contact with “the other side” might form a new arena for “foreign relations” manifests what we now recognize comfortably as secularism: the idea that the real work of governance is distinct from, and operates in a world other to, the world of gods and spirits. The petitioners, implicitly, refuse this secularist distinction precisely by their desire to see otherworldly communication as part of the nation’s foreign relations. They made their petition because they understood the nation as existing in relation with another world, because they mapped national space in relation with other spaces, to be bridged by national emissaries. They lived, in short, in a world

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20 Castronovo rightly observes the way that spiritualism’s contact with “the other side” generates a kind of bodily passivity and inertia that easily becomes political quietude. But the bodily passivity (a way of cultivating one’s body in this world, I would note, not a surrendering of the body) that marks spiritualism is only one way of living one’s connection to the “other world.” Phelps and Stowe both use contact with heaven to generate both overwhelming bodily sensation (in the feeling of sympathy) and physical and emotional activity (in the work of benevolent and political action). We have to be careful not to submerge the varied uses authors and readers make of the afterlife in secularist models that always already find in the religious a failure to exercise agency. For a trenchant critique of this critical tendency, see Saba Mahmood’s important Politics of Piety.
differently constituted than the secular one the senators identified, one that rendered the nation in intimate connection to the spirit world.

In “The Slave Mother’s Appeal,” the intimacies between the spirit land and the earth are central to its attempts to move its readers to political action. The lines that Castronovo quotes illustrate these connections:

And gladly would I lay thee down
To sleep beneath the sod,
And give thy gentle spirit back,
Unmarr’d with grief, to God:
The tears I shed upon that turf
Should whisper peace to me,
And tell me in the spirit land
My lovely babe was free. (“Appeal” 4)

Within the poem, the mother’s tears “shed upon that turf” bear the message of the child’s freedom in the spirit world. The movement of the tears from the mother to the ground thus make the spirit land available for the mother to experience, “whisper[ing] peace” and making her desire to share in her child’s freedom.

For Castronovo, this freedom is an illusion that undercuts this-worldly political change. Yet the poem’s sentimental claim depends on the material effects this other-worldly freedom has. In the next stanza of the poem, the mother wipes away the tears that have circulated between the turf and the spirit land and that have marked her desire “to go / The road which thou had’st gone” (4). The mother’s desire to join her infant in the spirit land is invoked only to be forestalled. In the final lines of the poem, death appears as that which “breaks the earthly clod”—that is, liberates the soul from the body—but also as that which “breaks the tyrant’s sway, that [the slave] / May worship only God” (4). Knowledge of the spirit land instantiates a particular kind of
religious freedom in the material present, one that facilitates "worship" that spans between life and afterlife.

In the play between invoking and forestalling the mother’s entrance to the spirit land, we can see the use sentimental politics makes of the relations between heaven and earth. The mother’s desire to join her infant in the spirit world is, in the logic of the poem, the intolerable condition that sentimental sympathy works against. The sympathetic tears that the mother’s desire for death makes possible also insist that the reader must erase this longing for death by working against slavery. The nation-state learns of its moral obligation to change through the spirit land’s existence, even as it then is impelled to bring the spirit land’s freedom and security into the national present.

Secular-critical disavowals of religious claims to space as unreal—and therefore not relevant to our understanding of categories such as nation, state, and territory—thus cut off a series of relations that are crucial to our understanding of how national subjects experienced life in the nation. To read the "spirit land" as an illusion is to miss the interplay between the slave mother, her child, and the reader’s sentimental formation; it is also to miss the interplay between the petitioners who saw the afterlife as a foreign land and the senators who dismissed those claims. To anachronistically impose a twenty-first century secularism on these nineteenth-century texts is to miss both the uneven and tenuous formation of secularism in the U.S. and the complex, multiply structured world that poems such as the "Slave Mother’s Appeal" invite us to contemplate. Failing to take the world these poems create on their own terms keeps us from seeing how the national identity and national space that was produced and reproduced out of movements such as sentimentalism and abolition was importantly in tension with religious geographies that we have dismissed as ideological window-dressing for other real forms of power. The secular
presupposition that death and the afterlife are this-worldly productions has kept us from seeing what authors such as Susan Warner, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps saw: not a heaven and earth divided into false and real, but instead a dense set of comparisons, relations, and transits between earthly places and the land of the afterlife. *The Geography of Feeling* brings these relations back into scholarly view.

**The Geography of Feeling**

In focusing on the connection between heaven and earth, *The Geography of Feeling* offers an alternative portrait of antebellum nationalism and its relation to territorial expansion. In what follows, I argue that antebellum Protestantism's material heaven helped to transform the sentimental novel's emotional pedagogy into a territorial one. Writing heaven allowed authors such as Warner, Stowe, and Phelps to teach their readers how it felt to live within the nation.21

Recent scholarship on the sentimental novel has traced the central role the emotions played in constituting the U.S. as a nation. Literary theorist Lauren Berlant argues that sentimental fiction "bind[s] persons to the nation through a universalist rhetoric... of the capacity for suffering and trauma at the citizen's core" ("Poor Eliza" 636). To participate in the reading of a sentimental text—to cry tears over Gerty's lost kitten in *The Lamplighter* or to see one's own experience in Eliza's heartfelt question "Have you ever lost a child?" in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—is thus to

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21 In insisting on the antebellum heaven's relevance for our understanding of affect, nation, and territory, I draw on a rich history of cultural studies scholarship that insists on the inseparability of aesthetics, culture, and politics. More specifically, I see heaven as part of what Raymond Williams calls a “structure of feeling,” a “particular quality of social experience and relationship... which gives the sense of a generation or a period” (132, 131). For Williams, structures of feeling are "living processes" that connect seemingly disparate ways of thinking, feeling and acting with social, political, and economic relations of power (133).
experience, for Berlant, the emotional ties that bind individuals into nations. Peter Coviello similarly traces the national bonds forged by affect in the early republic. Reading Jefferson’s grief-saturated drafts of the Declaration of Independence against Phillis Wheatley’s elegies, Coviello argues that the language of a common and “agonizing” grief offered to transform “dispersed and loosely joined populations” into a nation (443-4). For both Berlant and Coviello, emotions help to create the nation by forging connections among individuals; as sympathy, for instance, asks one who is not suffering to vicariously take on the pain of another, it draws subjects separated by time and space into intimate relation with each other, an intimacy that can become a resource for national connection. 

These national intimacies are racialized and gendered constructs. As literary theorist José Esteban Muñoz notes, emotions are key markers of racial identification, as are the implicit and explicit hierarchies by which certain emotions are classed as undesirable or deviant and others as valuable or proper. Whiteness, Muñoz argues, is as much a racial identifier as it is a constellation of emotional performances; “[a]cting white,” he suggests, “has everything to do with the performance of a particular affect,” the specific performance of which grounds the subject performing white affect in a normative life world” (68). To “feel white,” in Muñoz’s discussion, is both

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22 For expansions of these arguments, see also Berlant’s “The Subject of True Feeling” and The Anatomy of National Fantasy.

23 Tracy Fessenden observes that sentimental and domestic fictions actively attempt to erase distinctions between femininity, middle-class whiteness, and Protestant Christianity, so that each becomes interchangeable with the others. Fessenden observes that much of the critical work on nineteenth-century women’s writing has unquestioningly replicated these elisions, “habitual[ly] layering . . . the sentimental, the feminine, and the Christian” together without considering that these fictions represent highly selective portraits of “women” (as white, middle-class, and frequently, North American) and “Christianity” (as Protestant and evangelical) (166-7).

24 Throughout “Feeling Brown,” Muñoz uses “emotion” and “affect” somewhat interchangeably. I discuss other theorists’ distinctions between these two terms below.
to display proper emotions and to have those emotions properly orient one’s self to the world around them. In particular, the performance of white affect marks out not only the privileges of whiteness but also the outlines of what Muñoz calls a “national affect” (69). Authorized by their compliance with an “affective code that positions itself as the law,” those who perform white feelings become the nation’s proper citizens (69).  

The work of forming normative citizens also spills over into colonial relations. Historian Ann Laura Stoler argues that colonial power worked by forming and regulating “tense and tender ties” between the colonizer and the colonized. Tracing the history of conduct regulations for Javanese nurses of Dutch colonial children, Stoler notes “the colonial state’s investment in knowledge about the carnal, about sensibilities and familiarities, its preoccupying commitment to . . . the education of desire” (“Tense and Tender” 832). For Stoler, the state’s investment in regulating these ties extends both to their emotional and bodily effects; not only did Dutch colonial powers fear that their children would become too emotionally attached to their nurses, they also worried that their bodies would begin to “smell of [the nursemaid’s] sweat” and thus “metamorphize” into Javanese (“Tense and Tender” 832). Regulating proper feeling, in the colonial context, thus turns out to require an

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25 Focusing on contemporary politics, Muñoz stresses the distinctions between what he describes as the ostensibly “excess[ive]” affect of Latino/as and a “normative whiteness” that is “minimalist to the point of emotional impoverishment” (70). The affective minimalism of contemporary whiteness contrasts with the emotional floridity of nineteenth-century sentimentalism, in which whiteness appeared as the capacity for intense, if also properly provoked and regulated, emotional outbursts. Ellen Montgomery’s perpetual tears and Little Eva’s sympathetic sighs in The Wide, Wide World and Uncle Tom’s Cabin, respectively, offer two examples of nineteenth-century feminine whiteness as passionate emotional expression. Significantly, sentimental literatures sought to regulate the strong responses they solicited and naturalized; the genre of consolation literature is exemplary here. The transformation of white affect from sentimental intensity to contemporary coolness may account in part for pre-feminist rejections of sentimental fiction as saccharine, cloying, and inauthentic.
intimate and detailed regulation of the body and its capacities. Colonial power sought to inculcate, in Stoler’s words, “sensibilities that were fitting, aspirations that were appropriate, dispositions that would confirm the explicit and implicit entailments of social membership and the truth-claims that distinguished ruler from ruled” (“Affective States,” 7, emphasis in original).

When Stoler suggests that colonial power trades on the production not only of feelings but also of bodily dispositions and sensibilities, she identifies a double valence in the academic discourse on affect. On the one hand, scholars have used the term “affect” to describe emotional states such as fear, joy, love, sympathy, or anger. In these works, the term “affect” refers to an internal and sometimes intellectual experience, one that can be rendered and transmitted in language. More recently, however, scholars have used “affect” to indicate the body’s capacity to feel and to perceive. Stoler’s discussion of “sensibilities” and “dispositions” thus offers an example of this second meaning of affect. Scholars who focus on affect as bodily capacity instead of emotional practice often emphasize bodily responses that precede or stay submerged below the level of language: the clammy palms that speak someone’s nervousness, the flush in the cheeks that indicates excitement or shame, the metallic taste that accompanies feelings of aversion or disgust.

Much of this work derives from the writing of philosopher Brian Massumi, who stresses the distinction between emotions and affects. For Massumi, affects are nonconscious bodily responses to sensory stimuli—what he terms “purely autonomic reactions” that are manifest “in the skin—at the surface of the body, at its interface with things” (85). Massumi names these responses “intensities,” observing that the “strength or duration” (84) of a body’s response to stimuli can be unhinged from the
quality or content of a stimulus itself. Affect thus denotes a set of experiences and responses that evade conscious attention and reduction to language. Emotions, in contrast, are affects that have been translated into language and assigned “function and meaning” (88).

Massumi’s interest is in the cultural work affect performs—its ability to solicit precognitive responses that silently shape collective life. Affect, here, arises from the connections between the body and the material world. For the anthropologist of Islam Charles Hirschkind, these connections, in all their varied forms, come together to construct the senses. Rejecting the idea that the senses are “capacities of subjective experience”—that is, that they are instruments confined to individual bodies—Hirschkind instead defines sense perceptions as “relationship[s] between a perceiving subject and a world of sensible, material objects” (28). These relations, for Hirschkind, are historically specific, shaped by the varying “categories and symbols that organize experience” (29). From this perspective, research into the history of the senses offers insight into affect’s work on both sides of this relation—its production in the body and its effects in the world.

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26 Massumi’s discussion focuses on responses to visual imagery, and he develops his distinction between an image’s content and the intensity of its effects from a German research study on cognition and emotional response. A group of children watched a short video from German television that had elicited complaints from parents, who claimed that it frightened their children. The researchers presented three versions of the video to the children—the original unnarrated version, one with added “factual” narration, and one with added “emotional” narration. While the children rated the “emotional” video both most “sad” and most “pleasant” to watch, measures of skin conductivity showed that the children had the strongest bodily responses to the original unnarrated video. From this, the researchers extrapolated that autonomic responses, and not content, dictated the children’s perception of the images (83-4).

27 In reviewing the literature on affect here, I have focused on the scholars whose work seems most useful for this project’s purposes. The scholarship on affect is increasing exponentially; for other perspectives, see Julie Ellison, Julia Stern, Sianne Ngai, Sara Ahmed, Teresa Brennan, Jane Thrailkill, and Patricia Clough.

28 Later, Hirschkind argues that the senses are the “transfers, exchanges, and attachments that hinge the body to its environment” (29). Working from this
Recent scholarship in religious studies has stressed the importance of the senses to an understanding of religious practice. Religious historian Robert Orsi argues that work on religion requires “an understanding of the knowledges of the body in the culture, a clear sense of what has been embodied in the corporeality of the people who participate in religious practices, what their tongues, skin, ears, ‘know’” (7). If religious practice is shaped by the culturally specific sense perceptions that adherents bring to religion, for historian Leigh Eric Schmidt Enlightenment-era debates about the reality of religious voices worked this relation in reverse. By constructing ventriloquism as an amusing—if also potentially dangerous—art, the Enlightenment taught Protestant subjects that what sounded like divine voices were really “psychological illusions or symptoms of inner fragmentation” (302).29

Schmidt’s research into the history of hearing suggests that both Enlightenment and Protestant discourses actively intervened in the construction of the senses, theorizing their own networks of relations between body, self, and world.

*The Geography of Feeling* draws this scholarship on the body and the senses into conversation with scholarship on the sentimental novel’s emotional pedagogy, tracing continuities between emotional states such as fear, sympathy, and love and the bodily responses Orsi, Massumi, and Schmidt describe. I take this approach because sentimental literatures knit emotional self-cultivation into bodily experience. When Harriet Beecher Stowe’s imagined reader “feels right” at the end of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, she has learned not only to empathize with slaves and weep for them but also that her body’s responses to images of suffering are as essential as her feelings and actions to political change. Learning to feel appropriate emotions, in such fictions,

perspective “moves us away from a mentalist understanding that locates experience in a silent interior toward one that places it in a body practically engaged with the world” (29).

29 Charles Brockden Brown’s *Wieland* (1798) is a paradigmatic example of this shift.
requires a new set of sensory connections between the self and the world. Not only 
must the reader be able to imagine herself in the position of the suffering slave, the 
reader must be able to transform the sight of the words on the page into the sensation 
of suffering. For the novel to have political effect, this understanding must shape the 
reader’s experience of her everyday life—she must be willing to open her house to the 
runaway slave, or to experience the plantation as a place of despair, or to work to 
materialize the Northern States as free land.

Emotions, in texts such as these, become the placeholders, the visible indexes, 
of the body’s relation to the material world. As novels such as Uncle Tom’s Cabin 
cultivated white middle-class femininity, forming its proper and characteristic 
emotions and sensations, they rooted this national affect in their own particular visions 
of the material world. The bodily sensations these passages provoke, and the emotions 
that organize them, come to be within an explicitly Protestant spatiotemporal order. 
They rely on and are intimate with the dense and contradictory web of ties that link 
heaven and earth in the antebellum novel. Thus formed, emotions and sensations 
carry with them the imprint of the spaces and times in which they were created. 
Emotional self-cultivation is also a spatial and temporal practice—a way of 

determining which worlds, which arrangements, relations, boundaries, and structures, 
particular bodies will sense as the appropriate ones.

If these texts leave the imprint of their Protestant landscape in the white 
femininity they seek to create, they also, importantly, extend this landscape’s cultural 
work beyond the Protestant believer. One does not have to be a Protestant to cry over

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30 Adam Smith’s Theory of Moral Sentiments (1758) offers the paradigmatic 
description of sympathy as a type of identification. For an extension of Smith’s model 
to nineteenth-century literatures, see Hendler, Public Sentiments; for a powerful 
critique of identification and sympathy in abolitionist literatures, see Saidiya Hartman, 
Scenes of Subjection.
Tom’s suffering in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* or to share in the intense and chilling satisfaction Ellen Montgomery derives from the knowledge that her mother is destined for heaven in *The Wide, Wide World*. Whether one believed in the heaven Little Eva enters at her death can be, for some readers, beside the point; by weeping over her death, one enters a world in which earth exists in relation to something else. The spatiotemporality of heaven, in these texts, is a weight pulling on sentimentalism’s landscape, a gravitational force that silently skews and re-forms the material world in which the sentimental operates.

This newly-formed world pushes the scholarship on sentimental nationalism toward the material, territorial forms the nation takes. In these texts, we see that the emotional and embodied experience of nationalism carries with it a pattern for how the material world is supposed to feel. As they forged the emotional positions that count as national, these sentimental fictions formed nationalism as a sensory experience—as a particular relation between bodies and worlds. If political decisionmaking in the U.S. depends on “visceral modes of appraisal,” as political theorist William Connolly suggests, texts that imagined heaven sought to link the visceral to the material—to determine which territorial forms went with which sensory experiences. From this perspective, works that teach their readers how to feel right about the nation also expanded the range of spatial and temporal forms available to the nation-state. Drawn into relation with a heaven that is the subject of physical, material experience, the ostensibly rigid boundaries of the nation-state appear in Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to be flexible and permeable. Likewise, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s rendering of a heaven like earth pluralizes the national time that scholars often take as singular and homogeneous, locating within the clock-time of the everyday the experience of the eternal. Social identities acquire a similar flexibility, in that the relation between heaven and earth enables an expansion of white femininity across class distinctions in
*The Wide, Wide World.* While the story of nineteenth-century nationalism in the United States has often been one of strengthening borders and proliferating distinctions, these texts made available another embodied experience of nationalism: one in which the nation registers as coherent and proper when it is selectively flexible, amorphous, and heterogeneous.

Chapter one, "‘Let Us Watch and Keep Our Garments Clean’: Heavenly Laundry, Racial Whiteness, and Feminine Nationalism in Susan Warner’s *The Wide, Wide World,*" traces the multiple settings—earthly and otherworldly—in which the novel’s characters do the literal and metaphorical work of washing white clothes. Citing the Biblical book of Revelation, Warner’s novel rewrites evangelical Protestantism’s plan of salvation as laundry labor: the redeemed are those who have “washed their clothes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Juxtaposing this salvific laundry with material labor on white clothing, Warner inducts middle class white women in New England and their ambivalently white immigrant domestics into a joint responsibility to care for and cherish whiteness. This double valence for laundry labor establishes racial whiteness as both material and spiritual, and thus allows racial whiteness to both transcend and sustain class distinctions between feminine nationalism at mid-century.

Chapter two, “National Transnationalism in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin,*” traces the geographic and religious meanings intertwined in Tom’s dying assertion that “Heaven is better than Kintuck.” In this scene—the first that Stowe wrote, and one that crystallizes the novel’s claim on its readers’ sympathies—Stowe invests the relation between heaven and earth with deep affective significance. These sympathetic investments reconfigure the relations between heaven, earth, and nation. Tom’s comparison condenses into “Kintuck” all the places that he wishes to leave behind: the plantation South, the domestic home, the nation that enslaves him,
and the planet shared by all the living. This condensation makes these locations
interchangeable, allowing the home and the nation to expand outward to encompass
the globe. Stowe’s novel, I suggest, thus enacts a curious compromise between
sentimentalism’s investment in a stable, coherent nation-state and a new sense of the
nation’s boundaries as contingent and flexible.

Chapter three, “A Reasonable Heaven: The Temporality of Benevolent
Possession in Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s *The Gates Ajar*” reads Phelps’s novelistic
rendering of a material heaven as a significant revision to the temporality of the nation
form. Scholars have long equated nationalism with homogenous, linear time,
suggesting this homogeneity provides a grounding for national affiliation. Reading
Phelps’s novel as an attempt to put the nation back together again after the Civil War,
I show that *The Gates Ajar*’s material heaven alters the model of the nation that the
novel creates. While Phelps’s novel draws its readers into a common time, that
common time is internally heterogeneous, joining the linear time of the present to the
eternal time that governs heaven. Eternity, in Phelps’s novel, becomes a constitutive
part of the everyday experience of life in the nation. This heterogeneous temporality,
at once eternal and quotidian, becomes the lived experience of benevolence. Reading
Phelps’s benevolent temporality into a little discussed moment in postbellum
American imperialism, the United States’ assertion of benevolent control over
Caribbean and Pacific “guano islands,” I suggest that Phelps’s revisions to the
temporality of national benevolence helped to craft the modes of possession—at once
temporary and unending, at once national and non-national—through which United
States imperialism worked at the turn of the twentieth century.

Together, these chapters offer new perspective on the material and embodied
experience of national womanhood. Tracing the varied spatial and temporal forms
embedded in literary affect and Protestant practice, *The Geography of Feeling* maps alternative coordinates for the antebellum nation and the world.
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CHAPTER ONE

Doing the Laundry in Susan Warner’s *The Wide, Wide World*

At the heart of Susan Warner’s antebellum bestseller *The Wide, Wide World* (1850) is a moral imperative to do the laundry. This immensely popular domestic novel, one of the nineteenth century’s best sellers, traces the religious formation of young Ellen Montgomery, a middle-class girl who must triumph over her tempestuous emotions in order to become a virtuous woman. At two pivotal moments, the novel figures Ellen’s spiritual development as laundry labor. When Mrs. Montgomery dies, Ellen’s religious instructor John Humphreys tells her that she must “watch and keep [her] garments clean” so that she may be reunited with her mother in heaven (349). Similarly, before Mrs. Montgomery’s death we see Ellen read aloud a passage from the Bible in which the redeemed have “washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (28). For Ellen to do this metaphorical laundry, in the novel’s imaginary, she must learn to do literal housework. As she sweeps and washes and churns—cheerfully completing the tasks that middle-class women hoped to delegate to their domestic help—she finds the solace in her Protestant faith that will ensure her accession to True Womanhood.

This chapter takes *The Wide, Wide World*’s crossing of Protestant formation and laundry labor as a point of entry into the work of Protestantism in antebellum culture. Scholars have long read *The Wide, Wide World* and domestic fictions like it as Protestant bildungsromans.\(^{31}\) *The Wide, Wide World* writes this popular masterplot in the grammar of another, equally resonant cultural tale: the story of which women should do what work and why. Recognizing the interchange between these two

\(^{31}\) For the origins of this reading, see Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*, at 184.
narrative forms recasts *The Wide, Wide World* as a story of class and racial formation, in which the novel’s doubling of Protestantism and labor reconfigures the relations between middle-class women in New England and the domestic workers they employed. Critical treatments of class in domestic fiction have productively positioned race and gender as grounds on which class relations are worked out. This essay contends that Protestantism\(^{32}\) plays an equally pivotal role in sorting out and putting together gendered, racial, and class relations within domestic fictions. As it defines relationships among women, Protestantism knits these categories into each other. Renewed attention to the Protestant religiosity in domestic fictions such as *The Wide, Wide World* thus has the potential to expand our understanding of how race, gender and class were constructed together in antebellum culture.

By rewriting the Protestant bildungsroman as a labor narrative, Warner’s novel speaks to one of literary domesticity’s cultural anxieties: the seemingly pressing need to transform Irish Catholic immigrants into well-trained white Protestant servants. Domestic manuals such as Catharine Beecher’s *Treatise on Domestic Economy* promised that domestic labor would divest the Irish immigrant of her religious and racial difference. I read *The Wide, Wide World* in this context, focusing on the exchanges between the labor *The Wide, Wide World* metaphorizes as salvation and the salvation domestic literatures imagined for Irish women who did the laundry in antebellum New England. Through this interplay, Protestantism provisionally expanded whiteness to Irish women by redefining it as both a personal attribute and a caretaking labor that mistresses and servants shared. This newly expanded whiteness, 

\(^{32}\) In general, domestic fictions are more concerned with the essential similarities between Protestant denominations than with their differences. I thus use “Protestantism” to designate the cross-denominational emphases on moral behavior and spiritual devotion that appear in these literatures. For a similar account of antebellum benevolence’s “pan-Protestantism,” see Susan Ryan’s *The Grammar of Good Intentions*, 10.
I will show, relied on Protestantism to simultaneously reassert the naturalness and inevitability of racial and class distinctions between white women.

Making this coupling work is domestic Protestantism’s investment in material objects. In the first section of this essay, I focus on the crucial role objects play in Ellen’s religious, racial, and gendered formation. In order to become a proper Christian woman, Ellen must develop a specifically Protestant understanding of her relation to material things—what they mean, who they join, and how they join them. This Protestant relation to objects, I will demonstrate, serves as a template for domestic culture’s fantasy that doing the laundry will both Protestantize and whiten Irish serving-women. The next sections of the essay situate The Wide, Wide World in the context of religious and racial anxieties about the Irish Catholic women who did antebellum New England’s laundry. Anti-Catholic literatures frequently cast Catholicism as a defective relation to objects, an impropriety that labor on the Protestant household’s material goods offered to correct. As it Protestantized them, household labor would whiten Irish women by incorporating them into the shared endeavor of maintaining the objects that marked middle-class women as white. Next, I trace what happens when The Wide, Wide World subjects Ellen Montgomery to the physical labor on household things that whitens the Irish. As the novel presents whitening labor as a threat to Ellen’s body, it provides in Alice Humphreys’s relation to her servant Margery a model of the happy, enclosing bonds that Protestantism’s objects wished to form between the white Protestant mistress and her whitening servant. Finally, I follow the novel’s attempt to rivet these religious, racial, and classed formations to national identity by sending Ellen abroad to Scotland. There, Ellen uses the lessons she has learned between her Protestant and laboring educations to preserve her sense of self as an American subject. Ultimately, renewed attention to The Wide, Wide World’s Protestant objects underscores Protestantism’s ability to
introduce selective ambiguities into the logics of antebellum class, race, and gender while solidifying feminine attachments to the nation. Protestantism enables whiteness to expand to include the Irish via labor at the same time that it reasserts as natural distinctions between white and whitening women, and between women who labor on souls and who labor on material things.

A Mother's Gifts

Much of the scholarship on *The Wide, Wide World* has focused on Ellen's relationship with her mother and her mother's function in the text as a whole. As the novel opens, Ellen learns that her mother must go abroad to reclaim her health; Ellen, meanwhile, will live with her Aunt Fortune in the countryside. The rest of the novel traces Ellen's negotiation of her life as a virtual—and, after her mother's death, an actual— orphan. Claire Chantell and Veronica Stewart read Mrs. Montgomery's early departure from the novel as voicing doubts about the role maternal care plays in Ellen's formation, and Nicholas Bromell similarly underscores the fact that much of Ellen's moral instruction comes from other benevolent figures, such as her new friends Alice and John Humphreys. While Mrs. Montgomery's absence limits her direct influence on Ellen, it also facilitates Ellen's Protestant formation. Indeed, Mrs. Montgomery's departure from the novel either indirectly or directly generates many of the unchristian passions that Ellen must learn to control. Recognizing the difficult path before Ellen, Mrs. Montgomery leaves her with a collection of domestic objects meant to fulfill her maternal role. As they connect Ellen to her mother, these gifts play a central role in her development. By helping Ellen become a better Christian,
these gifts let the relation between self and object stand in for the relations among women—a shift that will do what Jane Tompkins calls “cultural work.”

Ellen’s impending separation from her mother sets in motion a shopping expedition, lovingly detailed in the text, in which Mrs. Montgomery outfits Ellen for her new life with her aunt Fortune. After observing that such an unprecedented quantity of gifts is likely to turn Ellen’s head, Ellen’s mother justifies her purchases by redefining them as necessary to Ellen’s development, saying, “I wish to have the comfort of thinking, when I am away, that I have left you with everything necessary to the keeping up of good habits,—everything that will make them pleasant and easy” (31). The objects purchased on Mrs. Montgomery and Ellen’s shopping expedition—a Bible, a writing-desk, a supply of pens and paper, and a sewing box, among other articles of clothing and the materials to repair them—are meant to not only facilitate Ellen’s “good habits” but to actually instruct Ellen in them in her mother’s absence:

“Well, my child,” said Mrs. Montgomery, in a lighter tone, “my gifts will serve as reminders for you if you are ever tempted to forget my lessons. If you fail to send me letters, or if those you send are not what they ought to be, I think the desk will cry shame upon you. And if you ever go an hour with a hole in

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33 In stressing the role that material objects play in Ellen’s Protestant formation, I offer a different genealogy for Protestantism’s work in U.S. culture than the one John Carlos Rowe traces in a recent essay. Rowe situates Warner’s novel in the context of theological writings that circulated across the Atlantic. While the doctrines codified in theological writing are certainly important, my emphasis here is on what religious historians David Hall and Robert Orsi have called “lived religion”: the practical, everyday activities undertaken by the many as a way of working out their religion in the world. Practices can also be vehicles for significant social transformations, as this essay seeks to demonstrate. My reading of the novel’s objects also differs from Nicholas Bromell’s. While Bromell sees a contrast between Warner’s Protestantism and her focus on material objects, I see these interests as mutually reinforcing. For other recent work on Warner’s novel, see Stacey Margolis, The Public Life of Privacy and Marianne Noble, The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature.
your stocking, or a tear in your dress, or a string off your petticoat, I hope the
sight of your work-box will make you blush.” (37)
For Mrs. Montgomery, these feminine objects will ventriloquize her teaching in her absence. Her departure from the novel thus marks less a failure of maternal influence than its redirection through material things.

Mrs. Montgomery’s understanding of these domestic objects as instructional reflects the ideology of “pious materialism” that Lori Merish identifies as at work in mid-nineteenth century America. Merish contests the prevailing assumption that the 1890s marked a decisive shift “from a Protestant work ethic to a hedonistic consumption ethic” (89), suggesting instead that antebellum culture integrated consumption into the Protestant ideology that dominated the period. According to Merish, the early nineteenth century saw a “novel synthesis” of Protestant and capitalist ideologies, in which the consumption and use of aesthetically pleasing domestic objects (themselves indicators of feminine taste) could “seduce wayward individuals into the regenerative sociability of domesticity, and by inspiring purified sentiments, could draw individuals to God” (91, 90). The ideology of pious materialism legitimated consumption by instantiating a newly “emotional rather than a narrowly utilitarian relation to objects” (90). This emotional relation allowed the object to instruct its possessors in the kinds of “right feelings” that would ensure both their domestic happiness and their Christian development. Likewise, Ellen’s

34 Merish’s description of pious materialism rests on her formulation of “sentimental ownership.” She writes: “I argue . . . that sentimental sympathy promotes a deeply felt psychic investment in proprietary power over, and control of, objects of love, that I call ‘sentimental ownership.’ Constructed as an autonomous emotional response, sentimental ownership is a fantasy of intimate possession that is in fact—like the ‘free market’ itself—produced and sustained by laws and economic policies. . . . I envision sentimental ownership as a particular inscription of emotion, an eroticized formation of proprietary and political desire that sentimental narratives both describe and constitute” (4).
ownership of these objects is expected—in keeping with the sentimental ideology that ownership of an object can transform the owner explicated by Merish—to train her, to transform her, to teach her appropriate Christianity and femininity.

According to Merish, the sentimental object teaches its owner goodness both through the aesthetic pleasures it offers and the emotional investments made in them by their owners (107). Gifts, in this logic, can come to emblematize the emotional relation between the giver and the receiver, and the recipient’s proper cherishing of the gift can symbolically reenact the bond between persons cemented via the gift. Sara Quay suggests that Ellen’s new domestic objects are “meant to keep Ellen’s relationship with her mother alive when they are separated” (43); if this is so, the objects purchased by Ellen’s mother are also meant to function in the place of her mother, and to evoke her mother’s image and presence.

This relation, in which the material object stands in for the absent mother, first appears in Ellen’s responses as she inspects her new things after the shopping trip. As she rhapsodizes about her new objects, “almost scream[ing]” with delight as she opens her new work-box, Ellen uncovers a “lovely scissors” (40). When she learns that her mother selected it for her, instead of purchasing the work-box and scissors as a set, Ellen replies, “‘I might have guessed it, mamma, it’s just like you’” (40). That the scissors are “just like” the mother establishes the power of the object to encapsulate in material form some portion of the mother’s essence—that is, to express her taste, her

35 Quay reduces the object’s mediation between mother and daughter to a relation between Ellen and a lost “home.” In substituting “home” for “mother,” Quay closes off the prospect that the object might work on the relations between persons, and as a result misses the possibilities that Merish’s work on the sentimental object opens up. Further, the narrowness of her definition of “home”—Quay focuses on the material home, while passing over the metaphorical “home” in heaven that pervades the novel’s discussions of Christianized domesticity—keeps her from connecting Ellen’s desire for a “home” with her Christian progress toward a heavenly home or her desire to return to America, her national “home.”
refinement, and her care for Ellen.\(^{36}\) Yet the terms in which the comparison is made simultaneously reiterate the fundamental difference between the mother and her gift. Not only is Ellen in no danger of mistaking her mother for the scissors,\(^{37}\) inherent in the idea of “likeness” that relates the mother and her gift is the essential difference between any two “just like” things. The idea of likeness draws a comparison that also underscores the separateness, the inequality, of the two terms being compared.

This relation of likeness and difference gives the material object its own, separate but intimately related, role to play in Ellen’s life. *The Wide, Wide World* reshapes pious materialism into a specific capacity attributed to objects: the ability to solicit bodily responses consistent with Protestant femininity from those who cherish them. In her absence, Mrs. Montgomery’s gifts will imprint maternal discipline on Ellen’s body: the desk “will cry shame” upon Ellen, while the work-box will make her blush. Mrs. Montgomery hopes that Ellen will respond to the physical accoutrements of middle-class femininity spontaneously and involuntarily, as if she were responding to her own mother’s voice.

As material objects craft Ellen in her mother’s mold, so Ellen’s behavior becomes an index to her mother’s character and class standing, and to her relation to material objects. Thus Alice Humphreys can claim that she formed an opinion of Mrs. Montgomery soon after meeting Ellen:

I thought your mother was a lady, from the honourable notions she had given you; and from your ready obedience to her, which was evidently the obedience

\(^{36}\) Merish points to the significance of domestic object as expressions of their owners’ refined feminine sensibilities.

\(^{37}\) Mrs. Montgomery reiterates the distance between the sentimentally loved object and the person with whom they are associated when she sells a ring that had belonged to her estranged mother to pay for Ellen’s new clothes, saying, “I can remember my mother without any help from a trinket” (29). Yet even this distance reiterates the importance of the object; the narrative observes that “[t]here were tears, however, in Mrs. Montgomery’s eyes, that showed the sacrifice had cost her something” (29).
of love, I judged she had been a good mother in the true sense of the term. I thought she must be a refined and cultivated person from the manner of your speech and behaviour; and I was sure she was a Christian, because she had taught you the truth, and evidently had tried to lead you in it. (240)

Marking out Mrs. Montgomery's character is not only Ellen’s “speech and behavior,” but their more intangible “manner.” Throughout the novel’s opening sections, characters respond repeatedly to an indescribable but clearly perceptible gentility in Ellen’s motions and carriage, a gentility emblematized in the blush that Ellen’s work-box has the power to provoke. Likewise, in identifying Mrs. Montgomery as a “lady,” the “honourable notions” Ellen possesses speak not only to a set of values but also to the proper interface with objects that middle-class ladyhood requires. To be a “refined and cultivated person” in antebellum culture was to relate properly to the world of sentimentally cherished objects that scholars such as Karen Halttunen and Lori Merish have described. Ellen’s refinement and cultivation thus invoke not only her mother’s “speech and behavior,” but also locate her mother implicitly in a world of material objects, all of which have their proper loves and uses.

Warner’s novel knits these object lessons into the process of Ellen’s Protestant formation. The section of the narrative that describes Ellen’s new possessions is repeatedly interrupted by discussions of Ellen’s need for, and current exclusion from, her mother’s Christianity. As Ellen and her mother wait for the doctor before they go shopping, Mrs. Montgomery asks Ellen to read a section from the Bible about heaven, which awakens in Ellen “a sad consciousness” that she is not yet a part of the communion of saints so important to her mother (27). After the packages are unwrapped and the new objects put away, the narrative depicts Mrs. Montgomery inscribing verses into Ellen’s new Bible, praying fervently for Ellen’s salvation (42). As Ellen receives her new possessions, the narrative oscillates between descriptions of
Ellen's responses and of her mother's attempts to form her faith. Ellen's packages arrive on nearly the same page as Mrs. Montgomery's insistence that Ellen must come to love Christ more than she loves her mother before she can become a believer (38-9), and Ellen's jubilant investigation of her work-box is brought to an end by her mother's placidly brutal suggestion that "Perhaps [God] sees, Ellen, that you would never seek him while you had me to cling to" (41). As it shifts its readers' attention between work-box and Bible, darning-cotton and salvation, the novel knits together Ellen's relations to objects and her relation to her mother under the heading of Protestant formation. Ellen must trade her mother for an object in order to appropriately use the implements of femininity and to come to faith—two acts that the novel blurs together. Ellen learns that her love for Christ can only come about through a radical re-valuing of the world, in which material and tangible objects sustain the relations between selves so necessary to Protestant ladyhood.

Central to this transformation is a new understanding of material objects themselves. Ellen's religious training consists in no small measure of an introduction to a particularly Protestant mode of interpretation, one that takes even the smallest objects as representative of an immanent truth. John Humphreys offers Ellen a strikingly overdetermined lesson in this mode of interpretation during a visit to a greenhouse. When he sees Ellen admiring a white camellia, John asks her what the flower calls to her mind; Ellen responds with confusion, saying, "I couldn't think of any thing but itself" (324). Given the novel's emphasis on using the material world to solicit Protestant behavior, this is clearly the wrong answer. John provides her with the correct one:

'It reminds me of what I ought to be—and of what I shall be if I ever see heaven; it seems to me the emblem of a sinless pure spirit,—looking up in fearless spotlessness. Do you remember what was said to the old Church of
Sardis?—“Thou has a few names that have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy.” (324-5)

Ellen, John observes, must learn to see in white camellias an image drawn from the scene in which she receives her mother’s gifts. The saints who “walk with [God] in white” reference the Biblical passage that has previously underscored Ellen’s distance from her mother’s faith. This selection is quoted at length in the novel as Ellen reads it aloud:

And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? . . . And he said unto me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore . . . he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. (28)

What differentiates Ellen’s initial reading of this passage from its reiteration some three hundred pages later is Ellen’s developing orientation to the material markers of white selfhood, whether camellias, work-boxes, or white clothing. To share her mother’s faith, she must learn to experience all of these objects as the many faces of the spiritual laundry that will save her soul.

What I want to propose in the remainder of this essay is that the relationship to objects that Ellen learns through her mother’s death works to resolve “a set of problems specific to the time it was written,” to borrow Jane Tompkins’s terms (38). The mid-nineteenth century saw a dramatic rise in Irish immigration to New England cities, and with it an increasing concern about the difficulties of transforming Catholics into Protestants, immigrants into citizens, and unskilled Irish women into well-behaved domestic servants. The “whitening” of the racially ambiguous Irish went hand in hand with expanding restrictions on the work available to free African-
Americans in New England cities. Drawing together Protestant formation and laundry-labor, white clothing and relations between women, Warner’s novel provides an imaginary landscape within which white objects simultaneously obscure and sustain distinctions between middle-class white women and their soon-to-be white domestics. This unified whiteness implicitly excluded non-white women from the reconciling power of laundry-labor, leaving the white mistress and her Irish domestic to find a Christian common ground at the edge of the washing-tub.

Maintaining Whiteness

Significantly, Ellen cannot become part of this cross-class alliance of white women who work on laundry until she becomes a Christian; as she reads the section on white clothing to her mother, the narrative informs us, Ellen recognizes that “she had no part with her mother” in the scene of Christian washing that comforts Mrs. Montgomery so (27). It is not until after her mother’s death (and her statement that the loss of her mother has only made her love Jesus more (349)) that Ellen can be incorporated into the category of Christians who are responsible for keeping white clothes clean. As he instructs Ellen in her Christian responsibilities after her mother’s death, John Humphreys narrates for Ellen her mother’s experience:

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38 On the labor restrictions imposed on free African-American women in the North, see Faye Dudden, Serving Women and Alice Kessler-Harris, Out to Work. Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson recount the similarly intense opposition to educating free women of color in the North in A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America. On the differing labor conditions of African-American women under slavery, see Jacqueline Jones, Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow. Loren Schweninger observes that free women of color in the south also “found employment at the bottom of the economic ladder” (107). David Roediger and Noel Ignatiev trace the consolidation of Irish “whiteness” through new labor restrictions that removed African-Americans from positions they had previously held; see Roediger’s The Wages of Whiteness and Ignatiev’s How the Irish Became White.
She loved and trusted him too; and now she is with him—she has reached that bright home where there is no more sin, nor sorrow, nor death . . . nor parting!—and though we are parted from them, it is but for a little; *let us watch and keep our garments clean*, and soon we shall be all together, and have done with tears for ever. She has done with them now. (349, emphasis added)

Ellen’s Protestant formation makes her an active participant in the spiritual relationship she has to this point been invited to observe. Where she initially needed to learn to see salvific laundry in the white camellia, she now must watchfully manage her spiritual clothing. Ellen’s incorporation into Protestantism via a metaphor of labor—and, as we will see later, into labor via Protestantism—raises questions about the status of labor, especially household labor, and its relation through religious formation to both the gendering of the sentimental woman and the development of white racial identity in the United States.

The question of domestic service, laundry, and whiteness in 1850 is implicitly a question about how America should respond to an influx of European immigrants. Matthew Frye Jacobson details the dramatic rise in immigration in the period in which *The Wide, Wide World* was written and published:

Yearly figures climbed to the tens of thousands per year by the mid-1820s, and to the hundreds of thousands per year by the 1840s. In 1847, among the worst years of the Famine in Ireland, total immigration to the United States leaped to 234,968, of whom nearly half (105,536) were from Ireland. From 1846 through 1855 a total of 3,031,339 immigrants came ashore in the United States, including 1,288,307 from Ireland and another 976,711 from Germany, the two new leading sources of immigration. (43)

As Jacobson notes, these immigrants were all admitted to the United States under an immigration and naturalization policy that allowed only “free white persons” to enter
the country and become naturalized citizens (39). Jacobson follows other scholars (notably Theodore Allen) in suggesting that the whiteness that permitted German, Eastern European, and especially Irish immigration was fragmented into infra-white racial distinctions, such that by 1860 Irish men held the privileges of white racial identity at the same time that popular and scientific discourses increasingly affirmed “the difference between distinct white races, the Anglo-Saxon and the Celt” (52).

These “white races” were often differentiated pragmatically through the markers of class, such that the hardy, liberty-loving Anglo-Saxon appears as having a kind of native gentility, while the Celt figures as dirty, unkempt, disorderly.

If the language of class secured distinctions between Anglo-Saxons and the Irish, concepts of masculinity often bridged these differences. David Roediger notes that this reconciliation rested on “a powerful masculine personal ideal”: the equation

39 Identified as “free white persons,” the Irish received the privileges of immigration, naturalization, and citizenship. More significantly, they also benefited from informal and formal restrictions that kept African-Americans out of certain jobs.

40 For the classic rendering of racial Anglo-Saxonism as equating whiteness with democratic ideals and bodily vigor, see Reginald Horsman, Race and Manifest Destiny. Horsman notes that racial Anglo-Saxonism allowed white Americans to “conceive of themselves as the most vital and energetic of those Aryan peoples who had spilled westward” (5). “It was repeatedly emphasized,” Horsman observes, “that it was the descendants of Anglo-Saxons who had successfully settled the eastern seaboard and established free government by means of a Revolution” (4). Who was included in this Anglo-Saxon racial identity varied regionally, Horsman suggests: “An Irishman might be described as a lazy, ragged, dirty Celt when he landed in New York, but if his children settled in California they might well be praised as part of the vanguard of the energetic Anglo-Saxon people” (4). In The Black Image in the White Mind, George Fredrickson quotes Unitarian clergyman James Freeman Clarke as observing that African-Americans had “a native courtesy, a civility like that from which the word ‘gentleman’ has its etymological meaning, and a capacity for the highest refinement of character” (109). As Fredrickson observes, this “native courtesy” would only develop through “favorable circumstances” such as contact with refined whites (109, 103).

41 See, for example, Warner’s description of the dying Irish boy John Dolan’s mother as “unwashed, uncombed, untidy” and the Dolan’s “little rickety shanty” as a “miserable place” with “no appearance of comfort or nicety anywhere or in any thing” (266, 277).
of wage labor with independence (13). Yet the prototypical nineteenth-century Irish immigrant was not an independent man, but instead a young, unmarried woman (Diner 31). Femininity, like masculinity, “enabled the negotiation of class relations and distinctions,” as Amy Schrager Lang notes (18), but it did so with a crucial difference. In the domestic literatures that were so popular at mid-century, gender’s work on class is a function of Protestantism—of how it formed people and defined their relationships to each other. In what follows, I trace how Protestantism structured relations between gender, race, and class by defining relations between mistresses and servants and between women and objects.

For authors such as Catharine Beecher, Protestantism created the imperative to have servants in the first place. Beecher’s widely read domestic manuals turned the common concern about how middle-class women were to manage their (presumptively Irish) servants42 into a religious issue, redefining gendered labor relations as missionary work. As Amy Kaplan notes, Beecher’s domestic manuals “inextricably link women’s work at home to the unfolding of America’s global mission of ‘exhibiting to the world the beneficent influences of Christianity, when carried into every social, civil, and political institution’” (586). Inside the middle-class home, white women could exercise a missionary influence by treating their Irish Catholic maids as foreign subjects to be evangelized.43 Incorporating class-differentiated Irish domestics into the domestic scene’s work on making things white

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42 For examples, see Beecher’s Treatise on Domestic Economy (1841), T.S. Arthur’s The Lady at Home (1844), and the anonymously published Plain Talk and Friendly Advice to Domestics (1855). Diner and Hotten-Somers describe how anxieties about Irish servants continued through the turn of the twentieth century.

43 This missional posture was not without contestation, as some middle-class women found the process of training unskilled domestics so vexing that they declared, as one mistress did, that they were “heartily sick of the Irish” (Hotten-Somers 192). Despite their frustration, the dominance of Irish women in the labor market meant that these mistresses still had to hire Irish servants. For a similar account, see Diner, Erin’s Daughters, 88-9.
meant that teaching domestic tasks to the often entirely unskilled and “unwashed” newly arrived immigrant could go hand in hand with converting Catholic servants into Protestant domestics who were bound to the family by love (65, 68).

Materially, this domestic work often took the form of maintaining the white clothes and delicate objects that marked their employers as white and middle class. Literary historian Bridget Heneghan notes that in the middle of the nineteenth century white objects of all kinds—dishes, dresses, doilies—came to serve as material evidence of their owner’s white racial identity (87). Thus constituted, whiteness depended on the work of domestic servants. Maintaining white clothing in particular added to the physically demanding work of doing laundry, a task that was often the first for which a middle-class woman would seek domestic help.

For most households in New England, hiring help with the laundry meant hiring a woman who had emigrated, often quite recently, from Ireland. Labor historian Faye Dudden suggests that by mid-century “it began to look as though every servant was Irish, at least in the major seaboard cities” (60). As early as 1825, sixty percent of the women applying to the Society for the Encouragement of Faithful Domestic Servants were Irish (Dudden 60). German and Scandinavian women were also likely to enter domestic service, although their concentration in specific cities and districts, their need to learn English, and their smaller numbers meant that Irish immigrants figured most prominently in domestic service. Dudden suggests that a domestic servant in the mid-nineteenth century was likely to find laundry among the most demanding of her tasks. In the late 1840s most laundry would have likely been done weekly, with a full day devoted to boiling, rinsing, wringing, and hanging the clothes and another day reserved for ironing them (Dudden 142). Appliances that would ease this arduous process were only just coming into wide use; the hand-cranked wringer was patented in 1847, and “fixed” laundry tubs, which had a drain at
the bottom, came into wide use shortly thereafter (142). While occasionally women might be employed by the day to do laundry at a house, or to take clothes to wash at their own home, most middle-class households hired in a maid whose responsibilities included laundry, or dispatched this work to their single live-in servant (143).

Significantly, the published version of Warner’s novel only presents laundry-work done inside the confines of the home by members of the household, avoiding the possibility that laundry could be sent out of the family space or be handled by strangers. Both of the sequences in which the novel represents women doing washing take place in Thirwall, and certainly Thirwall’s rural isolation accounts at least in part for the confinement of laundry to the home. Recent archival work on the drafts of the novel has uncovered a deleted sequence involving laundry that was originally meant to appear between Ellen’s shopping trip with her mother and her departure for Thirwall. This deleted sequence is significant both because of the alternative patterns of laundry-labor that it details and the inferences that its excision pre-publication supports. In these sections, first published in ESQ in 1999, Ellen, still resident in the city, meets a “little black girl” (19) named Rebecca Richardson. Rebecca is the daughter of a washerwoman, and helps support herself and her mother, Mary Ann, by gathering coals in the street. In the first episode, Ellen first shares a packet of figs with Rebecca; Rebecca then returns Ellen’s lost purse, leaving the money untouched;

44 Neither of these conveniences appears in the novel’s portraits of washing.
45 As the century progressed, African American women were increasingly excluded from live-in domestic service in the North (Dudden 63). The refusal of many white immigrants to work and share living quarters with non-white servants meant that African American women could only find employment either as live-out domestics or, more frequently, as laundresses who took clothes into their homes. The initial drafts of The Wide, Wide World include a sequence in which Ellen and her mother pay a benevolent visit to an African-American laundress who does washing in her home; Warner’s description of the “horrible smell” and lack of furniture in the family’s living space emphasize their distance from the whiteness that cleaning was meant to secure (Roberson 25).
and finally, Ellen and her mother visit Rebecca and her mother, taking a new dress and pair of shoes to give to Rebecca (Roberson 18-27). Along the way, Ellen receives a good lesson in the value of charity: “Remember Rebecca,” Mrs. Montgomery declares, “whenever you feel inclined to shrink from any disagreeable duty” (Roberson 27). Similarly, Ellen gets to witness her mother’s tutelary relation to Rebecca’s mother, who, according to Mrs. Montgomery, must not keep money that she finds in the street, for example, but instead “do [her] duty faithfully, & trust God for the rest” (Roberson 26).

In an article discussing the deleted sequence, Susan L. Roberson reads Warner’s drafting of this scene sympathetically, suggesting that Ellen and her mother’s encounter with the Richardson’s establishes a “porousness of space” that could provide a potential ground for race-mixing. The deleted episodes thus demonstrate, in Roberson’s view, Warner’s commitment to addressing issues of racial inequality (14).\footnote{Roberson goes on to suggest that “the little black girl and her mother act as surrogates for Warner, for they enable her to think metaphorically about herself and the problems of constraint, inequality, and poverty that as a woman she also faced” (14-5). Jane Tompkins’ discussions of Harriet Beecher Stowe posit a similar identificatory relation between white and black women, and Ann Cvetkovich’s critique of Tompkins functions well as a critique of Roberson: “Effective as Stowe’s equation of middle-class mothers and slave mothers might be, this gesture also constitutes a profoundly deceptive sleight of hand in so far as it is blind to the differences between white middle-class women and black slave women [and, I would add, free black women as well]. . . . The class and race differences that separate women are effaced by Stowe’s maternal melodrama and by Tompkins’ feminist celebration of her politics of affect” (124-5).} Roberson’s reading, however, does not offer a satisfactory explanation for the excision of this sequence; she attributes the deletion to Warner’s editors’ demands that Warner shorten the novel, but does not address why this particular sequence was deleted. Although the prominent role played by laundry in this sequence may not entirely account for its deletion, the uses to which laundry is put
in this novel are consistent with a need to confine representations of laundry-work to white women. Rebecca’s mother’s home-based work as a laundress reflected the common exclusion of black women from live-in domestic service in the antebellum North; Faye Dudden notes that in New York City in 1855, black women “constituted only one thousand of the thirty-one thousand domestics in the city” (63). White immigrants available to work in service increasingly outnumbered free black women, especially in the Northern cities most affected by rises in immigration, and the refusal of many white immigrants to work and share living quarters with black servants meant that black women could only find employment either as live-out domestics or, more frequently, as laundresses who took clothes into their homes.

Warner lingers over the Richardson family’s workspace in detail, describing the sign that hangs over the family’s joint living and working quarters (“Washing done by Mary Ann Richardson”), the “horrible smell” of “unsweet & unsavoury odours . . . with a very strong notion of soap-suds,” and the lack of any suitable furniture in the room, contrasted with the presence of two tubs containing washing (25). The reader is presented with the prospect of laundry that moves from one domestic sphere into another not its own, laundry that “goes out” and is cleaned not by loving, mother-like hands but by paid labor. Here, the labor of cleaning is not performed by someone who can be recognized as white and Christian; instead, it is doubly marked by both racial and religious difference. Warner’s desire to show Mrs. Montgomery and Ellen doing good works for the poor—perhaps reenacting some of the tract visits 47 so common at the time—is confounded by the larger cultural work that the novel needs to do: to use laundry to consolidate white feminine Christianity as a formation that transcends class. Hence Warner’s excision of the sequence involving the Richarsons: excluding them

47 Tompkins describes Warner’s work as a “Visiter” for the New York City Tract Society in her afterword to the Feminist Press edition of the novel (592).
preserves the idea that laundering is the province of white women and maintains white women’s joint responsibility for white clothes.

*The Wide, Wide World*’s concerns with keeping white laundry in the white home correspond with concerns voiced by Warner’s contemporaries who were writing domestic instructional manuals. Authors such as Catharine Beecher increasingly gave attention to how middle-class women should manage their (presumptively Irish) servants, implicitly understanding the middle-class home as a place where immigrants would come to be integrated into American domesticity.

Domestic literatures’ recasting of housework as salvation was thus shaped by racial distinctions between who should work and who should be “helped”—and, more significantly, who could come near the objects and settings that composed the middle-class white home. White Protestant women’s need for domestic help in order to preserve the standards of dress and cleanliness that marked them as white and middle-class was shored up by the evangelical imperative to incorporate putatively non-Christian others, including Catholics, into the metaphorical and material labor of keeping white clothes clean. The domestic home allowed the New England woman to conflate Protestantization with material domestic work, and in the process to use appropriate “whitening” labor to make gendered whiteness recognizable across class boundaries. At the same time, the evangelical impulse toward domestics allowed the “we” of John Humphreys’s “let us watch and keep our clothes clean” to enforce a division of household labor, in which middle-class white women had a moral imperative to find others to do their domestic work. It is through this fictionalized, racially defined “we”—united across class boundaries—that middle-class white women preserved the objects and practices that constituted their separateness as middle-class white women. Similarly, the tangibility and materiality of the clothing on which both sets of women work bound them as it differentiated them.
Warner’s novel weaves Ellen’s Protestant formation into the larger missional project of converting Catholic immigrants into Protestant servants. Below, I trace the work that whitening labor does on American and immigrant bodies. If domestic labor is meant to Protestantize Catholics, it is also, in a process similar but importantly distinct, meant to induct Ellen into proper Protestant ladyhood. Yet as I will demonstrate, Ellen’s position as a middle-class American girl means that she is, in the novel’s logic, made curiously vulnerable by domestic labor’s ability to whiten bodies. First, however, I trace the intertwined paths of religion and race in making proper domestic labor.

How the Irish (Woman) Became White

_The Wide, Wide World_ crafts its version of Christian and national whiteness by orienting women to objects and objects to labor. Ellen’s gifts from her mother, for example, not only assist her in her tasks but also redefine those tasks as acts of connection. These connections invest material objects with a spiritual significance; to learn to “keep [one’s] garments clean” is to labor both on clothing and the self, and to be properly related to others by that labor (349). Labor’s dual function as an admonition to watch over the self and to watch over an object was deeply entangled in what literary historian Jenny Franchot calls “the antebellum Protestant encounter with Catholicism.” As Franchot describes, antebellum Protestants of varied denominations defined Catholicism as excessively and improperly invested in the material world.48

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48 Franchot writes: “For liberal New Englanders, in particular, Christian worship had grown steadily less Catholic by continuing to separate itself from the earthy, the inarticulate, and the literal. . . . Religion’s progress from the material to the spiritual, the ceremonial to the verbal was finally successful, then, because of the way providential history worked” (12). This dichotomy between Catholic materiality and Protestant spirituality crossed denominational boundaries within antebellum Protestantism.
Franchot observes that “Protestantism claimed for itself a spiritualized nature that struggled against corrupt and materialist Catholic civilizations” (67). Overly invested in the world of things, Catholicism misrepresented symbolic significances as physical phenomena: “Within that [Catholic] ‘other’ occurred spectacular and haunting transformations, as the spirit infused the flesh, converting bread into the Godhead, men and women into saints, artifacts into relics—an infiltration of the material world that Protestantism claimed to have repudiated” (Franchot 199). Where Protestants considered themselves to be independently accessing the Godhead, Catholics allowed their faith to reside in relics, trinkets, and empty performances—or so antebellum Protestant discourse assumed.⁴⁹

If Catholicism indicated an excessive investment in the material world, it also gave the lie to the apparent bodily whiteness of Irish and Spanish Catholics. Writing about nineteenth-century U.S. literatures, literary critic Maria de Guzmán observes that the black/white racial binarics these literatures construct rely on the occlusion of “a critically unacknowledged third position or figure, that of the not-right-white or the off-white, the figure of the ‘Spaniard’” (4). Central to crafting the “Spaniard” as “off-white,” Guzmán writes, was the Black Legend, a cultural narrative circulated in the sixteenth and seventeenth century by Spain’s imperial enemies (4). “In this legend,” Guzmán suggests, “‘the Spaniard’ became a typological emblem of religious and political intolerance, tyranny, misrule, conspiracy, cruelty, barbarity, bloodthirstiness, backwardness, slothfulness, and degeneracy” (4-5). The Black Legend joined a

⁴⁹ See, for example, the attention Maria Monk’s popular anti-Catholic screed Awful Disclosures of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery pays to Catholic “superstitions” about objects. Monk describes gathering the hairs that fall from the Mother Superior’s head and the spare threads from her dress, observing that she “believed [them] to possess the power of removing pain and [had] often prayed to [them] to cure the toothache, etc.” (14). Monk’s investment in these privileged objects draws her into a submissive relation to the Mother Superior that her narrative casts as deviant and socially dangerous.
recitation (however slanted) of Spanish imperialism to the history of the Inquisition, melding religion, history, and politics into "a racialized typology of 'the Spaniard'" (6). What is important to observe here is the affiliation that the Black Legend helped to forge between Catholicism and a defective or tainted whiteness. Discussing Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1798), Guzmán observes that Carwin, the source of Wieland's fanatical delusions, appears "as a Jesuitical schemer with uncanny abilities to sway and control, a type that perfectly corresponds to representations of Spaniards through the lenses of the Black Legend" (22). Status as a "Jesuitical schemer" only serves to reinforce Carwin's ambiguous physical appearance and to render him "off-white" (Guzmán 23, emphasis in original).

If Catholicism marked the Spanish as not-quite-white in antebellum America, it also contributed to the racialization of another ambivalently white population, the Irish. Writing about the U.S.-Mexico War, Shelley Streeby observes the massive cultural anxiety about the connections Catholicism forged between Mexicans and Irish immigrants, who composed up to twenty-five percent of the U.S. military (15). Fed up with poor treatment by the U.S. army and the increasing nativist sentiment in the U.S., many Irish soldiers deserted and joined the Mexican army instead (Streeby 16). Such desertions only seemed to reinforce the cultural perception of Catholicism as common ground between Spain's former colonial possession and the Irish. What is more, Catholicism's condensation into the larger racial tropes promulgated by the Black Legend substantially blurred the boundaries between religion and race. From this perspective, the benevolent antebellum errand to "Christianize"—that is, to Protestantize—one's Irish domestic servant appears as an errand to transform off-whiteness into whiteness.

Hence laundry as such a perfect concretization of the work that is to be done for the Irish immigrant woman. Guzmán, significantly, reads the off-white Carwin's
description as “sallow” as “connot[ing] discoloration and dirt” (23). Like Carwin, the Irish immigrant in mainstream nineteenth-century literatures needs a good washing, one that concentrates first on divesting her of her inappropriate relation to material objects. Converting her from Catholicism means asking her to give up her superstitious materialism, her “Romish” hyper-investment in objects that magically cure toothaches or turn into the body of Christ. It is this transformed relation to objects that promises to remove the “discoloration and dirt” of Catholicism from a body they mark as off-white. At the heart of this transformation is what we might call a Protestant materiality—an understanding of material objects, of what they mean, who they join, and how they join them. Working to whiten white clothes, the immigrant-turned-domestic improves her own bodily whiteness by learning from middle-class white women to wash her clothes, and make them “white in the blood of the Lamb” (28). But as she shares responsibility for white clothing with her employer, and is literally joined to her by the transfer of the clothes from the mistress’s hands to her own, the responsibilities that whiten her differentiate her from her mistress. Doing the washing for another woman, she is herself washed. In the next section, I want to think about the stakes of this whitening labor for both the middle-class woman and the Irish domestic. If labor helps to convert Irish immigrants into white domestics, it is also curiously central to Ellen Montgomery’s conversion. What happens when a middle-class American girl is set to domestic labor?

Learning to Labor
Ellen’s introduction to Protestant Christianity consists in no small measure of learning how, and why, she and others need to work. Shuttled off to her aunt Fortune’s New England farm, Ellen is suddenly exposed to the labor that has to this point invisibly supported her middle-class existence. In The Wide, Wide World, the
prototypical move of the sentimental novel—to thrust a young girl out into the world to find her own way—thus coincides with the process of learning about labor. Offering a negative example is Ellen’s aunt, who treats the Christianizing practices that Beecher and others suggest should animate domestic work with a studied disdain. Miss Fortune’s main flaw, according to the novel, is her stubborn refusal to hire domestic help. Despite the fact that she has an ailing mother to tend and runs a large and by all accounts well-kept farm, her overzealous sense of industry and her lack of Christianity keep her from employing anyone else to help with her domestic tasks.

Miss Fortune is thus responsible for all of the house’s laundry, and this responsibility, coupled with her refusal to share her work with a domestic, leads her to refuse to participate in the overdetermined labor of keeping white clothes clean. On Ellen’s first day with Aunt Fortune, she wanders around the farm, soon finding herself ankle-deep in black mud. Upon returning to Aunt Fortune’s house, Ellen receives a chastising for dirtying her white socks, and when Miss Fortune discovers that Ellen has only worn white stockings, she decides—much to Ellen’s chagrin—that Ellen’s stockings must be dyed brown (108). The dyeing of her white socks marks a shift in Ellen’s perception of her white clothing, one that underscores Miss Fortune’s distance from the proper white femininity the novel seeks to form. When Ellen says that she does not like her new brown stockings, Miss Fortune replies tartly, “Well, I do. How many pair of white stockings would you like to drive into the mud and let me wash out every week?” (113). Ellen’s surprised response—“You wash! . . . I didn’t think of

50 For an overview of this sentimental plot, see Nina Baym’s Women’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels By and About Women in America, 1820-1870, at 35.
51 Even during the long illness that summons Ellen home from the Humphreys Miss Fortune is stridently opposed to hiring help; she only relents and allows others to help with the “heavy part” of the butter-making when it becomes clear that Ellen is not physically able to keep up with the work (370). The work given to these helpers is strictly delimited: “all within the buttery [was] still left to Ellen, for Miss Fortune would have no one else go there” (370).
your doing it"—marks her dawning recognition that white clothing, like all white objects, relies upon someone’s domestic labor for the preservation of its whiteness. It is a quick jump from Miss Fortune’s refusal to manage Ellen’s white socks to Ellen’s recognition that all of her white objects require someone’s domestic labor and care, and that given Miss Fortune’s refusal to partake cheerfully in the “whitening” project, her other white objects are in peril. Thus Ellen visualizes “all her white things turning brown” without the assurance of another woman’s labor to keep them white (113).

At stake for Ellen here is the question of who will do this whitening labor that Miss Fortune, in her diligence as farm-manager, cheesemaker, and butter-seller refuses. Returning to her room post-dyeing, Ellen is greeted by her unmade bed, which leads to her recognition “that the making of it in the future must depend entirely upon herself” (113). With Ellen’s new recognition that whiteness-preservation requires labor comes a similar recognition that she might be called upon to perform work herself. As Miss Fortune rightly surmises, Ellen’s engagement with labor has to this point consisted of carefully making tea and toast for her mother and perhaps helping with some of the basic needlework required to maintain her clothes.52 Indeed, much of Ellen’s shock at her new surroundings revolves around Ellen’s introduction to the prospect of her own labor and the evidence that labor is performed by others, that her cherished objects require labor to be kept intact. Initially, Ellen objects to both her own obligations to labor and her close proximity to others who labor; her first letter to her mother complains that she has to eat at the same table as Mr. Van Brunt, Miss

52 Interestingly, the sequence involving Rebecca Richardson also contains the only sustained work of any variety Ellen does before coming to Thirwall, as we see Ellen helping to sew her own clothes and the dress she gives Rebecca. The deletion of these sections thus underscores Ellen’s lack of experience of labor when she arrives at Thirwall.
Fortune’s hired hand.53 As Ellen becomes progressively more Christian, she begins to reorient herself toward work in general, and toward work that preserves white objects, both material and figurative.

Ellen’s shift in position toward labor—toward both the Christian act of “keeping one’s clothes clean” and to the domestic acts required to maintain white clothes, white objects, and the household markers of racial whiteness—solidifies in the period shortly after her mother’s death. Here the novel sets out an intimate connection between Christianity, domestic labor, and the whiteness of Ellen’s body. Shortly after Ellen receives John Humphreys’s instruction to mind her metaphorical clothes, Ellen and John read Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress, and discuss the scene in which Christian receives forgiveness of his sins:

as [Christian] stood looking and weeping, three shining ones came to him. The first said to him, “Thy sins be forgiven thee;” the second stripped him of his rags and clothed him with a change of raiment; the third also set a mark on his forehead.

John explained what was meant by the rags and the change of raiment.

“And the mark in his forehead?” said Ellen.

“That is the mark of God’s children—the change wrought in them by the Holy Spirit,—the change that makes them different from others, and different from their old selves.”

“Do all Christians have it?”

“Certainly. None can be a Christian without it.” (351-2)

Both Ellen and the reader are, at this point, well aware of the significance of Christian’s changed (read: newly white) clothing. Washing one’s clothes “in the

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53 In a sign of the cross-class alliances that this novel tentatively promotes, Mr. Van Brunt will eventually become Ellen’s good friend, Miss Fortune’s husband, and a believing Christian (111-2).
blood of the Lamb” leads to a bodily marking by which one becomes recognizable as a Christian (28). John immediately leads Ellen through a conversation in which she is called to interpret her own experience through the metaphors with which the story presents her. Once introduced to the idea of a “marked” Christian body, Ellen examines herself to see if her body is similarly “marked.” Tellingly, John’s instructions ask Ellen to determine the state of her body by comparing herself to a sentimentally cherished object; he tells her to “carry [her] heart and life to the Bible and see how they agree” (352). Concluding that they do, Ellen can recognize herself both as marked as Christian—that is, Protestant—and as having washed her “clothes” in a blood that made them white.

Ellen’s new recognition that her body has been marked as Christian is followed almost immediately by a renewed emphasis on Ellen’s need to learn to perform domestic labor. Mr. Van Brunt arrives at the Humphreys’s house, where Ellen is staying, in order to take Ellen back to run Aunt Fortune’s farm while she is ill. It is in this trial that she must prove her newly-attained commitment to her Protestant faith by an introduction to labor. Ellen completes this trial successfully, diligently managing the household and working incessantly without complaint.\textsuperscript{54} Most significant here, though, is the change that work makes on Ellen’s body. As Miss Fortune begins to recover, she redoubles her demands upon Ellen, leaving Mr. Van Brunt to complain that “to pay Ellen for having grown white and poor, her aunt was going to work the little flesh she had off her bones” (371). Christian submission to hard domestic labor has redoubled whiteness onto Ellen’s body, making her already white face whiter.

\textsuperscript{54} During Miss Fortune’s illness Ellen comes to experience “her morning hour of prayer” as “very precious now;” it is what enables her “often in the midst of her work, stopping short with a sort of pang of sorrow and weariness, and the difficulty of doing right, [to] press her hands together and say to herself, ‘I will try to be a good pilgrim!’” (360).
Likewise, the deleterious effects of hard work on Ellen’s body are here figured as growth, as the natural progress both of her improving character and her whitening skin. Taken as a whole, domestic labor whitens behavior and bodies in the same stroke.

Yet if this domestic labor whitens those who do it, as domestic manuals hoped, it whitens Ellen too much. In its dual connection with sickness and poverty, the whiteness Ellen attains from her labor implies that she is somehow unfit for these tasks.\(^{55}\) Indeed, the compensation that Miss Fortune offers Ellen for her labor—“to work the little flesh she had off her bones”—extends whitening labor into disembodiment, as what whitens Ellen threatens to destroy her. In this perversely rendered payment, we can see the utter impropriety of Ellen’s position. While the work she does during Miss Fortune’s illness is appropriately waged labor, it has other, non-pecuniary wages: the whiteness that domestic labor offers the immigrant who goes into service. But for Ellen to receive these wages is to receive something she already has. Warner’s novel positions waged labor as a physical threat to the middle-class woman’s body; to do labor that should be paid tips whitening over into erasure, into the removal of Ellen’s flesh from her bones.

While Ellen’s experiences during Miss Fortune’s illness prove the effectiveness of her Protestant formation, they also come at great cost to her. Ellen does the labor, but it is clear that the labor she does is not right for her. Already securely established as white and Anglo-Saxon from the beginning of the novel—Warner attends frequently to Ellen’s “flushed cheek and sparkling eye” and her “fair brow” (30, 268)—Ellen, unlike the Irish immigrant, does not need to have a “discolored” whiteness repaired. Nor does Ellen need to disavow the inappropriate

\(^{55}\) Compare Christine Stansell’s observation that “[b]eing a lady . . . meant not doing certain kinds of housework” (159).
materialism of the Catholic faith; if the energies of the novel are directed at converting her, the fact remains that she is converted not from theological error or from a wrong understanding of material objects but instead from childhood ignorance. The purpose of Ellen’s trial at labor might be less to prove Ellen’s admirable docility and more to write on the Protestant body the work that labor does for a Catholic woman. Even as Ellen successfully completes her tasks, the transposition of whitening labor onto her body reiterates the fundamental distance between middle-class girls and Irish ones, between Americans and immigrants, and between the proto-Protestant child and the Irish Catholic convert.

Proper Domestic Relations

In the relationship between Ellen’s mentor Alice Humphreys and her domestic servant Margery, *The Wide, Wide World* outlines a model of appropriately classed white feminine labor. Alice and Margery’s loving, yet hierarchical interactions offer insight into the cross-class identifications facilitated by labor on white objects and the classed distinctions that the Christian and Christianizing imperative to have white laundry cleaned in a white family enforces. Alice and Margery’s joint responsibility for the laundry in the Humphreys household—a joint responsibility with clearly class-delineated roles for each woman—demonstrates how Christian metaphors of laundry and domestic practices around material objects converged to incorporate middle-class white women and their white domestics into a complex relation of racial likeness and classed difference.

Significantly, the novel forges this alliance between women in reference to an immigrant woman who did not need training or Christianizing in the first place. We might consider, practically, that the novel has room for only one female convert, and that Warner’s interest in her heroine required keeping the domestics’ role in the novel
to a minimum. Yet to depict a servant’s training and Christianization would reinforce the differences between mistress and servant, underscoring the asymmetries of power between the two women. Telling a training narrative, as well, would both reinforce the domestic’s status as a worker and would have to address the very real possibility that a servant, once trained, could move on to a better employer. Such poaching of freshly-trained immigrants-turned-domestics was a common enough occurrence that Catharine Beecher referred to it as “a sore trial” (qtd. in Dudden 52). The relationship between Alice and Margery gains its cultural purpose through the fact that the “whitening” of the immigrant and the training in labor of the mistress has already occurred. As a result it positions its cross-class relations as natural, as already given.

Though Warner states that Margery came to the United States from England, emigrating with the Humphreys during Alice and John’s childhood, her choice of the name “Margery” implicitly aligns her with another fictional Irish servant, the Margery of Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s 1837 Live and Let Live; or, Domestic Service Illustrated. Margery\textsuperscript{56} offers a trenchant critique of indolent middle-class white women who mistreat their servants. Formerly a wet nurse to the Hartell family’s young child, Margery returns to the house six weeks after being dismissed to seek her wages. Sedgwick explicitly marks Margery as Irish, having another one of the house’s servants (mis)identify her as “Bridget . . . [a] very low Irish person” (143). Sedgwick then stages a dialogue in which Margery objects to Mrs. Hartell’s repeated deferral of her wages. When Mrs. Hartell soothingly claims “[b]ut, Margery, I told you I would pay you the next day,” Margery replies: “Ah, but ye ladies never think we have not servants to send or carriages to ride in for our pay. The time is all we have. It’s easy for you to say ‘call again,’ and ‘call again,’ and the time it takes to ‘call

\textsuperscript{56} Sedgwick’s novel, interestingly, situates the plight of the Irish domestic within a larger narrative of a middle-class white girl’s induction into domestic labor.
again’ is money to us, and ye are robbing us of it, besides holding back our own” (Sedgwick 149-50). Margery goes on to recount how Mrs. Hartell’s insistence that she “call again”—and walk the two miles there and back between the village and the Hartell house—“brought on a fever” that dried up her milk. Losing her milk meant losing her place as a wet-nurse, as well as losing her ability to nurse her own child. She closes her complaint by observing that her baby “sickened and died, and all—all—mark it well, Mrs. Hartell, came from my not getting my money when it was due!” (Sedgwick 150).

Sedgwick’s Irish Margery thus voices what is, for Sedgwick, a representative complaint. “Is it not very common,” the narrator observes at the end of Margery’s lament, “for ladies, far more from thoughtlessness than meditated injustice, to delay the payment of wages?” (151). In offering a forthright critique of Mrs. Hartell’s demurrals, Sedgwick’s novel seeks to uncover the hostilities and antagonisms lurking beneath the ostensibly benevolent relation between mistress and servant. An 1837 discussion of Live and Let Live in the New York Review observed in this move a troubling “leaning to the side of ultra-democratic sentiments, which are neither wise nor salutary” (qtd. in Damon-Bach 172, emphasis in original). The Review adds:

It is far more important, it is doing much more for social virtue and welfare, to instruct the people in the duties, and to warn them of the dangers, of liberty, than to minister continually to that overweening sense of rights, which . . . beget[s] discontent with established and necessary distinctions and subordinations, and hatred toward the richer classes.57 (qtd. in Damon-Bach 172, emphasis in original)

57 So concerned was the Review about the novel’s “democratic” leanings that it declared Live and Let Live “precisely the book we should wish to keep out of the hands of a numerous class of servants” (qtd. in Damon-Bach 172).
Sedgwick’s Irish Margery represents a righteous discontent on the part of the serving classes, a refusal to be instructed in “necessary distinctions” instead of common rights.

Warner’s Margery invokes this history of class conflict only to attempt to put it securely to rest. Margery’s Englishness allows her to function as an idealized representation of the immigrant servant, putting her in the place of the Irish immigrant domestic whose righteous indignation threatened to disrupt the whitening bonds between mistress and servant. Margery’s status as a servant lets her represent the Irish servant in need of domestication, while the fact that she is not a recent immigrant and is integrated into the family allows her to fully inhabit the position of the servant as properly formed. The novel offers Margery to the reader as someone who stands in the place of the Irish servant, but who as a whitened woman can also perform benevolent acts for them in equal measure with her middle-class employer.

Margery takes on this ambivalently egalitarian role in the two scenes in which Irish characters appear at the Humphreys’ house. In the first episode, a local woman named Kitty Dolan arrives in search of Alice’s father, a local Protestant clergyman whose sermons her dying son has attended. As she informs Alice of Mrs. Dolan’s presence, Margery describes the visitor as “an Irish body out by, waiting to speak to you” (266). In this moment, Margery, Alice, and Ellen are all securely gendered female, while Mrs. Dolan’s status as Irish identifies her, at least initially, as a “body” without a gender. Entering the “spotless upper kitchen,” Mrs. Dolan takes on a more feminine cast; the narrative describes her as “young, rather pretty, and with a pleasant countenance” (266). Belying her gender is “[t]he unfailing Irish cloak . . . drawn about her, the hood brought over her head” that simultaneously marks her race and obscures her bodily form (266). Yet as the scene continues, we learn that this “Irish body” is a model of motherly devotion, defying her husband’s insistence that she

58 I am indebted to Kate McCullough’s apt observation of this disavowal.
"won’t show the disrespect to the praast in yer own house” by walking more than a mile through an evening snowstorm to fetch Mr. Humphreys at her son’s request (268). A layer of unmelted snow covers Kitty Dolan’s head and shoulders, marking her maternal errand as a whitening one, however ephemeral. If Kitty Dolan’s evident care for her son marks her as appropriately maternal and temporarily white, her “brown cloak” and her “unwashed, uncombed, untidy” appearance mark her distance from the neat, well-ordered womanhood Margery, Alice, and Ellen share (267, 266).

Margery and Alice in this scene represent a united front, working together but almost autonomously to offer white middle-class hospitality to their off-white visitor. After leading her upstairs, Margery departs to fetch Mr. Humphreys while Alice listens to Mrs. Dolan’s story. While Margery is out of the room, Alice informs Mrs. Dolan that “Margery will give you something to refresh you,” which Mrs. Dolan refuses. Alice then interrupts her discussion with Mrs. Dolan with the exclamation “Margery—oh, that’s right,—a cup of tea will do her good” (267). Unbidden, Margery has appeared with the desired refreshment, a gesture that Alice recognizes instinctively as right even as it represents Margery’s independent decision. And from Margery’s hand, Mrs. Dolan accepts the tea that she had initially refused from Alice. Here Margery plays an integral role in the good works so central to middle-class feminine benevolence, appearing as an intimate partner in the charity that circulates in the scene.

Later in the novel, we see a similar process repeated between Margery and Ellen. Another “Irish body,” a man named Anthony Fox, arrives at the door with a letter in hand, asking Ellen if she will copy it for him (462). Margery, we learn, has already made Ellen aware of Fox’s plight: that he is ashamed that he cannot write well enough to make a letter “fit to send home to his mother” (462). Like Kitty Dolan, Anthony Fox is separated from his appropriate gender by his Irishness; he must rely
on the agency of a young girl to be a proper son to his mother. Ellen, who is
“comfortably ensconced in a corner of the wide sofa,” tells Margery that “he could
find plenty of other people to do it for him,” and asks her to send him elsewhere (462).
Having received Ellen’s refusal, Margery instead turns to John, saying that she “didn’t
know how to refuse” the man at the door, and makes a case for the Irish immigrant
again (462). The denouement of the scene—John informs Ellen that it is her duty to
write the letter, and Ellen repents of her selfishness—positions Margery as central to
the benevolent errand of “helping” the Irish, here through giving Anthony Fox access
to the niceties that are appropriate for mothers. So too it positions Margery, obliquely,
as having an important role in Ellen’s training in middle-class ladyhood; Ellen’s
lesson in self-denial comes about through Margery’s fulfillment of the benevolent
responsibilities that she must learn herself.

The novel’s move to fold Margery’s housework into the benevolent labor of
middle-class femininity is part of a larger crossing the novel wants to forge between
labor and affection. While Sedgwick’s Margery asserts her right to her wages, Warner
studiously avoids the implication that her Margery works for pay. Indeed, Margery’s
emigration was motivated not by economic need, Alice tells Ellen, but instead by
affective ties:

[Margery] came over with us twelve years ago for the pure love of my father
and mother; and I believe now she looks upon John and me as her own
children. I think she could scarcely love us more if we were so in truth. . . .
Margery came to America for the love of us. (173)

Transforming Margery’s waged labor into love brings it in line with the maternal,
caretaking labor that the novel wants to expansively define as Christian. What Ellen
already knows, and the novel hopes to teach, is that Margery’s motherly, caretaking
love is an extension of the Protestant God’s love, as an evangelist tells Ellen soon after she bids her mother goodbye:

In the first place, it is not your mother, but [God], who has given you every good and pleasant thing you have enjoyed in your whole life. . . . [Your mother] has only been, as it were, the hand by which he supplied you. . . . It is all—all God’s doing, from first to last. (72)

Warner’s Protestantism institutes an equivalence between all caretaking and cherishing labors. The heavy work of wringing out wet clothing and the genteel work of training a servant, the work of ordering tea for a guest and the work of hastening downstairs to prepare it, become differing faces of the same gift of love that God gives to his people. Protestantism thus provides an affective logic by which different labors become branches of the same caretaking tree—a move that simultaneously underscores the mistress’s common purpose with her servant and silently reasserts the separateness of their labors.

This simultaneous sameness and difference runs beneath the synthetic, happy enclosure that in The Wide, Wide World marks the proper relations between mistress and servant. These relations appear in sharpest relief in Ellen’s first visit to the Humphreys’s house. When Ellen arrives, she finds not Alice, but Margery, who is in the back yard “wringing some clothes out of a tub of water” (161). As if to underscore the inherent rightness of this scene, Warner narrates Margery as “a pleasant woman to look at, very trim and tidy, and a good-humored eye and smile when she saw Ellen” (161). The sentence’s grammatical fault, in which Margery does not have a “good-humored eye and smile” but instead seems to be these things, only amplifies the passage’s sense of pleasurable propriety. Not only is Margery doing the washing good for a middle-class girl to look at, it is also pleasant for Margery herself, who reflects her innate happiness with her laundry-labor back to Ellen in her welcoming smile.
Margery’s laundry-work quickly gives way to a tour of the Humphreys’s home, in which Alice displays for Ellen the tidily arranged linens and objects that mark her as a middle-class woman. Warner lovingly details Alice’s surroundings, pausing over the “ample curtains of white dimity” that cover the windows and the bed and the “snow-white muslin” that covers Alice’s toilet-table (163). Left unstated in the circuit of friendly smiles that pass between Ellen and Alice is the connection between the yards of dimity and muslin that Alice displays and the washing that occupies Margery. In its repetitive insistence on the pleasantness of the scene and the happiness of its inhabitants, the novel naturalizes both Margery’s and Alice’s relations to these white linens; the wet clothes in the wash-tub seem fitted to Margery’s hands, while the curtains and tablecloths provide for Alice what appears to be a natural backdrop. Installed in right relations to these objects, both Alice and Margery respond naturally with the happy affection and Christian caretaking that the novel seeks to cultivate.

These happy responses to one’s surroundings appear at a crucial point in Ellen’s Christian formation. Though Ellen has promised her mother that she will do her best to cultivate herself as a Christian, she has neglected her prayers and Bible-reading and failed to appropriately check her tongue in the face of Miss Fortune’s unkindness. In a move that resembles the earlier interweaving of Ellen’s mother’s gifts with Ellen’s Christian formation, the narrative follows Alice’s presentation of her snow-white linens with a careful investigation of Ellen’s spiritual state. Placing Ellen in an easy chair near the fire, Alice asks Ellen if she has “returned to her duty” and “resolved . . . to lead a Christian’s life” by making amends with her aunt Fortune (164). Though Ellen has tried to do so all morning, she finds herself “full of bad feelings,” desirous of further devotion but unable to actually forgive her sharp-tongued aunt.
What happens next is a paradigmatic example of the influence a house with snowy linens and a loving domestic is to have on feminine spiritual formation. Alice counsels Ellen to pray and to ask for her aunt’s forgiveness, and then leaves Ellen alone in her room, instructing her to “[m]ake a good use of the time while I am gone” (166). When Alice returns, Ellen is newly composed, ready to ask forgiveness and assume her Christian duties. Left in the blank between Alice’s departure and her return is the beneficial influence of Alice’s white and feminine surroundings on Ellen’s rebellious spirit. Like Alice and Margery, Ellen responds sympathetically to her properly organized surroundings, settling into proper Christian feelings as she has settled into Alice’s easy chair.

Ready to forgive, Ellen is now also ready for tea, a meal that will occasion an introduction to what the novel sees as appropriate middle-class housekeeping. The scene shifts into Alice’s “large, well-appointed, and spotlessly neat kitchen,” so delightfully arranged that “Ellen could not help exclaiming at its pleasantness” (167). Striking here is the procession of white objects that Alice handles in sequence: she puts on a white apron, sifts white flour onto a white board on a white table, and proceeds to roll out tea-cakes that are described as “nice little white things” (168). Her heart set aright, Ellen watches Alice produce and manage a series of white things that spontaneously reflect her racial whiteness. The passage from Christian formation to the enjoyment of whiteness suggests the intimacies between Protestant formation and the material markers of white ladyhood: as Alice’s house helps to make Ellen properly Christian, Ellen’s Christianity leads her into the enjoyment of the things that make her white. So too do these relations depend on a labor hierarchy, in which the white kitchen where Alice makes tea-cakes is positioned above a downstairs kitchen where Margery does “all her rough work” (167).
The material surroundings that ease Ellen into Christian forgiveness and introduce her to the production of middle-class whiteness depend on the well-oiled relations between Alice and Margery, who lovingly and separately work to maintain a house where order, dimity, and white tea-cakes reign. After Alice’s death, the novel explains Alice’s role in the care and maintenance of the Humphreys family’s laundry; while Margery washes and irons, Alice mends, folds, and puts away the cleaned clothes. Margery, like Alice before her, converts this household labor into affection, telling Ellen that “[i]t was more the thoughtfulness that cared about me than the help of all she could do” that made Alice’s work valuable (456). If laundry is the agent by which domestic servants such as Margery become intelligibly white, it is also the location where middle-class Christian women can prove their Christian and filial attachments to their servants. Alice’s “thoughtfulness” simultaneously justifies her participation in labor and preserves the fiction that her labor is unnecessary, motivated not by need but by sentiment. The very real differences between Margery’s and Alice’s labors are subsumed in the Christian love between mistress and servant.

It is this classed position toward labor and laundry to which the novel wants to introduce Ellen. Labors differentiated by love, the novel fantasizes, will help to form Christianity, even as Protestant Christianity forms them. As being in the house maintained by Alice and Margery’s relationship helps to produce Ellen’s Christianity, so the marker of Ellen’s completed Christianity will be her full integration into the loving relationship between mistress and servant. This doubled relationship may explain why the novel has to fold Ellen into the Humphreys’s household twice—once, after Alice’s death, when Ellen takes over Alice’s place in the household, and again, after she spends a few years with her mother’s family in Scotland. By sending its heroine across the Atlantic, the novel knits its Protestant labors into Ellen’s identity as an American woman.
A Heart in Two Countries

The final trial of Ellen’s successful religious development requires her to leave the secure and happy Humphreys home, where her Protestant faith has been so carefully nurtured, for a seemingly permanent stay with her mother’s genteel Scottish family. The framing of Protestantism in this sequence—the way in which it is correlated to and differentiated from the U.S. nation-state—is important to an understanding of how Protestantism works to frame the American whiteness being extended to (whitening) immigrant women in this period. In her sojourn in Scotland, Ellen’s experiences extend the stratified whiteness she possesses into a form of national attachment. Where the novel has already used labor to both join and differentiate women within whiteness, the Scotland sequence turns this structure of sameness and difference toward Ellen’s connection to national identity. As her Scottish family attempts to detach her from her American roots and to erase her American identity, Ellen’s Protestantism draws on the whiteness that connects the mistress upstairs to the servant below to secure the self to the nation and the nation to the self.

The Scotland sequence inserts Ellen into a new struggle of wills. Where the action of the novel has up to this point focused on training Ellen into proper submission to Protestant norms of behavior and feeling, in Scotland Ellen confronts the difficulty of being asked to submit to a will that opposes her Christian formation. The Lindsays, and especially the Lindsay women, are opposed to Ellen’s “religious notions,” which they consider to have spoiled her disposition and unfitted her for proper high-society interactions. Inseparable from these “religious notions,” in the Lindsays’s view, is Ellen’s previous life in America. When Mr. Lindsay discovers that Ellen has been reading her cherished copy of the Pilgrim’s Progress to Mrs. Allen, the housekeeper, he takes it from her. Discovering that it is heavily annotated
in John’s hand and inscribed “To my little sister,” Mr. Lindsay declares, “I will not have her going back to those old recollections she is so fond of. I wish I could make her drink Lethel!” (551). Like her mother’s gifts, the book not only helps Ellen to live properly but also facilitates a set of interpersonal connections—between Ellen and Mrs. Allen, and more importantly, between Ellen and her former family in the United States—that the Lindsays wish to erase.

If Ellen’s Protestant devotion marks her as distinctively American, her Americanness draws her disconcertingly close to physical labor. Shortly after she arrives in Scotland, Ellen’s grandmother and uncle question her about her life in the United States. Learning that she thinks George Washington “a great deal better than some saints” and that she has read “‘[t]wo lives of Washington, and some in the Annual Register, and part of Graham’s United States; and one or two other little things’” about the Revolutionary War, the Lindsays then question what she did with the remainder of her time (506-7). Ellen reveals the quantities of domestic labor she performed at Aunt Fortune’s house, saying “‘I had to sweep and dust, . . . and set tables,—and wash and wipe dishes,—and churn,—and spin,—and—’” (507). The Lindsays, predictably, are horrified not only by the fact that Ellen has performed domestic labor, but also by the fact that Ellen’s work therefore connects them to the laboring classes.

Knit together in these passages are Ellen’s affections for the Humphreys, her love for the United States, and her Christian openness to labor; it is this constellation of loves and desires that the Lindsays position themselves against. Together, these dispositions mark, for the Lindsays, an unsettling openness to cross-class identifications and a problematic failure to form friendships with class-appropriate peers. After an outing with several genteel young people, Ellen observes that she was “not sorry to get home” (550). Questioned by her aunt and her grandmother about
why she only liked her companions “tolerably,” Ellen suggests that she did not like that they talked about “partners in dancing . . . and dresses, and different gentlemen, and what this one said and the other one said” (550). Asked whom she prefers, Ellen mentions the Swiss scholar M. Muller—who, we will later learn, is a friend of John’s—and Mrs. Allen, the housekeeper. If Ellen’s behavior and comportment are always faultlessly genteel, her associations fail to manifest the “pride” appropriate to the Lindsay family’s status (549). Instead of chatting brightly with Miss Gordon and Miss MacPherson about clothes and boys—and in the process establishing class-appropriate feminine bonds—Ellen forms a cross-class relationship with Mrs. Allen, who shares her Protestant faith and listens attentively as she reminisces about her American family (551).

If the Lindsays want to correct her relations with women, they also see at the heart of the problem “that person that seems to have obtained such an ascendency over her,” John Humphreys, as Ellen’s visits to Mrs. Allen’s room enable her to recall and actively cherish her relation with him (551). Relations among women, in this sequence in the novel, define and facilitate the relations Ellen has to the men in her life. Forbidding Ellen to visit Mrs. Allen is part of Mr. Lindsay’s larger attempt to sever Ellen’s continued attachment to John, to Protestantism, and to America. When Mr. Lindsay questions Ellen about why she is crying, and she confesses that she is missing John, they have the following conversation. Lindsay begins:

“[W]hat shall I do to make you forget these people?”

“Nothing, sir; I cannot forget them; I shouldn’t deserve to have you love me a bit if I could. Let me love them, and do not be angry with me for it!”

59 While the Lindsays are puzzling over how they can help Ellen to manifest the behaviors and dispositions appropriate to her new upper-class Scottish family, Mrs. Lindsay observes that Ellen “is perfectly lady-like always” (548).
"But I am not satisfied to have your body here and your heart somewhere else." (534)

Curiously, Lindsay here parses Ellen’s divided attachments as a geographic problem: her body is in Scotland, he suggests, but her heart is in America with John. Notably, Ellen’s response is not to contest Lindsay’s suggestion that she is geographically divided, but instead to reframe this geographic problem as a matter of the heart. She replies, “I must have a poor little kind of heart . . . if it had room in it for only one person” (534). Ellen solves the problem Lindsay presents by suggesting that her heart can be in two places at once. Possessed of enough “room” to accommodate both John and Mr. Lindsay, Ellen’s heart can be simultaneously located in America and in Scotland.

Implicit here is a domestic metaphor, in that Ellen’s heart looks strangely like a home, comprised both of the “room” that denotes adequate space and the rooms that divide and compose the interior of a house. It is this domestic and Protestant heart that, in its claim to lovingly respond to the authority of two men, has the ability to reside in two countries at the same time. We see this in a scene in which Ellen turns to her faith for comfort as she struggles to fit herself in her life in Scotland. After Ellen’s grandmother forbids her to spend her usual morning hour reading the Bible and praying, Ellen flees to her bedroom to cry and find solace. Ellen’s interior monologue records her imaginative access to the U.S.; as she looks out the window, she muses:

I wonder if that same moon is this minute shining in at the glass door at home?—no, to be sure it can’t this minute—what am I thinking of?—but it was there or will be there—let me see—east—west—it was there sometime this morning I suppose; looking right into our old sitting-room. Oh, moon, I wish I was in your place for once, to look in there too! But it is all empty now—there’s nobody there—Mr. Humphreys would be in his study—how
lonely, how lonely he must be! Oh, I wish I was back there with him!—John isn’t there though—no matter—he will be . . . I wonder where John is—nobody writes to me . . . I wonder if I am ever to see them again. . . . I am fast now—fast enough—but oh! am I to be separated from them for ever! Well!—I shall see them in heaven! (543)

Though Ellen is, in one sense, not in the United States—hence her wish that she could take the moon’s place—her view from her window in Scotland curiously transforms into a vision of “our old sitting-room.” The moon that shines on both Scotland and the U.S. enables Ellen to borrow its perspective, letting her look in the window of her former home and see for herself that “it is empty now—there’s nobody there.” Later she will experience the rural countryside of the Braes, where the Lindsays have a country house, as both an analogue for and a conduit to the United States. “The sky and the land,” the narrator observes, “though different from those she best loved, were yet but another expression of nature’s face; it was the same face still; and on many a sunbeam Ellen traveled across the Atlantic” (555). Ellen, we learn, is able to experience the United States while in Scotland, and to reconcile her love for the U.S. with a full enjoyment of the moonbeams in her Scotland window and the sky and the land of the Scottish countryside.

What draws Scotland and the U.S. together as locations for Ellen’s heart is Ellen’s Protestantism. Ellen’s lament that she seems to be separated from her American family “for ever” resolves in the idea that this separation is only a temporary prelude to a heavenly reunion. Here the existence of heavenly space grants Ellen the ability to see the U.S. through Scotland—to have her heart, literally, in two places at once. The “sunbeam” on which “Ellen traveled across the Atlantic,” the text suggests, is a physical phenomenon that connects the self to a Protestant geography. Following this quote, Warner includes a footnote to a quotation from the seventeenth-
century George Herbert: “Then by a sunbeam I will climb to Thee” (58). Herbert’s poem calls on the faithful to use the natural world to learn about God’s character. Warner, however, alters the terms of this relation; where Herbert’s poetic speaker ascends to heaven, Ellen crosses the Atlantic. Heaven, here, provides an imagined other location by which Ellen can divide her heart geographically between the U.S. and Scotland. This division, likewise, takes the form of a doubled experience, in which Scotland fundamentally comes to feel like the United States.

This doubled experience of space is strangely reminiscent of the spatial arrangement between mistress and servant that is so central to the novel’s rendering of whiteness. At the heart of the egalitarian conceit that Margery, Alice, and Ellen all share equally in the genteel pleasures and duties of whiteness is the assumption that what one does upstairs feels like what one does downstairs. The internal unity of the white middle-class home rescripts Alice’s limited work on the laundry as a merely a variation of Margery’s washing and renders Alice’s delicate baking in her white upstairs kitchen the natural extension of Margery’s “rough work” downstairs. Ellen’s experience of the U.S. in Scotland operates by a similar sleight of hand: her recourse to the idea of heaven joins Scotland and the U.S. in an experiential whole. In drawing on the resources of Christianity to divide her affections between the U.S. and Scotland, Ellen draws also on the spatial pattern of similarity and difference that the novel has encoded into whitening labor.

While Ellen is in Scotland, however, the freshly-mapped topography of her heart must remain only figurative, a mental construct constrained by the materiality of the body. Ellen’s divided heart leads her to hope and wait, wondering all the while why John and his father do not write. Drawn into the Lindsays’s version of white

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60 Warner quotes from a poem called “Mattins,” which concludes: “Teach me Thy love to know; / That this new light, which now I see, / May both the work and workman show, / Then by a sunbeam I will climb to Thee” (58).
gentility—which insists on separating her from both Protestantism and labor—Ellen finds herself having to be satisfied with an abstract heart, with an attachment to the U.S. without the ability to return. It is only through the agency of another laboring woman—the Lindsays’s housekeeper, Mrs. Allen—through which Ellen’s ability to experience Scotland as the U.S. can be recuperated into an actual, physical return to her national home. One day, when Ellen is “mourning . . . to Mrs. Allen” the fact that she has received no letters from John and Mr. Humphreys, Mrs. Allen sensibly inquires “if her friends knew her address?” (556). Mrs. Allen’s simple question resolves the resignation, and the doubled sense of place, that Ellen has had to work so hard to cultivate in the renewed prospect of reunion with the Humphreys. So too does Mrs. Allen’s question return Ellen’s ability to experience Scotland as a felt substitute for the U.S. to the material world; her inquiry sets in motion the chain of events by which John finds Ellen in Scotland and, eventually, returns Ellen to the United States. If Ellen’s cultivation as a genteel woman allows her to access the U.S. wherever she is, Mrs. Allen’s position as keeper of the practical and the quotidian holds this practical nationality firmly in place in the home.

Hence when John brings Ellen back to her proper home in the Humphreys’s household, he returns her both to a collection of new and old cherished objects and to her intimacy with Margery. In a concluding chapter to the novel, unpublished in Warner’s lifetime, John shows Ellen all of the exquisite objects he has arranged in her room for her enjoyment. Yet before she can go upstairs to her room she must first go downstairs, to Margery’s kitchen, where she sits and weeps with Margery for “a quarter of an hour afterwards” (573). Knit together in the novel’s happy ending is the sense that Ellen has successfully come of age as a Christian, and that this coming of age means that she will be surrounded by her very own cherished objects—and tied by the bonds of affection to a beloved servant whose labor is care.
The recursive relations between a Christianity written as labor and a labor written as Christianity enable *The Wide, Wide World* to turn its engrossing focus on Ellen’s interiority into a meditation on how religion might map race and class. United in Ellen’s experience, Protestant formation and laundry labor offer a complex counterweight to what Cindy Weinstein calls the “mythological premise . . . that America was a classless, endlessly mobile society” (15). The seductive power of Warner’s narrative of Protestant labor lies in its ability to seamlessly mesh two contradictory movements: the egalitarian expansion of whiteness to include Irish women and the hierarchical reassertion of natural distinctions among laboring women. Both of these, from the novel’s perspective, look just like love.

We might infer, then, that *The Wide, Wide World* teaches two lessons about whiteness, Christianity, and national identity. The first is that the truly national subject, by virtue of her whiteness, her gentility, and her Christianity, can experience herself as within the nation wherever she goes. The second is that this feeling is both crucially important and woefully inadequate, requiring the love and labor of a serving-woman to join materiality to meaning. What Ellen Montgomery learns through her travels in *The Wide, Wide World*, perhaps, is that white femininity draws from Protestant Christianity the ability to both suspend and sustain the material markers that differentiate mistress from servant and home from the world.
WORKS CITED


CHAPTER TWO

National Transnationalism in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1852 best-seller *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* offered readers an affectively charged representation of the sufferings produced by slavery in the antebellum United States. The emotional climax of the novel—the first scene that Stowe wrote—\(^{61}\) is the scene in which Tom, the novel’s eponymous faithful Christian servant, dies at the hands of his brutish owner, Simon Legree. The chapter recounting Tom’s death encapsulated, for Stowe, the affective claims to justice for which the remainder of the novel would be written. At this central moment in the text, Stowe uses Tom to make two spatial claims: that the world in which humans live and move is divided into heaven and earth, and that this geography places moral demands on the political and emotional subject. Tom’s deathbed reunion with his former master George Shelby generates the following dialogue:

“Bless the Lord! it is,—it is,—it’s all I wanted! They haven’t forgot me. It warms my soul; it does my old heart good! Now I shall die content! Bless the Lord, oh my soul!”

“You shan’t die! you *mustn’t* die, nor think of it! I’ve come to buy you, and take you home,” said George, with impetuous vehemence.

“O, Mas’r George, ye’re too late. The Lord’s bought me, and is going to take me home,—and I long to go. Heaven is better than Kintuck.”

“O, don’t die! It’ll kill me!—it’ll break my heart to think what you’ve suffered,—and lying in this old shed, here! Poor, poor fellow!”

"Don’t call me poor fellow!” said Tom, solemnly. ‘I have been poor fellow; but that’s all past and gone, now. I’m right in the door, going into glory! O, Mas’r George! *Heaven has come!* I’ve got the victory!—the Lord Jesus has given it to me! Glory be to His name!” (362)

In the moment of Tom’s exemplary Christ-like sacrifice—which motivates Shelby’s declaration that “from this hour, I will do *what one man can* to drive out this curse of slavery from my land!” (365)—Tom’s claim that “Heaven is better than Kintuck” does comparative work, drawing heaven and Kentucky together in order to underscore their differences. Through this asymmetrical comparison, the novel knits together Tom’s morally exemplary suffering and George Shelby’s political-affective conversion to abolitionism.

This chapter takes seriously Tom’s claim that “heaven is better than Kintuck,” suggesting that it condenses into a few short words a complex intersection between race, affect, Protestant Christianity, and the U.S. nation-state. Often the story of antebellum nationalism is one of ever finer distinctions, of pseudoscientists and surveyors splitting territories and races into hierarchically ordered categories. Running alongside these distinctions—and possibly even strengthening them—was a concomitant move toward confusion, toward conflation, toward disavowing the differentiations that so much effort was being made to secure. To see these conflations, we must as a first step read religious spaces in literature differently. In the chapter’s initial section, I read Stowe’s romantic racialism as an instrument by which she asserts that heaven and earth are equally real places. Next, I read the novel’s treatment of Tom’s suffering at the hands of Legree, suggesting that Stowe claims the reality of heaven at the same time that she invokes a skepticism that will accommodate this reality. The rapprochement between skepticism and heaven’s reality asserts for heaven a place in U.S. national life that transcends individual religious belief. From
here, I read Tom’s comparison of heaven and Kentucky in the context of U.S. literary study’s current focus on transnationalism. Transnational approaches to Uncle Tom’s Cabin have traced its circulation outside of the U.S., noting its popularity in other countries and its invocation in other abolitionist struggles.\(^\text{62}\) What I propose here is something different: an examination of how Stowe’s invocation of heaven mapped a world neither resolutely national nor entirely intelligible under transnational theory as it is currently constituted. Tracing what I call Stowe’s sentimental Protestant geography, I demonstrate that Uncle Tom’s Cabin enacts a curious compromise between sentimental nationalism and a flexible sense of U.S. boundaries. Tom’s comparison, I suggest, knits the formation of white sympathetic feeling into a new geographic structure that conflated home, nation, and globe. These strategic conflations, I suggest, crafted a nationalism that is strangely transnational.

Romantic Racialism and Giving Heaven to White People

Throughout the novel, Tom’s Christianity is used to assert the existence of heaven, and to define the relation between heaven, earth, and nation. Shortly after we are introduced to Tom, we see him taking part in a meeting of slaves from neighboring plantations, in which the assembled pray and sing songs about their future liberation in heaven.\(^\text{63}\) These choruses, Stowe tells us,


\(^\text{63}\) This equation of the afterlife, the “promised land” of Canaan, and slave liberation has been extensively discussed by scholars of African-American literatures and cultures, especially in Eddie Glaude’s Exodus! and Robert Stepto’s From Behind the Veil. I emphasize the spatiality of the afterlife in ways that Glaude and Stepto do not. My interest, here, is how Stowe renders these practices of African-American Christians through the lens of her romantic racialism in order to equate blackness with a privileged access to heaven.
made incessant mention of “Jordan’s banks,” and “Canaan’s fields,” and the “New Jerusalem;” for the negro mind, impassioned and imaginative, always attaches itself to hymns and expressions of a vivid and pictorial nature; and, as they sung, some laughed, and some cried, and some clapped hands, or shook hands rejoicingly with each other, as if they had fairly gained the other side of the river.  

The river here is the river Jordan, which in the book of Exodus the Israelites had to cross to enter the promised land of Canaan. In antebellum slave Christianity, the river also represents death, the last boundary between the suffering subject on earth and his promised reward in heaven. Stowe, here, suggests that the slave has special access to this heavenly landscape; his “impassioned and imaginative” mind allows him to experience the spatial imagery of the song as a direct bodily reality. As the slave sings, Stowe argues, he is particularly constituted by his race to have the bodily experience of being in heaven.

Stowe’s rendering of the slave’s special access to heaven is rooted in what the historian George Fredrickson calls “romantic racialism.” A move away from Enlightenment universalism (98), romantic racialism held that each racial group had its own innate, heritable characteristics that would shape the destiny of the nations they formed. Thus “the Anglo-Saxon,” for example, “was represented as carrying in his blood a love of liberty, a spirit of individual enterprise and resourcefulness, and a capacity for practical and reasonable behavior, none of which his rivals possessed” (98). This portrait of Anglo-Saxon-cum-American virtues was beginning to solidify,

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64 Here Stowe refers to the Biblical image of crossing the river Jordan as a metaphor for entering heaven.
66 For a similar account of the formation of “Anglo-Saxon” character, see Reginald Horsman, Race and Manifest Destiny.
according to Fredrickson, "at the very time when the slavery controversy focused interest on the Negro character" (100). Where the Anglo-Saxon was rendered as logical, rational, and calm, in Stowe's terms, the African in America was sketched as all emotion and sensation. While the "inherent" emotiveness of the African was evidence for some of the impossibility of Black racial advancement and of the necessity of the slave system, this predisposition to affect was seen by some reformers and evangelicals not as a deficit but instead as a positive good. Writing in opposition to slavery, William Ellery Channing described "the African" as "so affectionate, imitative, and docile that in favorable circumstances he catches much that is good" (qtd. in Frederickson 103); other antislavery writers described enslaved blacks as "eminently gentle, submissive," and "singularly childlike, affectionate, docile, and patient" (qtd. in Frederickson 102-3).

For Fredrickson, romantic racialism rewrote "the alleged Negro virtues"—his sensitivity and emotional pliancy—as an inherent predisposition toward Christianity. Fredrickson credits Alexander Kinmont, a lecturer and sometimes schoolteacher in Cincinnati, with the development and popularization of the idea that Africans were racially predisposed toward Christianity. Kinmont argued that racial differences were an integral component of God's plan for the infinite advancement of mankind. Though Caucasians, as Kinmont saw it, offered mankind their (ostensibly considerable) intellectual gifts, they were sorely lacking in the emotional capacities necessary for "true" Christianity (105). "All the sweeter graces of the Christian religion appear almost too tropical and tender plants to grow in the Caucasian mind," Kinmont writes; "they require a character of human nature which you can see in the rude lineaments of the Ethiopian" (qtd. in Frederickson 105). This legitimated, for Kinmont, not racial intermixing, but instead a vision of successive civilizations, in which a world dominated by Caucasian advances in industry and science would
eventually give way to “a later but far nobler civilization” of Africans who practiced an ideal Christianity (105). In the interim, for Kinmont, the African in America offered the Caucasian access to an idealized version of Christian subjectivity.

Stowe’s portrait of Tom, and of slave Christianity generally, relies heavily on the romantic racialism Kinmont popularized and that was commonplace in U.S. culture by the 1850s.\(^6^7\) Tom’s ability to access the feeling of what it would be like to be in heaven, likewise, is part of this complex of romantic racialism. Scholars have often read Stowe’s rendering of Tom’s special access to his heavenly future as a rejection of material reality. Karen Sánchez-Eppler, for example, reads antislavery’s use of Christianity as presenting a “conflict between a structural or material and an emotional or moral conception of social reality”:

Failing to discover tangible and stable grounds on which to distinguish idealized domestic values from the abhorred system of slavery, antislavery writers retreat to the realm of the intangible;\(^6^8\) once they do so their arguments for the difference between slavery and domesticity reconstruct this opposition in terms of the tension between physical and spiritual ontologies and epistemologies. (45-6)

The “spiritual ontologies and epistemologies” to which Sánchez-Eppler refers are, of course, the explicitly Christian ones that fueled a wealth of reform movements in the nineteenth century. Sánchez-Eppler strongly asserts this distinction between the body and the soul, arguing that abolitionist literatures sought to identify freedom for women

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\(^6^7\) Stowe lived in Cincinnati in the late 1830s, when Kinmont was giving lectures advocating his racial views; though it remains unclear whether or not she attended, Fredrickson argues that if Stowe did not see the lectures in person, “she almost certainly read him in the beautifully bound memorial edition which was a major publishing event in Cincinnati in 1839” (110).

\(^6^8\) I would stress here the distinction between things that are “intangible” and the absence of space.
and slaves at the level of the soul, no matter what happens to their bodies (47). Hence antislavery fiction offers "evocations of a spiritual reality . . . as a placebo for women’s and slaves’ lack of social power" (46-7), while at the same time "endors[ing] the belief in an alternate spiritual realm where power and efficacy are distributed differently" (47). Tom’s Christianity in Uncle Tom’s Cabin is for Sánchez-Eppler a perfect example of the "recourse to the refuge provided by a separate spiritual reality" (47). Tom, Sánchez-Eppler suggests, counters "the oppressiveness of [his] physical reality" by turning towards a heavenly reality to which he has a racially specific access; thus "[t]he triumph of Tom’s soul is . . . emphatically presented as rebutting material conceptions of personhood" (47). 69

If Tom is rejecting his body, this rejection, paradoxically, is also a way of inhabiting his body, and of living out (or living within) the material world. Notice, for example, that in the scene where Tom asserts what Sánchez-Eppler calls the "irrelevance of the condition of his body" by asserting his confidence in his right to heaven, this confidence dictates bodily action. The first words Sánchez-Eppler quotes are Legree’s:

‘Did n’t I pay down twelve hundred dollars, cash, for all there is inside yer old cussed black shell? An’t yer mine, now, body and soul?’ he said, giving Tom a violent kick with his heavy boot; ‘tell me!’

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69 This recourse to Tom’s spiritual freedom, Sánchez-Eppler argues, erases the significance of Tom’s body, and in the process provides a model for the novel’s colonizationist ending: “[Stowe’s] celebration of Tom’s soul serves to erase his flesh. Equally telling is Stowe’s failure to imagine an America in which blacks could be recognized as persons. Perhaps the most disturbing insight of her novel is that the utopian freedom she constructs is predicated upon the absence of black bodies: Tom’s ‘victory’ wins him the freedom of heaven; George, Eliza, and the rest find theirs only in Liberia” (47-8). If national freedom is about the absence of black bodies, that absence is inseparable from an ethic of national dissemination, in which the nation’s domestic utopia depends on its ability to replicate itself across the globe.
In the very depth of physical suffering, bowed by brutal oppression, this question shot a gleam of joy and triumph through Tom’s soul. *He suddenly stretched himself up, and, looking earnestly to heaven, while the tears and blood that flowed down his face mingled, he exclaimed,*

‘No! no! no! my soul an’t yours, Mas’r! You haven’t bought it,—ye can’t buy it! It’s been bought and paid for, by one that is able to keep it; —*no matter, no matter, you can’t harm me!*’ (309, italicized sections omitted from Sánchez-Eppler’s quote)

Sánchez-Eppler reads this passage as asserting Tom’s freedom through his disembodiment, since Tom’s assertion that Legree cannot harm him rests on the association of the self with the soul and the separation of the soul from the body. In this scene, Tom’s claims about the freedom of his soul are intimately linked, in the narrative, to what he does with his body. The experience of knowing that his soul is destined for heaven registers itself as embodied action: Tom straightens his body and turns his face to the skies. Tom’s assertion of his soul’s freedom is paired, inseparably, with a particular bodily posture.  

Throughout the text, when Tom resists Legree by claiming the inalienability of his soul, he always at the same time stands up and directs his face upward toward heaven. Part of Tom’s racially specific

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70 Marianne Noble places a somewhat similar emphasis on Tom’s use of his body in the present, though her psychoanalytic approach leads her to read Christianity as sublimated sexuality. Such a reading, while plausible, offers only one small portion of the work Christianity performed in sentimental texts.

71 This framing of Tom’s soul’s transcendence through his body’s directing is repeated throughout the progress of his oppression by Legree; when Tom is able to oppose Legree by meditating on his future arrival in heaven, these meditations always are accompanied by him straightening up his body and directing his face toward heaven. Implicit in Tom’s bodily practice—that he directs his face toward heaven—is the elision between heaven and the sky. Heaven, generally, is upward; hence Tom sings

‘When I can read my title clear
To mansions in the skies,
I’ll bid farewell to every fear,'
Christianity is not only the ability to have this imaginative access to heaven, but also the ability to have the bodily experience of that access—to have heaven orient one’s body along a vertical axis, toward the sky.

Following Saidiya Hartman, we might think about Stowe’s rendering of Tom’s bodily experience in terms of performance and pleasure. Stowe argues that she wrote *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in order to show her (presumably white) readers the “living dramatic reality” of slavery, hoping to move them to work against the slave system (383). Stowe’s rendering of Tom’s bodily experience of heaven might be read, then, as a performance, in which Tom’s experience of the “vivid and pictorial” representations of heaven models for the white reader, pictorially, an access to heaven that he lacks by virtue of his “Anglo-Saxon” racial character. Access to heaven (and to a better Christianity) is what Tom offers to Miss Ophelia and St. Clare around Eva’s death.

On the night Eva dies, Miss Ophelia finds Tom sleeping on the porch outside Eva’s room, and chastizes him:

‘Uncle Tom, what alive have you taken to sleeping anywhere and everywhere, like a dog, for?’ said Miss Ophelia. ‘I thought you was one of the orderly sort, that liked to lie in bed in a Christian way.’

‘I do, Miss Feely,’ said Tom, mysteriously. ‘I do, but now—’

‘Well, what now?’

‘We mustn’t speak loud; Mas’r St. Clare won’t hear on’t; but Miss Feely, you know there must be somebody watchin’ for the bridegroom.’

‘What do you mean, Tom?’

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And wipe my weeping eyes’ (341).

72 I am grateful to Anthony Reed for suggesting this connection.
'You know what it says in Scripture, 'At midnight there was a great cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh.' That's what I'm spectin' now, every night, Miss Feely,—and I couldn't sleep out o' hearin', no ways.'

'Why, Uncle Tom, what makes you think so?'

'Miss Eva, she talks to me. The Lord, he sends his messenger in the soul. I must be thar, Miss Feely; for when that ar blessed child goes into the kingdom, they'll open the door so wide, we'll all get a look in at the glory, Miss Feely.' (255)

Miss Ophelia's religious concerns, here, are more about civilization than Christianization; her call to Tom that he "lie in bed in a Christian way" privileges proper domestic behaviors as Christian ones. Tom's superior devotion, in contrast, prioritizes access to heaven—"the glory" that Tom expects to see when Eva "goes into the kingdom"—over domestic niceties. Tom's citation of the Christian need to have "somebody watchin' for the bridegroom"—to remember that Eva's death will draw together life on earth and life in heaven—not only directs the reader to the appropriate Christianity in this moment, but within the story, it also moves Miss Ophelia to sit up and watch Eva, and so to call the family when at midnight Eva finally dies. Tom's Christianity, here, is the necessary prerequisite for the family's witnessing of Eva's death and the heavenly glory revealed there.

After Eva's death, we see even more clearly this transferential relation, in which Tom's natural Christianity enables whites to have the experience of heaven to which they are racially inadequate. St. Clare's intellectual doubts in the truth of Christianity leave him inconsolable after Eva's death. Reading the story of Lazarus aloud at Tom's request, St. Clare exclaims to Tom that "this is all real to you!" (263). St. Clare then challenges Tom's faith: "But, Tom, you know that I have a great deal more knowledge than you; what if I should tell you that I don't believe this Bible? . . .
Wouldn’t it shake your faith some? . . . you must know I know the most” (263). 
Tom’s response is classic romantic racialism: “O, Mas’r, haven’t you jest read how he 
hides from the wise and prudent, and reveals unto babes?” (263). What matters 
crucially here is what this romantic racialism makes possible for St. Clare, and by 
extension for the “intellectual” Anglo-Saxon. At St. Clare’s request, Tom begins to 
pray aloud; Stowe describes the scene as follows:

Tom’s heart was full; he poured it out in prayer, like waters that have been 
long suppressed. One thing was plain enough; Tom thought there was 
somebody to hear, whether there were or not. In fact, St. Clare felt himself 
borne, on the tide of his faith and feeling, almost to the gates of that heaven he 
seemed so vividly to conceive. It seemed to bring him closer to Eva. (263-4)
The syntax Stowe uses to describe St. Clare’s response to Tom’s prayer is essential. 
The sense of the passage is that St. Clare feels “himself borne . . . almost to the gates 
of heaven” through his experience of Tom’s faith—that is, it is Tom’s faith that gives 
St. Clare access to heaven in this moment. The repetition of the pronouns “himself,” 
“his,” and “he” blurs the distinctions between St. Clare’s experience and Tom’s.

The experience in the passage above is St. Clare’s; St. Clare is the one who 
“felt himself borne.” Yet St. Clare’s experience depends on Tom’s; St. Clare is borne 
“on the tide of [Tom’s] faith and feeling” to “the gates of that heaven [Tom] seemed 
so vividly to conceive” (263-4). The slippage between these pronouns models the 
work done by Stowe’s romantic racialism: performed for a white audience, Tom’s 
racially specific access to heaven becomes the property, and the felt experience, of 
whites. In the process, what is lacking in whiteness’s experience of Christianity—its 
ability to feel heaven in the body—is remediated by the vision of black natural 
Christianity. What is more, this remediation happens apart from the question of St. 
Clare’s belief, or lack thereof. Determinative here is not St. Clare’s skepticism, but
instead the fact that “Tom thought there was somebody to hear, whether there were or not” (263).

Tom’s ability to grant St. Clare access to heaven marks Stowe’s capacious understanding of the applicability of religion. For Stowe, the religious images and concepts of which she wrote were binding on believer and non-believer alike, and became so as affective forms. To see this, first, we must return to the crisis of faith precipitated by Tom’s arrival on the Legree plantation. Recognizing that Tom’s Christianity offers Tom a source of resistance to his control, Legree sets himself to the task of beating Tom’s Christianity out of him. In keeping with her general treatment of Tom as a Christ figure,73 Stowe presents Legree’s tormenting of Tom as a kind of Christian last temptation, in which Tom’s suffering, like Christ’s, becomes so great that Tom nearly gives in to doubt. Subjected repeatedly to Legree’s “atheistic taunts,” Tom’s soul sinks “to the lowest ebb” when, looking into the fire, he has a vision of Christ (339). Christ’s broken and bleeding body slowly transforms into the glorified version of the Christ who overcomes, and with a compassionate look on his face, Christ tells Tom that “[h]e that overcometh shall sit down with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father on his throne” (339-340). Tom falls prostrate before Christ, and when he comes to, “the dread soul-crisis was past, and in the joy that filled him, he no longer felt hunger, cold, degradation, disappointment, wretchedness” (340). He then begins to sing verses from the hymn “Amazing Grace”:

‘The earth shall be dissolved like snow,

The sun shall cease to shine;

But God, who called me here below,

73 See Elizabeth Ammons, “Stowe’s Dream of the Mother-Savior,” and Tompkins, Sensational Designs.
Shall be forever mine.’ (340)

Tom’s experience of the suffering-turned-triumphant Christ not only moves him to sing the words of the hymn, but it allows him to feel them more intensely (“he had sung [the hymn] often in happier days, but never with such feeling as now” (340)). Crucially, the verses of the hymn that Stowe renders in the text all deal with the Christian’s expectation of the afterlife and its relation to present experience: “[t]he earth shall be dissolved like snow . . . [b]ut God . . . shall be forever mine” “[w]hen we’ve been there ten thousand years . . . [w]e’ve no less days to sing God’s praise” (340). Stowe here renders Tom as empowered74 by his experience of Christ to bear his suffering without complaint; his ability to transcend Legree’s torment, significantly, is keyed to his experience of the earth as transient (it “shall be dissolved like snow”) and of heaven as a place that is permanent.

In this moment in the narrative, Stowe sketches a Christian way of experiencing the world. As she does so, however, she is also attuned to the possibility of unbelief, and to the relegation of these geographies to the private and the individual that secularism depends on and reiterates. As Stowe renders Tom’s experience of earth in relation to heaven, she simultaneously asserts the truth of Tom’s experience and allows for the possibility of skepticism about it:

The psychologist tells us of a state, in which the affections and images of the mind become so dominant and overpowering, that they press into their service the outward senses, and make them give tangible shape to the inward imagining. Who shall measure what an all-pervading Spirit may do with these

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74 Whether Tom’s Christianity is a source of agency or a refusal of it has occasioned much critical controversy. For the classic reading of Tom as emasculated and powerless, see James Baldwin’s “Everybody’s Protest Novel.” Offering a contrasting view is Samuel Otter, who argues that “Stowe is careful to represent [Tom’s] ‘eager docility’ as an active force, an expression of strength through its reserve” (21). See “Stowe and Race” from A Cambridge Companion to Harriet Beecher Stowe.
capabilities of our mortality, or the ways in which He may encourage the desponding souls of the desolate? If the poor forgotten slave believes that Jesus hath appeared and spoken to him, who shall contradict him? (340)

In the beginning of the passage, Stowe makes the argument that Tom’s experience of Christ’s appearance becomes tangible—or experienced as tangible—through the extremity of Tom’s suffering and the intensity of his faith. As the intensity of Tom’s feeling makes Christ’s form tangible, that intensity of feeling is reduplicated in his singing of the hymn “never with such feeling as now” (340). By extension, we might suggest that the experience of an earth which will be dissolved like snow is also a tangible one, one that is converted into materiality through the intensity of Tom’s feeling.

Here Stowe’s argument brings the secular reduction of “this world” to the world of sense perception into relation with a religious set of spatial relations between heaven and earth, which are here available to the senses. If intense feeling can make the planet’s relation to heaven a transient experience, this experience is not absolute. Stowe’s rhetorical question about who can contradict the slave who believes that Christ appeared to him locates Tom’s experience in the individual (“If the poor forgotten slave believes”) and suggests that the assessment of that claim is ultimately personal. The closing question “who shall contradict him?” implicitly opens the field of possible reasons for crediting Tom’s experience as “real” beyond belief in Christ or his ability to appear to the living; one might not contradict the “poor forgotten slave” because one empathizes with his belief, not because one believes in his experience.

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75 This equation between what is “real” and what is visible and tangible is central to secularism’s claim to “disenchant” the world. For a useful discussion of the congruence secularism creates between selected sense perceptions and reality, see Talal Asad’s Formations of the Secular, especially the introduction. I discuss this congruence in more detail in my chapter on Phelps.
What is important for my purposes is how this ecumenical and tolerant perspective (classically secularist in its ability to allow others to believe what they want, and in its relegation of religion to the realm of private freedoms) gets routed into Stowe’s narrative of Tom’s morally exemplary suffering. Tom goes on, after this passage, with a new experience of his material surroundings, and for Stowe his experience of the world is interlaced with his experience of his faith: “firmer than the ground he trod on was his strong faith in Almighty, eternal love” (340-1). Stowe’s invocation of secular skepticism here is strategic, opening up the possibility of crediting Tom’s affective experience without acknowledging the truth of his religious belief. This secular skepticism allows for Tom’s experience of religious space, via affect, to have a force beyond religious belief, because it is as affect that it makes its claim on reality.

Stowe’s use of affect to extend the experience of heaven beyond the believer is visible also in her treatment of Legree. Throughout the ending of the novel, Legree is progressively more tormented by what Stowe considered to be “spiritual realities” (Tomkins 133). These realities include not only Cassy’s ghosts, but also the heaven that Tom makes available to St. Clare. The scene in which Legree finally beats Tom to death opens by asserting Legree’s vulnerability to Tom’s heaven. After Tom defiantly refuses to disclose Cassy and Emmeline’s stratagem and Legree threatens to kill Tom, Tom implores Legree to think of his own salvation: “O, Mas’r! don’t bring this great sin on your soul! It will hurt you more than ‘t will me! Do the worst you can, my troubles’ll be over soon; but, if ye don’t repent, yours won’t never end!” (358). Tom’s prediction of Legree’s eternal fate brings Legree, as an inverse image of St. Clare, similarly into relation to heaven:

Like a strange snatch of heavenly music, heard in the lull of a tempest, this burst of feeling made a moment’s blank pause. Legree stood aghast, and
looked at Tom; and there was such a silence, that the tick of the old clock
could be heard, measuring, with silent touch, the last moments of mercy and
probation to that hardened heart. (358)
For Benedict Anderson, the ticking clock is a secular construct, facilitating the
simultaneous “dawn of the age of nationalism” and “the dusk of religious modes of
thought” (11). Here, the “moment’s blank pause” invoked by Tom’s declaration
marks the applicability of the “strange snatch of heavenly music”—and its attendant
heaven—to Legree, whether he believes or not. The division of the world into
“heaven” and “earth” that Tom affectively experiences is for Stowe a universal,
wholly compatible with Legree’s unbelief.

This geographic structure is the context in which Tom declares on his deathbed
that “Heaven is better than Kintuck.” Tom’s conversation with Shelby pivots on the
interchange between Shelby’s literal, present-tense assertions about the world and
Tom’s Christian, eternally-minded responses. When Shelby offers to take Tom home
to his Kentucky plantation, Tom replies that he is headed for a better home in heaven;
when Shelby offers to buy Tom, Tom responds with the assertion that he has already
been purchased. Here Tom is, in one sense, using wordplay to reframe Shelby’s
earthly concerns as religious-eternal ones; his responses propose alternate meanings
for home and for purchase that are explicitly Christian. But Tom’s comparison of his
earthly home to his heavenly one is also entirely serious—Shelby’s refusal to contest
heaven as alternate home, or salvation as alternate purchase, suggests the consensus
around the legitimacy of Tom’s words. Certainly the prevalence of narratives about
heaven in the nineteenth century United States that Ann Douglas describes⁷⁶ suggests
that Tom’s assertion of a heavenly home was read as a comparison of two spaces both

⁷⁶ See “The Domestication of Death: The Posthumous Congregation” in The
Feminization of American Culture.
markedly different and equally authentic. In what follows, I read the applicability of Tom’s heaven as a comparative gesture, one that in its extension beyond the believer suggests a new geographic structure for the nation-state. First, however, I examine U.S. literary study’s increasing interest in transnational theory, reading the transnational turn’s invocation of the “planet” against Stowe’s juxtaposition of heaven and earth.

Religion and the Transnational Turn

Since the 1990s, Americanist literary and cultural scholarship has increasingly questioned the homology between the juridical boundaries of the U.S. nation-state and the disciplinary boundaries of Americanist study. In her 1998 presidential address to the ASA, Janice Radway asked American Studies scholars to think U.S. nationality as “constructed in and through relations of difference” (10). Radway challenged “the idea that [U.S.] culture can be adequately conceived of as a unitary, uniform thing, as the simple function of a fixed, isolated, and easily mapped territory” (15). Radway’s speech condensed an already developed move toward transnationalism in American Studies and in Americanist literary criticism. Central to the transnational turn was a reconsideration of the place of the U.S. nation-state in literary and cultural analysis. Where Cold-War era Americanist scholarship had taken the U.S. nation-state as a given, scholars in Latin American and border studies treated the United States as an historical object constructed through political, economic, and cultural labor. With this shift to view the nation as produced came a new conception of national boundaries not as the self-evident frame for critical inquiry, but instead as objects of inquiry themselves. 77 As scholars turned to borders, they also began to analyze phenomena

77 For an overview of this critical history, see Kirsten Silva Gruesz, Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing, especially chapter one. On the invention of “America” and its centrality to imperialism, see Aníbal Quijano and
that transcended or otherwise crossed them. Micol Seigel describes transnationalism as an agenda for history: "transnational history examines units that spill over and seep through national borders, units both greater and smaller than the nation-state" (63). Aihwa Ong similarly considers transnationalism as "the condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space," especially across the boundaries of the nation-state (4). Likewise, Caroline Levander and Robert S. Levine call for an examination of "the intricately intertwined geographies, movements, and cross-filiations among peoples, regions, diasporas, and nations of the American hemisphere," suggesting that such study can not only "contextualize what can sometimes appear to be the artificially hardened borders and boundaries of the U.S. nation" (3). Transnational work, for Levander and Levine, can "chart new literary and cultural geographies" that are "obscured in U.S. nation-based inquiries" (3).

These new literary and cultural geographies require new spatial frames for Americanist inquiry. Tracing movements and cross-filiations across newly relativized national boundaries has required scholars to expand the spatial frames of their analyses. Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* defined the *transatlantic* as a circuit of literary, cultural, and economic exchange; Anna Brickhouse and Kirsten Silva Gruesz trace *transamerican* lines of literary influence; and Caroline Levander and Robert Levine identify the *hemisphere* as a new frame for the study of American literatures. What these differing spatial frames share is a common ground. The transatlantic, the transamerican, and the hemispheric all inscribe themselves as new spatial categories within a larger one: the planet. Likewise, they rest on the planet as material

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territory—literally, as the sum total of the ground on which human activity occurs. Reading one selected example of transnational thinking—Wai Chee Dimock’s call for a “planetary” American literature—I want to think about the conception of the planet that undergirds transnationalism’s expanding spatial frames.

Following these centrifugal moves outward, Wai Chee Dimock has recently proposed the planet as a new frame for Americanist literary study (“Planet” 5). Dimock turns to the planet, in her terms, because it offers a stable counterpoint to the fragile fictiveness of the nation:

Territorial sovereignty, we suddenly realize, is no more than a legal fiction, a man-made fiction. This fiction is not honored by religious adherents who have a different vision of the world; nor is it honored by the spin of hurricanes accelerated by the thermodynamics of warming oceans. In each case, the nation is revealed to be what it is: an epiphenomenon, literally a superficial construct, a set of erasable lines on the face of the earth. It is no match for that grounded entity called the planet, which can wipe out those lines at a moment’s notice, using weapons of mass destruction more powerful than any homeland defense. (“Planet” 1)

Dimock juxtaposes the planet’s inexorable materiality to the nation’s constructedness, observing that the natural characteristics of the material world reveal the ephemerality of the nation form. The planet, as a frame for literary and cultural analysis, offers Dimock “a platform broader and more robustly empirical than the relatively arbitrary and demonstrably ephemeral borders of the nation” (“Planet” 5). Furthermore, it requires “alternate geographies, alternate histories” that “take their measure from the durations and extensions of the human species itself” (“Planet” 5). Here the planet appears as a capacious, objectively verifiable frame that is coextensive with and appropriately matched to the human.
What makes Dimock's planet attractive as an analytic is that it functions as a container; in its reference to the material ground on which humanity acts, it promises to capture within its ambit the totality of human endeavors. By taking the planet as the largest possible frame for human action, Dimock positions the planet as "a cradle—a set that describes and redescribes its subsets," such as nations, regions, and localities ("Planet" 8). In Dimock's rendering, the planetary takes on a kind of absoluteness, in which it is separate from, and seemingly impervious to, the human effort that constructs national boundaries; if the planet describes and redescribes its subsets, it is not described and redescribed by them. Subsets such as the nation are "epiphenomenal," constructed by human labor, while the planet is a "grounded entity" that can erase human constructions at a moment's notice ("Planet" 1). If in this theory the nation is constructed, the planet simply is.

For Dimock, turning toward the planet brings into focus "world religions" as one axis of transnational connection. If Dimock's planetary perspective asks researchers to trace the transnational connections religions facilitate, it also implicitly defines in advance how those inquiries treat religion. The historical longevity and spatial diffusion of world religions makes available what Dimock calls "deep time," a

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78 Note that the category "world religions" is itself a problematic one. Dimock describes "world religions" as "a well-established phenomenon, one of the most durable and extensive on earth" (Through 23). Intellectual historian Tomoko Masuzawa deftly traces the creation of "world religions" as an organizing category in the nineteenth century, observing that its formation was imbricated with the advance of imperial power. The category "world religions," Masuzawa writes, "has become so prevalent, so naturalized in our discourse that it seems as though it were no logic, no ideology at all, but a mere reflection of the way things are" (6). Yet, as Masuzawa observes, the idea that "religion" was a definable object common to all cultures worldwide was itself an invention of the nineteenth century. The development of "world religions" as a category and as a conceptual framework ... quickly became an effective means of differentiating, variegating, consolidating, and totalizing a large portion of the social, cultural, and political practices observable among the inhabitants of regions elsewhere in the world" (Masuzawa 20).
“set of longitudinal frames, at once projective and recessional, with input going both ways, and binding continents and millennia into many loops or relations, a densely interactive framework” (Through Other Continents 3). Thus a shared set of Islamic texts connects Emerson to the fourteenth-century Persian poet Hafiz, who Emerson read in translation, across five centuries and two continents (Through 44). In this assessment, religions forge connections across the planet—across an already extant, material space that precedes them—and in a time not of their making. 

Religion, as an essentially human (and not supernatural) activity, is a subset of the planet, and is wholly enveloped by it.

John Carlos Rowe offers a similar assessment of religion’s place in transnational study. “Religion is one of the commonest examples of transnationality in nineteenth-century United States culture,” Rowe writes (82). Religion, for Rowe, reaches across borders and acts “often in direct conflict with national authority” (82). Like Dimock, Rowe imagines religion as an actor within a world that it has no power to define. Positioned as an example of transnational movement, religion is effectively cordoned off from defining what the transnational is or where it is to be found. My object here is not to challenge Dimock and Rowe’s attention to the connections that religion facilitates across national boundaries; clearly these are of much analytic value. These boundary crossings, however, do not tell the entire story of religion’s work in the world, nor do they map all of the avenues of inquiry that religion traces for

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79 Dimock writes: “What impressed Emerson about Islam (and world religions in general) was what would later impress Malcolm X: the scope, the long duration, the ability to bind people across space and time . . . World religions are probably the most durable diachronic axes known to the human species” (Through 35).

80 My reading of Dimock’s treatment of religion as internal to the planetary is strongly influenced by the anthropologist Talal Asad’s account of the development of secularism as the redefinition of religion as a human, not a divine, invention. See Formations of the Secular, 191-5. I discuss Asad in more detail in the introduction and in my chapter on Phelps.
transnationalism. Speaking about U.S. Protestantism, we might observe that for many adherents the planet is not the only scene of human activity, nor are humans the only actors on a planet shared with God, the Holy Spirit, angels, and demons. The planet, in Christianity broadly defined, exists in relation with other locations such as heaven or hell. Similarly, the historical time that measures the planet exists in relation with eternal and prophetic temporalities. Part of the work of being a Christian subject is not only to understand one’s daily life on the planet as related to another life elsewhere, but it is also to work through, and to reconceptualize over time, the relation between the planetary and the otherworldly, between this life and the next one. Under Christianity, the planetary is not a given; it is one node in a larger network of ties that cross time and space. Thus we might say that Christianity not only maps alternative geographies on the planet, but also draws the planet itself into relation with other, religiously defined spaces.\footnote{For a somewhat similar account of the force of “gods and spirits” in South Asian history, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, Provincializing Europe, introduction and chapter two. Chakrabarty underscores the fact that in Bengali culture, the world is composed not only of humans but also gods and spirits. For Chakrabarty, this requires that scholars “read [their] secular universals in such a way as to keep them open to their own finitude” (90). In thinking U.S. Protestantism, it is important to note the spatial form that the inclusion of God in the world of the human takes.}

These relations sketch what I call a sentimental Protestant geography. At its root, the word “geography” designates a writing of the earth.\footnote{See Martin Brückner’s history of geographic literacy in early America: “from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth century, Anglo Americans consistently defined and applied the terms of geography according to the literal signification of the Greek word: as ‘to record, draw, and write the earth’” (Geographic Revolution 6).} In the nineteenth-century United States, the sentimental Protestantism that suffused so much of the era’s popular literature wrote the planet, and its accompanying subsets, into relation with a heaven increasingly modeled on the earth. Relying on a secular conception of territory, Americanist scholars have severed the spatial connections between heaven
and earth that these texts worked to create, differentiating between the “real” places such as Boston or the frontier and the “imaginary” places such as heaven and earth that these texts render.\textsuperscript{83} The literatures themselves, however, make no such distinction. In sentimental Protestantism, the planet is not the highest-order frame for human existence—the outer boundary of the human—but is instead a place in relation to heaven.\textsuperscript{84}

Thus Dimock’s suggestion that “religious adherents” “have a different vision of the world” only tells part of the story of religion’s relation to the nation-state. While Dimock rightly observes that these different visions of the world can challenge “territorial sovereignty” as a “man-made fiction,” not all religious visions of the world do so. Sentimental affect, as many scholars have observed, was at the heart of attempts to consolidate a national identity in the antebellum U.S.\textsuperscript{85} Sentimental Protestantism’s vision of an earth in relation to heaven was a crucial spatial form for this affective work. Indeed, in the U.S. Protestant context, there are not always clear lines between the “territorial sovereignty” that inscribes the nation-state in space and the “different visions of the world” that inform Protestant religious practice. Paradoxically, the religious practices that orient the subject outside the nation also serve to shape the earth that contains the nation, and to shape the nation itself.

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\textsuperscript{83} I discuss this critical tendency in more detail in my chapter on Phelps. For a notable exception (which I discuss in more detail below), see Jane Tompkins’s “Sentimental Power: Uncle Tom’s Cabin and the Politics of Literary History” in Sensational Designs.

\textsuperscript{84} Crucially, the sentimental Protestant geographies I trace in this dissertation seamlessly incorporate the national within their portrait of the planet. Thus they challenge the common secular distinction between the “religious” and the “national.”

\textsuperscript{85} The scholarship on affect and nation is rich and ever-expanding. Studies of affect in the nineteenth century include Lauren Berlant’s The Female Complaint, Peter Coviello’s Intimacy in America, Dana Luciano’s Arranging Grief, and Elizabeth Barnes’s States of Sympathy. For contemporary investigations, see José Esteban Muñoz’s “Feeling Brown,” William Connolly’s Why I Am Not a Secularist, and Ann Laura Stoler’s “Affective States.”
What then of Dimock’s turn to the planet? In the next section, I want to read *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as an example of what I will call a national transnationalism—an affective posture formed by sentimental Protestantism that remakes national boundaries in relation with religious geographies. The result, I will suggest, is a new form of national territoriality that extends the nation-state’s proper reach to the globe.

**Heaven is Better than Kintuck**

Accompanying the turn toward transnational inquiry has been a turn toward comparison as method. Calling for a return to comparative work, Susan Gillman identifies a need for “more varied translocal, transtemporal sites of comparison” (209). Caroline Levander and Robert Levine similarly argue for the necessity of “comparativist and dialogical approaches to the Americas” (3). As scholars in the humanities have expressed renewed interest in comparative method, they have also begun to rethink the enterprise of comparison itself. Writing in *Radical History Review*, historian Micol Seigel argues that thinking transnationally requires scholars to question the basic suppositions subtending comparative method. Observing that “[c]omparison is the process of relational self-definition,” Seigel suggests that comparative study’s basic unit, the nation, “emerges in relation to others” just as the self does (64, emphasis omitted). If the nation-state is *formed* comparatively, Seigel suggests, then comparison may not be the ideal method for understanding it, because comparison implicitly separates the objects that it compares. Seigel writes: “Comparison requires the observer to name two or more units whose similarities and differences she or he will then describe. This setup discourages attention to exchange between the two” (65). More importantly, Seigel suggests, “setting up parallel objects
for study obscures the exchange fostered by comparisons themselves" (65). To posit a
comparison, in Seigel’s analysis, is itself a productive act.

Comparative study of religion has often overlooked comparison’s productive
force. To think religion comparatively has often meant analyzing two conceptually
distinct religions, identifying modular facets (such as deities, scriptures, or afterlives)
that they share. Seigel’s suggestion that comparisons are themselves productive is
apposite here; not only does the idea of “comparative religion” structure religion, as
the historian Tomoko Masuzawa suggests,⁶⁶ but it also suggests that comparison is
something externally applied to religions. Religions are compared; they do not
themselves make comparisons.

What we see in Stowe is something quite different. Tom’s dying claim that
heaven is better than Kentucky uses Tom’s Christianity to make a comparison—one
that is simultaneously religious and political. If, as Seigel suggests, the act of
comparing reshapes the objects being compared, then we might see Tom’s assertion
not as a refusal of Kentucky and the nation,⁶⁷ but instead as an attempt to substantively
revise both. As this comparison implicitly constructs Kentucky, it also attempts an
affective intervention: to move the reader to oppose slavery. Here the context in
which Tom compares heaven and Kentucky is important. In his biography of his
mother, Charles Stowe observes that the news of the Fugitive Slave Law germinated
Stowe’s decision to write “something that would make this whole nation feel what an

⁶⁶ Masuzawa notes that it was in the nineteenth century that “comparative religion”
formed as a field of intellectual inquiry; the process of making religions comparable,
Masuzawa observes, simultaneously constitutes religion as a category (installing
Christianity as the default model of religion) and assessing and excluding other
religions based on their conformity to or their rejection of the Christian model.
⁶⁷ See, for example, James Baldwin’s classic reading of Uncle Tom’s Cabin’s
Christianity as an attempt to evade real social conditions: “The failure of the protest
novel lies in its rejection of life, the human being” (501). Sánchez-Eppler similarly
reads Tom’s Christianity as a rejection of claims to the nation.
accursed thing slavery is” (qtd. in Life 145). Stowe began the novel in earnest when, sitting in church one Sunday, “like the unrolling of a picture, the scene of the death of Uncle Tom passed before her mind” (C. Stowe, Life 145). Immediately, she went home and wrote the conversation between Tom and Shelby, and when she finished she read it aloud to her children, who “broke into convulsions of weeping, one of them saying through his sobs, ‘Oh, mamma! slavery is the most cruel thing in the world’” (C. Stowe, Life 148-9). Such a response was exactly what Stowe was looking for; if she could move her readers to sympathize with the suffering slave, Stowe thought, she could move the nation to political action.  

If Stowe sought to move her readers to sympathize with the suffering slave, she also implicitly suggested that sympathetic feelings alone were insufficient. From the beginning of the chapter that narrates Tom’s death, Stowe identifies Shelby’s motives as already sympathetic. We learn first that both George and his mother are uneasy at the knowledge that Tom was sold at auction, and that Mr. Shelby’s narratively convenient death now allows Mrs. Shelby to make good on her promise to redeem Tom (360). Likewise, when George finds Tom at the Legree plantation, he manifests the sympathetic response Stowe desires for her readers: “Tears which did honor to his manly heart fell from the young man’s eyes, as he bent over his poor friend” (362). It is this sympathetic feeling that causes Shelby to exclaim “you mustn’t die, nor think of it! I’ve come to buy you, and take you home” (362).

Up to this point, Shelby’s sympathy is at once praiseworthy and also strangely ineffectual. Delayed by miscarried letters and the enormous task of untangling Mr. Shelby’s financial affairs, Shelby’s proper feelings appear at the wrong time and thus

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88 For the classic readings of Stowe’s sympathetic intentions, see Berlant and Tompkins.
fail. If Tom’s death shows that Shelby’s sympathy is in the wrong time, it also points to a larger insufficiency in Shelby’s offer. Left unanswered in Shelby’s offer to buy Tom and take him home is the question of whether a Kentucky home equals benevolent enslavement. At this moment in the narrative, Shelby’s assertion that he will buy Tom blurs the distinction between redemption and reenslavement, between liberation and changing masters. In the interest of making a sympathy that does not allow for such ambiguities, Stowe has Tom reframe Shelby’s sympathetic offer. To George’s insistence that he will buy Tom and take him home, Tom asserts another purchase and another home: “The Lord’s bought me, and is going to take me home,—and I long to go. Heaven is better than Kintuck” (362). Shelby’s ineffectual sympathy here needs to be clarified and reframed by Tom’s comparative perspective, which juxtaposes Shelby’s Kentucky home with heaven. The comparative claim that “heaven is better than Kintuck” thus appears as a redirection of, or a correction to, Shelby’s sympathetic offer.

One of the things that happens as a result of Tom’s claim is, on a basic level, that heaven and Kentucky become comparable. In what follows, I will suggest that the comparability of heaven and Kentucky becomes, for Stowe, a necessary precondition for properly active abolitionist sympathy. To understand what this means for the novel’s affective work, we must first examine how this comparison constructs heaven and Kentucky.

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89 Contrast, for example, Miss Ophelia’s insistence on having St. Clare write her a legal title to Topsy, “because now is the only time there ever is to do anything in” (362). When St. Clare dies, Topsy alone is spared from the slave auction.  
90 Later, Stowe implies that some or all of the money intended to redeem Tom comes from Chloe’s work for the Louisville “perfectioner;” she never explicitly states that the Shelbys intend to manumit Tom. Given that the Shelbys own Chloe and all of Tom and Chloe’s children, freeing Tom alone would be insufficient.
The first thing that this comparison invokes is a sense of a larger system that gives order to the universe. In her seminal reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Jane Tompkins suggests that Stowe’s novel insists “that all human events are organized, clarified, and made meaningful by the existence of spiritual realities” (133). This spiritual organization, “by putting all individual events in relation to an order that is unchanging, collapses the distinctions between them so that they become interchangeable representations of a single timeless reality” (134).91 The correspondence that the novel creates between events sets up a correspondence between places, as Tompkins observes:

Ohio, Canada, and Liberia are related to one another by virtue of their relationship to the one “bright Canaan” for which they stand; the Mississippi River and the Ohio are linked by the Jordan. (Ultimately, there are only three places to be in this story: heaven, hell, or Kentucky, which represents the earthly middle ground in Stowe’s geography). (138)

For Tompkins, the world created in Stowe’s novel is spiritual, not actual: “The setting [of the novel] does not so much describe the features of a particular time and place as point to positions on a spiritual map” (135). Viewed from the perspective of the novel’s sentimental Protestantism, “even the homeliest details show up not as the empirically observed facts of human existence but as the expressions of a highly schematic intent”—to render a seamless web of cross-reference in which all things are related under God (136).

While I agree with much of Tompkins’ important reading, I want to question the distinction she draws between “the features of a particular time and place” and

91 Stowe’s soteriological perspective, for Tompkins, makes a claim on the organization of social structures within the nation. As I will argue below, these “spiritual realities” are intended to revise the content of the nation by making a primary revision to the nation form.
"positions on a spiritual map.” The opposition between “the empirically observed facts of human existence” and Stowe’s spiritual geography rests on a primary distinction between religious belief and the “real” world. This distinction, however, is not internal to Stowe’s novel, which treats heaven and Kentucky as comparable. Here theoretical treatments of narrative’s relation to space can be illuminative. Critical geographers have long argued that space is not a static backdrop for human activity—or, to borrow Tompkins’ terms, is not an “empirically observed” location in a “particular time and place.” Instead, these scholars suggest, space is produced by political, economic, and cultural relations.92 One crucial technology through which space is produced is narrative, as stories allow readers to conflate their surroundings with the worlds narratives represent. Reading Stowe’s novel from this perspective, we might see the mapping of spiritual realities as constructing “the features of a particular time and place” such as Kentucky—as not a move to an alternative spiritual reality but instead as a recreation of what goes by the name of “empirically observed” space.

To read from this perspective would bring Tom’s comparison and the sympathy it was meant to create into intimate connection with the antebellum discourses that defined and produced space, both implicitly and explicitly.93 The period immediately following the Revolution saw an upsurge of interest in geographic

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92 Critical geography’s understanding of space as socially produced originates in Henri Lefebvre’s The Production of Space. Influential works that draw on Lefebvre include David Harvey’s The Condition of Postmodernity and Edward Soja’s Postmodern Geographies. Drawing on Marxist theories of production, Lefebvre assigns capitalism a determinative role in the production of spatial relations. Inherent in Marx’s critique of capital is an understanding of religion as ideology. A next step in this project would be to think through the contradictions between Lefebvre’s critique of capitalism and the expansion of the category of “real” space that I am attempting here.
93 Though my focus here is on how sentimental Protestantism reenvisioned the nation form, my reading also suggests a larger revision to geography’s disciplinary boundaries. For if contemporary work on space has relied on a secular understanding of what space is, my reading of sentimental Protestantism troubles the distinction between secular and religious space.
literacy. Geographic knowledge, in the early and antebellum United States, offered a crucial resource for solidifying national boundaries and fostering national unity. Particularly important in this process were geography textbooks, which from the 1790s forward were perennial best-sellers. These textbooks simultaneously taught their students how to read words and maps, for example listing “Chief Towns” and their pronunciations (“Bos’-ton”; “New Or’-leans”) while also placing Boston and New Orleans on a map of the United States (Brückner, Literacy 177). As they taught readers where to find Boston and New Orleans, these textbooks also installed the map’s conceptual apparatus as a guide to the reader’s surroundings. Emma Willard and William Woodbridge’s System of Modern Geography (1825), for example, encouraged readers to begin by drawing a cartographic rendering of the table in front of them, and then to progress upward until they could accurately draw a map of the world (Brückner, Literacy 183-84). Learning to map one’s surroundings meant locating one’s self within a standardized system of spatial differentiations; becoming geographically literate meant being able, in part, to recognize one’s home as part of (or distant from) a town, which was within a state, which was within a region, which was within a nation, which was within the world. Within this system of spatial differentiations, geography textbooks taught their readers to identify places relationally: Boston, for example, is identifiable as a city within Massachusetts, and a place 215 miles from New York.

The spatial concepts of home, town, region, state, nation, and globe that students of geography were taught to map are called scales, and are produced by both explicitly geographic discourses, such as the ones modeled in geography textbooks,

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94 See, for example, Martin Brückner’s reading of geographic literacy as an “agent of national unification” (Geographic Revolution 105).
95 On space as formed through social relations, see Doreen Massey, Space, Place, and Gender.
and narratives that implicitly order the reader’s experience of space. Scales “organize and produce space,” in Mary Pat Brady’s terms, by narrating “a framework of spatial relations” within which human activity occurs. For Neil Smith, these spatial relations visualize scales as nested within each other, with higher-order scales wholly encompassing lower ones. The early American and antebellum fascination with geographic literacy worked to install scale as a concept that organized daily life, teaching Americans to locate their homes, cities, states, and regions under the umbrella of the nation. So too did narrative literature teach its readers about the relations between cities, states, and the nation, both by mapping the home as the highest expression of national character and by providing imaginificative descriptions of each scale.

Though heaven appeared frequently in the genre of medieval maps called the mappae mundi, antebellum geographies frequently excluded heaven from the nested hierarchies they rendered. If heaven was erased from antebellum maps of the earth, however, in antebellum narrative the two became strangely intertwined. Narratives that constructed heaven and earth together altered the antebellum project of geographic literacy. With an explicit mandate to write the earth, antebellum

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96 My account of scale theory is especially indebted to Mary Pat Brady’s account of the nature of scale. See Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies at 172-173.
97 See Neil Smith’s “Contours of a Spatialized Politics” at 66). Herod and Wright use the image of matryoshka dolls to illustrate the idea that scales are nested into each other. See “Placing Scale: An Introduction” in Geographies of Power (Blackwell, 2002).
98 Pulling the literature on critical geography—much of which focuses on the twentieth and twenty-first century—back into the nineteenth century runs the risk of anachronism. Following Brückner’s reading of geographic literacy in the early U.S., I want to suggest that we can usefully read nineteenth century literatures as developing the structures that would be important to critical geographers in the twentieth century.  
99 Primary Geography for Children, the best-selling geography textbook that Stowe coauthored with her sister Catharine Beecher, separates heaven from the terrestrial geography it intends to teach. On heaven in medieval maps, see “Mapping Paradise in Space and Time” in Alessandro Scafì’s Mapping Paradise.
geographies took the earth as their outer boundary, their highest scale. What we see in Stowe's comparison is a shift to writing the earth relationally: to sketch the nested hierarchy of scales that governs the earth, but also to transform that hierarchy by putting it in relation to heaven.

To understand how being in relation to heaven rewrites antebellum geography, we need to trace the multiple meanings the passage assigns to Kentucky. Most obviously, Kentucky designates the subnational state and region in which the Shelby plantation is located. Naming George a "Kentucky boy," Stowe identifies Kentucky as a region that shapes its inhabitants' manners, inclinations, and sympathies.\footnote{See George Shelby's final encounter with Legree, in which his Kentucky upbringing makes him impetuous enough to knock Legree "flat upon his face" (364). See also Stowe's description of George's behavior on the boat: he attends to Cassy's needs "with the politeness which comes naturally to every Kentuckian" (368).} Making Kentucky an indicator of individual character doubles the passage's link between Kentucky as state and Kentucky as home: if George's mixture of politeness and impetuosity locates him in reference to the state of Kentucky, it also connects that place on the map to the domestic sphere where his Kentucky character was formed. Kentucky is, for Shelby, both a federal state and his personal home. It is this dual meaning that subtends George's offer to "take [Tom] home" and Tom's reading of the offered home as Kentucky.

If Kentucky is at once state and home, it also comes to metonymically represent the U.S. nation-state.\footnote{Here my reading of "Kentucky" as both "nation" and "home" draws on the double meaning of "domestic" as home and nation that Amy Kaplan identifies. I discuss Kaplan in more detail below.} Implicit in Tom's refusal of Kentucky for heaven is Stowe's sweeping critique of slavery as a national, not a regional, sin. Stowe's rendering of "the best and worst" of the slave system locates the "best" of slavery at the Shelby's Kentucky plantation (383). The Kentucky home stands in, in the
narrative, for slavery as an American institution, functioning as the specific part that represents the national whole. Central to this metonymic work is Stowe’s implication of the North in the sins of slavery. She writes at the novel’s close:

Do you say that the people of the free states have nothing to do with it, and can do nothing? Would to God this were true! But it is not true. The people of the free states have defended, encouraged, and participated; and are more guilty for it, before God, than the South, in that they have not the apology of education or custom... There are multitudes of slaves temporarily owned, and sold again, by merchants in northern cities; and shall the whole guilt or obloquy of slavery fall only on the South?

Northern men, northern mothers, northern Christians, have something more to do than denounce their brethren at the South; they have to look to the evil among themselves. (385)

The Fugitive Slave Law, for Stowe, has obliterated the already tenuous distinction between Northern “free” states and Southern “slave” ones; the sale of Eliza’s son in Kentucky sets in motion the slavecatchers’ pursuit of the Harrises across the ostensibly “free” territory of Ohio. As the location that condenses all of the horrors of slavery, big and small, Kentucky stands in for both the South and the equally guilty North. Slavery’s status as a national problem thus lets Kentucky function in the place of the nation, blurring the boundaries between the two.

Kentucky’s metonymic relation to the nation-as-slave-territory introduces a new set of spatial confusions. When Tom declares that heaven is better than Kentucky, his refusal of Kentucky is also a refusal, implicitly, of his current surroundings. Better to go to heaven forever, Tom declares, than to spend another minute in the rough shed on Legree’s plantation where he suffers. “Kentucky” thus
names everything from the home to the nation to the plantation shed, rendering an
equivalence between them.

Underscoring this equivalence is Tom’s citation of the contrast between
heaven and Kentucky to designate the difference between death and life. Place-
names, here, refer simultaneously to locations and to states of being. Heaven is the
home of all those who have passed through death to eternal life, while Kentucky, in a
curious slip, names the location of all the living. The sense that this comparison is
strangely asymmetrical comes from the placement of Kentucky where the earth would
usually be. When antebellum evangelical literatures invoked heaven, they customarily
did so in opposition to earth. What these literatures would have called earth—the
planet, the physical territory on which the living act and interact—Tom calls
Kentucky. Placed in opposition to heaven, the Kentucky that equates home, state,
region, and nation becomes synonymous with the globe.

This conflation, I want to suggest, is the territorial form through which
Stowe generates white sympathy. If, as I have argued, antebellum romantic racialism
defined blackness, in part, as having privileged access to heaven, then what whiteness
gains from Tom’s dying comparison is a new ability to organize territory under heaven
not by defining and distinguishing scales (or distinguishing within scales) but instead
by blurring the boundaries between them. What we see in the remainder of the
passage is that witnessing Tom’s encounter with and entrance to heaven—and by
extension the geography it creates—generates a properly abolitionist white sympathy.

102 Stowe is characteristically oblique about the possibility of being in hell; as he is
dying, Tom refuses to entertain the horrifying thought of the torments Legree will face
upon his arrival there.
103 While she was writing Uncle Tom’s Cabin, Stowe published a pamphlet entitled
“Earthly Care, a Heavenly Discipline” (Hedrick 156). According to Joan Hedrick, the
tract circulated widely in the 1850s.
104 I am indebted to conversations with Angela Naimou for helping push me to think
about conflation.
Sympathy’s Geography

If Tom’s death conflates Kentucky with home, nation, and globe, it at the same time redirects Shelby’s sympathy toward its proper abolitionist end. Watching Tom die, George is impressed by the “solemn awe” of the scene, which makes the rough shed in which he stands “holy” (363). From this experience comes George’s abolitionist vow. Kneeling at Tom’s grave, George declares, “Witness, eternal God! . . . oh, witness, that from this hour, I will do what one man can to drive this curse of slavery from my land!” (365, emphasis in original). Through his experience of Tom’s death, George’s sympathetic impulses find proper direction and expression in the antislavery effort. Here the emotional transfer between Tom and George—the gifting of black racial access to heaven to whites—recuperates George’s ineffectual sympathy—his love for one slave—into a proper sympathy with all of the enslaved, and a proper focus on slavery as a whole.

While Tom’s death spurs George to individual action, this private vow is also a matter of public import. Stacey Margolis observes that antebellum discourses of private self-cultivation (such as George’s assertion that he “will do what one man can” to oppose slavery) often reflect an attempt to form a public self. So too is George’s sympathy, and for Stowe all proper sympathy, an intervention into the public sphere. Lauren Berlant helpfully explicates sympathy’s public face:

Thus witnessing and identifying with pain, consuming and deriving pleasure and moral self-satisfaction, and imagining these impulses will lead, somehow, to changing the world—this ideological, aesthetic, and capitalist cluster is at the center of the death-driven, pain-saturated, therapy-seeking, and unevenly

105 On the intertwining of public and private discourses in antebellum fiction, see Stacey Margolis’s The Public Life of Privacy, especially the introduction.
radical discourse of protest that Uncle Tom's Cabin generates. ("Poor Eliza" 645)

This sympathy, in its concern with the civic, also makes a claim—if an “unevenly radical” one—on the state and what it should properly do. Under the sentimental, according to Berlant, sympathy is “the condition that authorizes the reader to imagine changing the world” ("Poor Eliza" 645). As sympathy creates the possibility for social change, it also sketches out new relations between the citizen and the nation and defines new purposes for the nation and its laws. Berlant writes:

Sentimentality has long been the means by which mass subaltern pain is advanced, in the dominant public sphere, as the true core of national collectivity. It operates when the pain of intimate others burns into the conscience of classically privileged national subjects, such that they feel the pain of flawed or denied citizenship as their pain. Theoretically, to eradicate the pain those with power will do whatever is necessary to return the nation once more to its legitimately utopian order.¹⁰⁶ Identification with pain, a universal true feeling, then leads to structural social change. In return, subalterns scarred by the pain of failed democracy will reauthorize universalist notions of citizenship in the national utopia, which involves believing in a redemptive notion of law as the guardian of public good. The object of the nation and the law in this light is to eradicate systemic social pain, the absence of which becomes the definition of freedom. ("The Subject of True Feeling" 53, emphasis added)

¹⁰⁶ The original has “odor,” which does not make sense in the context of the article.
For Berlant, the individual’s sympathetic impulse to change the world installs the
nation-state as the guarantor of freedom, which is redefined as the absence of
suffering. Similarly, it installs the law as that which can end suffering. 107

While sympathy outlines this new purpose for the state, it simultaneously
inscribes the state into the comparative geography that Tom invokes through his death.
Sympathy invents itself into a world organized differently, and this different
organization will come to be of crucial importance for the nation-state and its exercise
of power. To see this, we need a clearer sense of the relation between state power and
geography. Political theorists have generally identified the state as a stable geographic
entity with a clearly defined territory 108 over which it is sovereign (Agnew 53). The
study of international relations, and likewise the disciplining of literary texts into
“British,” “American,” and “world” literatures, depends on the division of the world
into fixed territories that delimit state power. While the boundaries between states
may be altered, the fact that these boundaries exist and are constitutive characteristics

107 This conception of the law (the state) as the guarantor of freedom from suffering is
also integral to the development of secularism. Asad notes that the concept of secular,
universalizable human rights rests on a distinction between “[i]nhuman suffering”
(which “was a morally insufferable condition for which someone was therefore
responsible,” and for which someone could be punished), and “pain that was adequate
to its end, not wasteful pain” (111, emphasis in original). The pain produced by Hindu
religious practices, for example, could be the target of British colonial intervention
precisely because that pain was invoked as gratuitous, and therefore “inhuman.”
Asad’s work on secularism should be central to our assessment of sentimentalism’s
investment in freedom, because it enables us to see Stowe’s vision of sympathy as
simultaneously deeply religious and committed to the development of an ostensibly
“secular” state power. Important here is the fact that “religion” and “secularism” are
not antonyms; secularism offers a way of classifying the religious and marking its role
in public life, but in the U.S. context certainly doesn’t imply the absence of (or a
freedom from) religion. On “Christian secularism” in the U.S., see the new collection
Secularisms edited by Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini.

108 Territory, here, refers to the physical terrain on which the state operates. Broadly
speaking, what Dimock identifies as the planet is the ground political theorists divide
into state territories.
of the nation-state has been for these fields a baseline assumption. Similarly central has been the relation between state power and state control over a bounded, fixed territory; political geographer John Agnew suggests that “what distinguishes the state” from other organizations is “the survival and maintenance of the sovereignty of the state over its territory” (60).\footnote{For Agnew, the end of the Cold War marks the disintegration of this system of state territoriality. Agnew’s emphasis on phenomena that cross state boundaries and work through non-state territorialities is characteristic of the general trend of inquiries into globalization in the last decade. In what follows, I suggest that these challenges to territorial bounding in the twenty-first century have nineteenth-century antecedents—ones that integrated state power with a highly selective set of territorial conflations that were generated by literature and religion.}

Within its boundaries, then, the state exercises its power. For James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta, this exercise of power depends on the division of state territory into the nested hierarchies of geographic scale. Noting that “states are not simply functional bureaucratic apparatuses, but powerful sites of symbolic and cultural production,” Ferguson and Gupta observe that “states represent themselves as reified entities with particular spatial properties,” producing “a taken-for-granted spatial and scalar image of a state that both sits above and contains its localities, regions, and communities” (981, 982). Ferguson and Gupta name these two images of state spatiality verticality and encompassment (982). Together, verticality and encompassment provide a model for the working of state power downward to localities, as when the Fugitive Slave Law’s position as a federal act takes concrete form in Loker and Marks’s pursuit of the Harrises across Ohio.\footnote{Usually this verticality works its way downward through what Ferguson and Gupta call “mundane bureaucratic practices” (994). The verticality that Tom’s religious comparison creates works not by bureaucracy, but instead by interweaving emotional dispositions and territorial forms.}

Central to Stowe’s rendering of Tom’s Christianity is this vertical orientation. If state power is exercised along a vertical axis—if the state is what is above and also
what encompasses everything below—we might think more about how this vertical axis works in Stowe’s novel. For if state power is generally “upward,” in Stowe’s novel so is heaven. Tom’s Christian resistance to Legree, especially, is oriented vertically. Eva, likewise, maps heaven as what is “above” and hell as what is below. Lamenting Topsy’s lack of Christianity, Eva sighs, “oh!—such a pity! . . . that any one, who could be a bright angel, and live with angels, should go all down, down, down, and nobody help them!” (249). Sympathy, here, is oriented along a vertical axis: Eva is moved by the thought that Topsy might go “down” to hell when she could go “up” to heaven.

Eva’s empathetic geography becomes, through the reformulation of his sympathy, for George Shelby the vertical axis along which freedom is mapped. After presenting free papers to all of his slaves, and declaring that he will teach them “how to use the rights [he gives them] as free men and women,” Shelby instructs the assembled crowd to “look up, and thank God for the blessing of freedom” (379, 380). “An aged, patriarchal negro” then leads the former slaves in a collective prayer, and “a more touching and hearty Te Deum never ascended to heaven . . . than came from that honest old heart” (380). As George’s sympathies take the form that Stowe intends, his actions conflate legal freedom with the absence of suffering, as when he observes that manumitting his slaves will ensure that no one will be sold and separated from family through his actions (380). This legal and affective freedom orients the subject along a vertical axis, and directs him to “look up.”

What is “up,” here, is both the God in heaven who provides “the blessing of freedom” and the state whose legal authority gives the free papers their liberatory force. Stowe’s sympathetic claim on what the state should do and how it should work cannot be separated from this vertical orientation, in which one looks up simultaneously to heaven and to the state for freedom. As looking to the state
coincides with looking to heaven, the geographic comparison that Tom makes between heaven and Kentucky comes to have salience for the state’s sympathetic obligation to end suffering. Directing one’s self upward to the state, here, comes to be the same thing as directing one’s self upward to heaven. This changed verticality—in which the verticality of state power becomes the same verticality as accessing heaven—also changes the way that encompassment, the “nested” portion of the nested hierarchies of state scales, works. Scaling works through two kinds of boundaries. Boundaries between scales distinguish, for example, cities from nations and nations from the globe. Within these boundaries, “higher” scales encompass “lower” ones. Boundaries within scales separate cities from cities and nation-states from nation-states. Sympathy’s revision to the first set of boundaries alters the stability of the second.

I have argued that Tom’s comparison of heaven and Kentucky sets up a chain of conflations, in which “Kentucky” comes to stand in for everything from the Shelby plantation to the globe. These conflations, through sympathy, come to sketch not only a private and intimately felt geography, but also a new geography for the nation-state. Sympathy’s demands on state power reconfigure the nested hierarchy of home, nation, and globe, and in the process reshapes the divisions that distinguish one nation-state from another. If proper sympathy is produced out of Tom’s comparison of heaven and Kentucky, and the comparison of heaven and Kentucky conflates the local, the national, and the global, then we might observe that the state power that sympathy orients vertically also introduces the possibility of a state power that works not by distinguishing scales but by conflating them.

If Kentucky is both home and the globe, what does that mean for our earlier reading of Dimock, and for our assessment of state power? Here I want to focus on how the move to conflate downward (between Kentucky and “home”) is reshaped by
the move to conflate upward (between Kentucky and nation and Kentucky and the
globe).

**National Transnationalism**

The story of national power in the nineteenth-century United States has often
been one of divisions, of boundaries, of drawing lines on a map and distinctions
between people. In studies of sentimental and domestic literatures, Amy Kaplan’s
“Manifest Domesticity” offers a widely-discussed theorization of these boundaries.
Noting the productive conflation of the domestic as home and the domestic as nation,
Kaplan argues that the literature of domesticity is predicated on an “expansionist
logic” (602). This logic involves two contradictory moves. The first is an expansion
of national boundaries outward to encompass the hemisphere or the globe. The
second move, contrary but not inconsistent, is to anxiously assert rigid yet arbitrary
boundaries between “domestic” and “foreign” territories and others.\(^{111}\) Together,
these ideas form “the engine of national expansion, the site from which the nation
reaches beyond itself through the emanation of woman’s moral influence” (Kaplan
586). Here the nation-state extends its power and authority by drawing a line around
the nation—a line that may expand or contract, but that of necessity keeps the nation
within.

As an agenda for Americanist study, Kaplan’s article is most often read as
calling for renewed attention on U.S. imperialism through its construction of the
interplay between the “domestic” and the “foreign.”\(^{112}\) Running alongside these

\(^{111}\) See, for example, Kaplan’s suggestion that “[t]he representation of the home as an
empire exists in tension with the notion of woman’s sphere as a contracted space
because it is in the nature of empires to extend their rule over new domains while
fortifying their borders against external

\(^{112}\) Sandra Gunning cites Kaplan’s suggestion that “allied with but generally occluded
by the ‘domestic’ has always been the ‘foreign’: that is, nineteenth-century American
distinctions, however, is a current that moves in exactly the opposite direction: toward blurring boundary lines, toward the kinds of territorial conflation that Stowe’s novel seeks to make available and affectively resonant. Underappreciated in readings of manifest domesticity’s push to move the nation ever outward is its invocation of a vertical geography that resembles Stowe’s. Kaplan’s description of a domesticity impelled ever outward is rooted in her reading together of Catharine Beecher’s *Treatise on Domestic Economy* and John O’Sullivan’s “The Great Nation of Futurity,” which coined the phrase “manifest destiny.” Common to both pieces, as Kaplan points out, is a vision of a nation that inexorably spreads outward until, at some point in the future, it encompasses the planet.¹¹³ For Kaplan, Beecher and O’Sullivan’s
domesticity traditionally relied upon “a sense of at-homeness, in contrast to an external world perceived as alien and threatening” (38). Bruce Burgett similarly glosses Kaplan as arguing that domesticity “not only monitor[ed] the borders between the civilized and the savage but also regulat[ed] traces of the savage within” (78). Transnationalism’s equation of debordering with denationalizing relies on a similar logic.

¹¹³ Beecher, from *Domestic Economy*: “The builders of a temple are of equal importance, whether they labor on the foundations, or toil upon the dome. Thus also with those labors that are to be made effectual in the regeneration of the Earth. The woman who is rearing a family of children; the woman who labors in the schoolroom, the woman who, in her retired chamber, earns with her needle, the mite to contribute for the intellectual and moral elevation of her country; even the humble domestic, whose example and influence may be molding and forming young minds, while her faithful services sustain a prosperous domestic state;—each and all may be cheered by the consciousness that they are agents in accomplishing the greatest work that ever was committed to human responsibility. It is the building of a glorious temple, whose base shall be coextensive with the bounds of the earth, whose summit shall pierce the skies, whose splendor shall beam on all lands, and those who hew the lowliest stone, as much as those who carve the highest capital, will be equally honored when its top-stone shall be laid, with new rejoicing of the morning stars, and shoutings of the sons of God.” (qtd. in Kaplan 587)

O’Sullivan, from “Great Nation”: “The far-reaching, the boundless future will be the era of American greatness. In its magnificent domain of space and time, the nation of many nations is destined to manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles; to establish on earth the noblest temple ever dedicated to the worship of the most high—the Sacred and the True. Its floor shall be a hemisphere—its roof the firmament of the star-studded heavens, and its congregation an Union of many
comments mark an expansion of national boundaries, the move outward of a dividing line. Left unmentioned is the vertical geography that both texts also share. Beecher describes the domestic project as “the building of a glorious temple, whose base shall be coextensive with the bounds of the earth, whose summit shall pierce the skies” (qtd. in Kaplan 587). O’Sullivan, likewise, sketches the U.S.’s “magnificent domain of space and time” as creating a temple stretching upward from the earth to the sky: “Its floor shall be a hemisphere—its roof the firmament of the star-studded heavens” (qtd. in Kaplan 588). Expansion outward, in both of these texts, is inseparable from expansion upward. For the nation to fulfill its moral purpose in the world—thematized in Beecher by the “woman who is rearing a family of children” and in O’Sullivan by the advent of a nation of “hundreds of happy millions, calling, owning no man master”—it must not only move outward until it is “coextensive with the bounds of the earth,” but also reach out along a vertical axis to do so.

In Stowe’s novel, this vertical orientation sets the stage for a shift not only in *what* the nation-state encompasses, but more importantly, in *how* and *when* it encompasses. For Beecher and O’Sullivan, the movement of national boundaries outward and state power upward evolves over time; the boundary line moves until finally, at some point in the future, it comes to coincide with the hemisphere or the globe. Stowe’s rendering of state sympathy, in contrast, claims this coincidence for the present—as an already extant, if improperly recognized, reality. By locating the comparison between heaven and Kentucky in the present tense, Stowe asserts that the conflation between home, nation, and globe has already come to pass. In the process, Stowe rescripts the boundary movement that for Beecher and O’Sullivan allow the nation to fulfill its moral purpose. Instead of visualizing national boundaries moving

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Republcs, comprising hundreds of happy millions, calling, owning no man master, but governed by God’s natural and moral law of equality.” (qtd. in Kaplan 588)
ever outward, Stowe’s sympathy makes the very idea of a boundary oddly contingent. The national sympathetic errand—to free people from pain—is keyed to this geography of conflations, in which the home is the nation is the globe. Boundaries, here, seem of little importance in the face of the all-encompassing obligation to end human suffering.

What we might see in Stowe’s rendering of sympathy, then, is a strangely national transnationalism. For the nation-state’s obligation to end suffering, in Stowe’s novel, manifests a fluidity and porosity eerily familiar to the scholar of transnationalism. Here it is the nation-state itself that demonstrates an uncanny ability, and a moral obligation, to “spill over and seep through national borders” and to form itself into “units both greater and smaller than the nation-state,” to borrow Micol Seigel’s terms (63). Central to this power is sentimental Protestantism’s insistence on constructing the planet not as the antidote to national power but as national power’s highest achievement. Ultimately, tracing Stowe’s formulation of white sympathy leads us to reconsider the opposition Wai Chee Dimock posits between the nation and the planet, and suggests a new, if also more fraught, avenue for transnational inquiry. Reading Stowe’s Protestantism attentively suggests that the nation-state is itself deeply invested in the spatial mobilities and porosities that have subtended many claims about transnationalism’s liberatory potential. For what sentimental Protestantism offered to national sympathy, in Stowe’s novel, is a new version of national form—one whose primary mode was not distinction but conflation.
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CHAPTER THREE

A Reasonable Heaven: The Temporality of Benevolent Possession
in Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s *The Gates Ajar*

At that time, it will be remembered, our country was dark with sorrowing women.... I wished to say something that would comfort some few... of the women whose misery crowded the land.... If there be another world, and such a one, it will be no theologic drama, but a sensible, wholesome scene.

—Elizabeth Stuart Phelps

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s 1868 bestseller *The Gates Ajar* was written for comfort. Widely read in the postbellum United States, *The Gates Ajar* offered to console the women whose husbands, brothers, and sons died in the Civil War. It did so by presenting a new vision of the Protestant Christian heaven. Where Calvinism promised an afterlife as intellectual and unfeeling as its abstruse theological debates, Phelps’s novel rendered a material and tangible heaven patterned on the sentimental novel’s domestic sphere. For Phelps, post-war grief would resolve when her readers understood the “true” nature of heaven: that it was a “sensible, wholesome scene” keyed to the fulfillment of human needs and wants. Thousands of readers who wrote to Phelps agreed, finding in *The Gates Ajar*’s portrait of a heaven of clapboard houses, pianos, and ginger-snaps solace for their earthly sorrows.

Though its rendering of heaven spoke to private losses, *The Gates Ajar* treats grief as a problem at once personal and national. Written to a nation only recently at

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114 Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *Chapters from a Life*, 96, 97, 129.
115 In her autobiography, Phelps claims to have received thousands of letters in the years after *Gates* was published. See *Chapters from a Life*, 127-128.
war with itself, Phelps’s novel identifies grief—specifically, white women’s grief—as a common denominator that transcends sectional difference.\textsuperscript{116} This white feminine sorrow precipitates “our country”—a unitary, singular formation—out of a North and South separated by war. Here Phelps cites the shared suffering of white mothers and sisters in order to envision the nation as what Peter Coviello calls “a collectivity of the mutually wounded and bereaved” (443). Scholars of United States literatures increasingly recognize the central role that affect, and especially racialized affect, has played in consolidating national identity.\textsuperscript{117} Yet as white feminine grief constitutes the nation, it also threatens to deform it. In Phelps’s novel, the “general grief” that unites the nation also hangs over it “like a material miasma,” crowding and darkening the land and “chok[ing] the very air” that the citizen breathes (\textit{Chapters 97}). If grief draws the nation together, left unremediaged it makes national life intolerable, blotting out “all the little resistance of common, human joyousness” (\textit{Chapters 97}).

\textit{The Gates Ajar} resolves this paradox by weaving an intricate web of connections between daily life in the nation and eternal life in heaven. Phelps’s heaven is the site for all manner of activities drawn from middle-class life in mid-century New England; there, mothers care for their infant children, husbands build houses for their wives, friends reunite for a cup of tea. Heaven appears as just another location, a natural extension of the activities and rhythms and disciplines that structure the reader’s present. \textit{The Gates Ajar} draws heaven into the quotidian scenes that are

\textsuperscript{116} Though it is set in a New England town, \textit{The Gates Ajar} is for the most part silent on divisions between North and South, and erases slavery and abolition from its narrative entirely. Phelps’s silence on these issues is in keeping with her desire to imagine the grief that is of such crucial importance to the nation as belonging to white women.

\textsuperscript{117} See especially Lauren Berlant, \textit{The Queen of America Goes to Washington City} and \textit{The Female Complaint} and Peter Coviello, “Agonizing Affection;” in other disciplines, see Ann Laura Stoler, “Affective States” and “Tense and Tender Ties” and William Connolly, \textit{Why I Am Not a Secularist} and \textit{Capitalism and Christianity, American Style}. 

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the sentimental novel's principal focus. Within *The Gates Ajär*’s interior world, life in heaven and life in the nation are folded into a continuous sphere of human existence. The consolatory power of this portrait depends on what the scholar of literary nationalism Pheng Cheah calls “the ‘causal’ or ‘formative’ power that the novel possesses in relation to the nation”: the fact that novel-reading fuses “the world inside the novel . . . with the external real world” (8). Writing its white Protestantism into the novel, *The Gates Ajär* seeks to renovate its readers’ world into a place where heaven is like earth and life in the nation is continuous with heavenly life. It is this transfer between the world inside the novel and the world outside it, in Phelps’s logic, that will convert the overwhelming grief experienced by white women into a quiet, settled benevolence, and will establish this grief-turned-benevolence as a useable source of national coherence.

Yet if *The Gates Ajär*’s synthesis of heaven and earth promises to make the nation bearable again, it also renders the nation in terms unfamiliar to scholars of the sentimental novel. Much of this scholarship, like scholarship on the novel generally, has drawn a sharp line between the religious and the national. Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, for instance, predicates its crucial reassessment of the nation as a cultural form on the idea that nationalism is like religion. Implicit in Anderson’s comparative gesture is the idea that nation and religion are separate and separable categories, distinct modes of human experience. In Anderson’s thesis, the advent of the nation can be traced to the diminution of religious ways of experiencing the world—and in particular to a shift to a secular, homogeneous time that the novel helps to inaugurate and of which it is emblematic. In this way of thinking, because the

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118 Cheah, following Benedict Anderson, emphasizes the particular skill with which omniscient narration, in its ability to invoke “the totality of society,” effects this transfer (8). While *The Gates Ajär* is a first-person narrative, its attempt to remediate post-Civil War grief plays a similarly generalizing role.
nation is like the religion of the past, fulfilling its functions and taking its place in the world, it is isolated from the worldmaking claims of present-tense religion.

Critical work on The Gates Ajar has often replicated these distinctions, insisting on a qualitative difference between the novel’s representations of a “real” New England town and its representations of an “imaginary” heaven. This insistence, however, severs the intimate connection Phelps crafted between ameliorating grief and making heaven a part of the “real” world of her readers. Phelps’s resolution to national grief refuses the distinction between religion and nation that has guided so much scholarship on the novel. Within The Gates Ajar’s interior world, national life is religious life, national space is religious space, national time is religious time.

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119 For the most prominent discussions of Phelps’s novel, see Nina Baym’s introduction to Three Spiritualist Novels and Ann Douglas’s The Feminization of American Culture. Baym reads The Gates Ajar and its sequels as emblematic of the mid-nineteenth-century U.S.’s interest in Spiritualism. I discuss Phelps’s ambivalent relations with Spiritualist thought and practice below. Douglas discusses The Gates Ajar as the “apotheosis” of nineteenth-century writing on grief and consolation, documentary evidence of “the enticingly effortless and inevitable pre-eminence of the average” (224, 226). Other scholarship has stressed Phelps’s intervention in theological debates (Schnog, Long, Smith, Sootin Smith, Harde), her feminism (Stansell), and her rendering of the intimacies of grief (Long, Douglas, Schnog). Gail Smith’s important “The Popularization of Hermeneutics” is one of the few works on Gates to take seriously Phelps’s effort to construct a vision of heaven; while Smith stresses Phelps’s use of figurative language to describe heaven, my emphasis here is on the material, visceral effects of Phelps’s portrait.

120 Phelps’s novel, and the genre of consolation literature generally, offers an alternative mapping to the divided “sacred” and “national” geographies that Molly Robey insightfully traces in women’s Holy Land fiction from the period. Phelps’s novel depicts not a sacred geography, but instead a resolutely quotidian one; what is innovative about her rendering of heaven is precisely its reliance on and investment in everyday life. My preference for looking at the novel’s Christianity as inseparable from daily life is motivated by the broader turn toward “lived religion” among scholars and historians of religion; lived religion scholarship emphasizes, as Leigh Eric Schmidt puts it, “the places where faith and materiality . . . commingle” (qtd. in Orsi 6). In some senses, lived religion scholarship challenges the sacred/secular binary in much the same way that the collection No More Separate Spheres! challenged the separate spheres thesis.
Without recognizing this conflation, we cannot understand the novel’s offer to console its readers, rebuild the nation, and convert white feminine grief to benevolence. Both benevolence and the coherence of the nation depend on the feeling that daily life in the nation and eternal life in heaven are intimately connected—a set of connections our theories of novel and nation constitutively exclude.

This chapter traces the contours of national benevolence in *The Gates Ajar’s* imagined world. Phelps’s novel constructs into benevolence a set of spatial and temporal relations between heavenly and national life. As these relations renovate the post-war nation, they also revise the homogenous, empty time that Anderson and others have taken as a defining characteristic of the modern nation-state. While *The Gates Ajar*, like the novels Anderson discusses, draws its readers together into a common experience of time, that experience is internally heterogeneous, joining the linear time of the present to the eternal time that governs heaven. Eternity becomes a constitutive part of the everyday experience of life in the nation, and benevolence entails a new experience of the nation, one in which life in the nation “feels right”¹²¹ when it is measured by a heterogeneous time.

In the forging of this experience, we can see how making the nation feel right again opens up new spatial and temporal structures for the U.S.’s expansion after the Civil War. Much of Americanist scholarship’s recent turn toward transnationalism has assumed that the nation is a rigidly defined entity, invested in and sustained by

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¹²¹ My phrasing deliberately echoes Harriet Beecher Stowe’s oft-quoted declaration that political change requires that individuals “see to it that they feel right” (385). The process I describe here has resonances with the emotional experiences that Naomi Greayer calls “affective geographies” (277). Greayer emphasizes sentimentalism’s ability to connect dissimilar subjects over spatial and social distance. While Greayer’s emphasis is on sentimentalism’s attempts to connect individuals across space, my discussion focuses on the experience of the material world that Phelps’s novel makes available through its conflation of evangelical Protestantism and U.S. national coherence.
illusory consolidations and standardizations. From this perspective, heterogeneities appear antinational. *The Gates Ajar*’s genealogy of benevolence, however, renders the novel’s heterogeneous time as resolutely national. Reading Phelps’s genealogy of benevolence alongside a little-discussed moment in postbellum U.S. imperialism, I suggest that *The Gates Ajar*’s nationalist consolation outlined the temporal boundaries of a benevolent nation’s errand to the world. In the U.S.’s claims to benevolent authority over guano-producing islands in the Caribbean and the Pacific, we can trace not only the lineaments of the U.S.’s later imperialist expansion into the Philippines and Puerto Rico, but also the contours of the heterogeneous time found in *The Gates Ajar*. Claims to benevolence allow the U.S. to define its control over these islands as simultaneously temporary and unending, providing an affective blueprint for the curiously flexible modes of territorial possession that characterized U.S. imperialism at the turn of the twentieth century.

This Other Home

*The Gates Ajar* was nothing short of a cultural sensation in the United States. The brisk sales of the first print run of 4000 copies were followed by more than 80,000 sales in the United States; the novel remained in print well into the 1900s (Smith, Sootin Smith). Ticknor and Fields’ authorized edition spawned numerous pirated versions both in the U.S. and abroad. The novel also generated a wide variety of “Gates Ajar”-themed paraphernalia: a collar, a tippet, a flower arrangement for funerals, a cigar, and, in a cross-marketing endeavor perhaps more confused than inspired, a patent medicine pre-packaged with a pirated copy of the novel (Phelps, *Chapters* 112-7). Phelps’s novel was an exemplar of the nineteenth-century genre of consolation literature, which encompassed a broad range of tracts, stories, poems,
advice literatures, and sermons devoted to comforting the bereaved. Explicitly evangelical and Protestant in outlook, consolation literatures often wedded sentimental narratives to hypotheses about or explicit imaginations of the Protestant afterlife. The Gates Ajar wrote consolation literature’s informative gestures into a first-person account of the passage from bereavement to benevolence. Gates’s narrative traces heaven’s outlines through Mary Cabot’s conversations with her aunt Winifred about the nature of heaven, which Mary records in her diary. At the opening of the novel, Mary, a young, white New Englander, has just learned that her brother Roy has been killed in the Civil War. A “member of an evangelical church, in good and regular standing,” Mary is surprised to find her Calvinist faith wholly inadequate to her crushing sense of loss (7). The trouble here, for Phelps, is with Mary’s understanding of heaven, which Mary outlines in a diary entry annotating a sermon by the appropriately named Dr. Bland. Answering the question “What will be the employments of heaven?”, Bland observes that “We shall study the character of God” (40). Mary summarizes the rest of his thoughts:

An infinite mind must of necessity be eternally an object of study to a finite mind. The finite mind must of necessity find in such study supreme delight. All lesser joys and interests will pale. He felt at moments, in reflecting on this theme, that that good brother who, on being asked if he expected to see the dead wife of his youth in heaven, replied, ‘I expect to be so overwhelmed by the glory of the presence of God, that it may be thousands of years before I

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122 For a broad overview of consolation literature as a genre, see Douglas’s “The Domestication of Death: The Posthumous Congregation” in The Feminization of American Culture and Dana Luciano’s “Moments More Concentrated Than Hours” in Arranging Grief.

123 Popular religious works such as William Holcombe’s Our Children in Heaven (1868), for example, responded to “a cultural hunger” for a “clear, consistent, authorized revelation” of heavenly life, depicting dead children learning their letters in heavenly primary schools and being tucked into bed by heavenly nurses.
shall think of my wife,'—he felt that perhaps this brother was near the truth.

(40-41)

In keeping with the Calvinist theology of the moment, Bland posits a radical opposition between of heaven and earth. The dead in Bland’s heaven exist as disembodied minds, sentenced forever to take “supreme delight” in intellectual contemplation of the Godhead. Dematerialized and disembodied, Bland’s heaven is characterized by its break from earthly domestic life. So overpowering is the glory of God, in this rendering, that home and family will become “lesser joys” that can be appropriately forgotten.\(^{124}\)

What is more horrifying, in Phelps’s narrative economy, is that this rejection of familial and domestic ties is actually desirable, a sign of the believing Christian’s appropriate submission to God’s will. Heaven’s opposition to earth, for Mary, redoubles the separation from Roy that death institutes. Though Roy died a Christian, Mary writes, “[i]f I were to go [to heaven], it would do me no good, for I should not see him there. . . . The singing and worshipping must take up all his time” (8, 14). The “Jealous God” of Calvinism requires such unwavering attention that the loves and cares of earthly life are wholly erased. Dr. Bland’s sermon leaves Mary “empty, unconsolable, groping,” wishing for “something actual, something pleasant, about this place into which Roy has gone” (42).

Enter Mary’s Aunt Winifred, who will supply the “something actual, something pleasant” for which Mary so desperately longs. Where Dr. Bland’s sermon stresses the alterity of heaven and earth, Winifred depicts a heaven that is like earth. Where Dr. Bland sees house, home, and family as “lesser joys” that fade away with

\(^{124}\) In a moment of narrative justice, Dr. Bland comes to see the error of his ways after Mrs. Bland is killed in an accident—upon which he turns to Winifred for counsel about the material heaven she describes and burns the copy of the sermon on heaven summarized in Mary’s journal (123).
the earth, Winifred positions them at the center of heavenly experience. Winifred confidently asserts that in heaven Mary and Roy will interact as they did on earth:

‘Do I think you will see him again? You might as well ask me if I thought God made you and made Roy, and gave you to each other. See him! Why, of course you will see him as you saw him here.’

‘As I saw him here! Why, here I looked into his eyes, I saw him smile, I touched him. Why, Aunt Winifred, Roy is an angel! She patted my hand with a little, soft, comforting laugh.

‘But he is not any the less Roy for that,—not any the less your own real Roy, who will love you and wait for you and be very glad to see you, as he used to love and wait and be glad when you came home from a journey on a cold winter night.’

‘And he met me at the door, and led me in where it was light and warm!’ I sobbed.

‘So he will meet you at the door in this other home, and lead you into the light and the warmth.’ (31-2)

The grammar of the passage sets up a homology between heaven and earth, in which the dead in heaven behave as they did while living—loving, awaiting, welcoming their friends and loved ones. Heaven, in Winifred’s rendering, is a site of daily domestic activity, where one’s absent family members are always waiting at the door.

From this similarity in heavenly and earthly activities follows another similarity in spatial organization. For Roy to welcome Mary home, there must be houses and homes, streets and fields, in short, an entire landscape, that looks like the one on earth. Winifred’s heaven is tangible, material, solid; its inhabitants live “under the conditions of organized society” in a city she describes as “marked into streets and alleys, paved solidly with gold” (79, 88). There, the dead live in “habitations [that] are
altogether like the habitations on earth which are called houses, but more beautiful” (96). Winifred confidently declares that in heaven she “expect[s] to have [her] beautiful home, and [her] husband, and Faith, as [she] had them here; with many differences and great ones, but [hers] just the same” (79). Her house in heaven, Winifred imagines, will even have flowers growing under the windowsill (78).

And so it is that the novel devotes page after page to recording Mary and Winifred’s conversations about what this material, tangible, “reasonable” heaven will be like (70). Mary and Winifred’s discussions draw the contours of heavenly space—how it looks and feels, how it is ordered, what one does there—using the raw materials of New England domesticity. Consolation comes, for Mary, from the repetitive embroidering of the fabric of heaven through her conversations with Winifred. Phelps’s assumption is that Mary’s consolation will become the reader’s: as Mary’s knowledge of a heaven like earth eases her grief, so the reader is meant to learn about heaven, and to be similarly consoled.

Heaven in the Real World

Scholars have often read these images of heaven as ideological distractions from the “real” world.125 Certainly, Phelps’s novel invites its readers to look forward to heavenly satisfactions; Winifred promises a musically inclined young girl that in heaven she will finally have her own piano, while the toddler Faith confidently proclaims that in heaven she will have toys “nicer than they have in the shops in Boston” (82, 103). The critical tendency has been to take this anticipation as creating a kind of substitution, in which the bereaved subject’s unsatisfying present is displaced or obscured by a vision of a fulfilling future. Ann Douglas, for example, suggests that consolation literatures such as The Gates Ajar offer those who are oppressed and

125 For a notable exception, see Gail Smith’s “The Popularization of Hermeneutics.”
disappointed in this world—women, “weak” ministers, the poor—the “bribe” of a domestic heaven ordered to their liking (225). In a similar vein, Nina Baym argues that Phelps’s portrait of a material heaven was “tremendously appealing to people from all walks of life whose own lives had disappointed them” because it “direct[ed] attention away from the real present toward an imaginary future” where earthly desires would be satisfied (xix, xi). For both Baym and Douglas, The Gates Ajar’s griefwork depends on its ability to invite its readers to make a fundamental mistake about their surroundings—to turn away from a “real” present toward an illusory future.

Baym’s distinction between Gates’s “imaginary” future and the reader’s “real” present rests on a set of historically specific assumptions about religion. Unstated in Baym’s analysis, but central to its logic, is what the anthropologist Talal Asad calls “the modern doctrine of secularism” (194). Secularism, in Asad’s reading, is the constellation of changes in practice, law, custom, and culture that distinguishes religion from the “real” world in which all humans, regardless of their religious beliefs, are said to live. The advent of secularism, Asad writes, transforms “the complex Medieval universe” of overlapping religious and civil spaces “into a duality: a world of self-authenticating things in which we really live as social beings and a religious world that exists only in our imagination” (Formations 194, emphasis in original). Secularism, Asad notes, relies on a particular conception of the world as “natural” (that is, as accessible by the senses and governed by natural laws) and “social” (that is, as the site of human activity) that it itself helped to bring into being. Implicit in this “natural” and “social” world is a definition of religion and of its relation to space. “In the discourse of modernity,” Asad writes, “the secular presents itself as the ground from which theological discourse was generated (as a form of false consciousness) and from which it gradually emancipated itself in its march to freedom” (Formations 192). Religion, in this view, is a human invention wholly
internal to secularism's "natural" and "social" world. Its descriptions of alternative spaces and times thus mark not alternate realities but instead fundamental misapprehensions of the (singular and indisputable) "real" world. The category of "imagination" thus comes into service to describe religious places such as heaven as human productions: as imaginations located in this world, not renderings of another world outside of this one.

As a starting point for literary analysis, the secular distinction between religion and the real world determines in advance the import of Phelps's material heaven. In Douglas and Baym's readings, Phelps's rendering of heaven has to be understood through its deviance from the "real" material world in which all humans live. Hence Baym reads Phelps's consolation as working by distracting the reader from the "real present": from this perspective, literary renderings of heaven cannot be anything other than misunderstandings of the real world, because the real world is wholly unaltered by religious belief or religious claims about space. Authorized as "real," this vision of the world effectively cordons off Phelps's novel from the material world in which its readers lived and moved.

This understanding of religion's relation to the "real" world, however, is not the one in which Phelps conceived her response to overwhelming national grief. Nor is it the one in which the novel successfully consoled the bereaved. In the world the novel renders, the natural world accessible to the senses includes heaven. For Phelps, heaven is as real as any other place one has not yet seen: like earth, heaven is tangible, material, accessible to the senses. If we insist as a first principle on the "irrationality" of belief in heaven, or on the radical alterity of religious descriptions of the world and material ones, then we draw an analytic line between Phelps's rendering of life in a New England town and her rendering of a material heaven. Such lines, however, stand in contrast to the novel's repeated attempts to draw heaven and earth together,
and to its insistence that this synthesis is the only thing that can resolve the “general grief” that mars the nation. For what the idea that heaven displaces the real present cannot explain is Phelps’s constant knitting of heaven into the fabric of the quotidian. Heaven, in Phelps’s novel, is accessed in a setting entirely domestic and mundane. Mary and Winifred spin out their vision of heaven sitting by the fireside, walking in the fields, driving to the next town to get butter. Phelps’s readers, likewise, came by this new understanding of heaven precisely through activity undertaken in the “real” world: the activity of reading a popular novel. Again and again, The Gates Ajar returns to the idea that heaven and earth are part of a synthetic whole of human experience. In the process, Gates works to create a sense of space and time intimately intertwined with the “real” world that secularism brings into being. What might we see about this novel, about grief, and about nineteenth century U.S. nationalism, if we read Phelps’s representation of heaven not as a refusal of the real world but as an attempt to create it?

To recognize the continuities that Phelps’s novel draws between heaven and earth does not require that we take her representation of the world as our own. Nor does it require the critic to subscribe to her particular strain of Protestant Christianity, or to any religion at all. What it requires, instead, is that we recognize the inextricability of Phelps’s Christianity, and that Christianity’s rendering of space and time, from the solution to national grief The Gates Ajar creates. The anthropologist Webb Keane’s description of Christianity’s force in the lives of the communities he works with is apposite; noting the recurrent scholarly concern that to write about religion is to endorse it, he observes:

Christianity, its ideas, institutions, social formations, political identities, hopes, desires, fears, norms, and practices, both everyday and extraordinary, exist for an [sic] remarkably large and varied number of people. Christianity may be
part of a taken-for-granted background or a fervent frontline concern, the tone
of people's engagement may be indifferent or passionate, but for them it is
there. (29, emphasis in original)

Here, Keane shifts the critical conversation away from the question of Christianity's
validity, focusing instead on Christianity's force in the world. The "there"-ness of
Christianity, for Keane, requires the researcher to treat it as a "social fact."\textsuperscript{126} a
condition through which individuals understand themselves and their surroundings.
Imaginative fiction, literary scholars have long held, is an especially effective vehicle
for popularizing and disseminating these social facts. The scholar of literary
nationalism Pheng Cheah observes that the novel creates "a symbolic mapping of
external social space" in which "the world inside the novel becomes fused with the
external real world" (8). Readers are thus "enabled to 'see' or represent their external
surroundings as part of the larger protonational or national community to which they
belong as members" (8). The Christianity that Keane sees as "there" in the world of
the believer, when routed through the novel, also produces the "there" that the believer
experiences. The fact that it is a "symbolic" mapping only amplifies the point; the
world created in literature has its effects entirely apart from the question of whether or
not it objectively corresponds to "reality" in the secular, Enlightenment-rationality
sense of the world.

What we see if we look at Phelps's novel apart from the rhetoric of substitution
is a deep investment in constructing relations between heaven and earth—two spaces
that were equally "there" in the life of the reader whose grief responded to the novel's
consolation. In its rendering of a material heaven, \textit{The Gates Ajar} seeks not to
displace the present with the future, or to replace earthly realities with heavenly

\textsuperscript{126} Keane draws this concept from Marcel Mauss's \textit{The Gift: The Form and Reason
for Exchange in Archaic Societies}. 

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reward, but instead attempts a wholesale revision of its readers’ experience of the present in space and time. If, as Cheah notes, the novel enables the reader to conflate the world inside the novel with the world outside of it, then what we see in The Gates Ajar’s rendering of heaven is an attempt to simultaneously reorganize daily life and the nation form. Later, I will address The Gates Ajar’s reformulation of the nation in more detail. First, however, I turn to The Gates Ajar’s reformulation of the reader’s present.

Restoring the Senses

To understand how Phelps’s novel seeks to ameliorate grief, we have to understand the relations Phelps posited between emotions and the material world. In The Gates Ajar, grief is not only an emotional disorder; it is also a sensory one. The anthropologist of religion Charles Hirschkind describes sense perception “as a relationship between a perceiving subject and a world of sensible, material objects” (28). Hirschkind draws this turn toward the sensual, in part, from the work of cultural anthropologist Nadia Seremetakis. Seremetakis describes the dense network of ties between the body and its surroundings that constitutes sense perception:

The sensory is not only encapsulated within the body as an internal capacity of power, but is also dispersed out there on the surface of things as the latter’s autonomous characteristics, which can then invade the body as perceptual experience. Here sensory interiors and exteriors constantly pass into each other in the creation of extra-personal experience. (qtd. in Hirschkind 28-9)

For Hirschkind, studying the senses directs scholars “to the transfers, exchanges and attachments that hinge the body to its environment” (29). These attachments, Hirschkind suggests, become visible in “the historically specific categories and symbols that organize experience” and that teach subjects what to perceive and how to
perceive it (29). Religious studies scholar Robert Orsi makes a similar point when he suggests that “to understand religious practice” scholars must possess “an understanding of the knowledges of the body in the culture, a clear sense of what has been embodied in the corporeality of the people who participate in religious practices, what their tongues, skin, ears, ‘know’” (7). As Jose Esteban Muñoz’s recent work on the racialization of affect suggests, these “knowledges of the body” are shot through with the racial discourses of their period, and are themselves instrumental in constructing and sustaining racialized identity.\textsuperscript{127}

Taken together, this scholarship suggests the imbrication of emotions, race, and the material world—how white feminine grief was crucially positioned at a racialized intersection between self and world. Grief, for Phelps, disrupts this relation. Mary writes:

The house feels like a prison. I walk up and down and wonder that I ever called it home. Something is the matter with the sunsets; they come and go, and I do not notice them. Something ails the voices of the children, snowballing down the street; all the music has gone out of them, and they hurt me like knives. The harmless, happy children! (3-4)

The transformation Mary records here is not simply metaphorical. The house “feels like a prison” because Mary’s senses no longer register properly. The sunsets fail to draw Mary’s attention; the sound of the children’s voices stabs instead of soothes. As grief alters Mary’s experience of the material world, it also alters the material world in itself. Mary’s inability to “notice” the sunsets means that “something is wrong” with them; the children’s voices “hurt . . . like knives” because the music they once possessed has disappeared. Mary’s sensory perceptions blur into and meld with the

\textsuperscript{127} See Muñoz’s “Feeling Brown: Ethnicity and Affect in Ricardo Bracho’s The Sweetest Hangover (and Other STDs).”
material, suturing together what she perceives and what really is. It is at this juncture between the body and its surroundings that grief becomes simultaneously a personal and a collective phenomenon; the “occult force” of a “general grief,” for Phelps, thus extends from those individually bereaved to “choke the very air . . . like a material miasma” (Chapters 97).

Central to grief’s disruptive force is its temporality. The sensory disorder that grief introduces into this world comes out of the way eternity is constituted. The dematerialized, abstracted heaven to which Dr. Bland looks forward, and against which Winifred offers her material, domestic paradise, not only fails to offer something comforting to anticipate; it also, and more importantly, dictates a set of temporal relations between the dead and the living, and between heaven and earth, that amplify and congeal grief. Dr. Bland’s heaven is governed by a temporality entirely other to earthly human existence; what enables Dr. Bland to imagine that “it may be thousands of years” before he remembers his wife is the fact that eternity’s long duration makes sequential, calendrical time meaningless. Drowned out in Dr. Bland’s immense eternity are the moments and hours, the temporal measures, that orient life on earth and make it fulfilling. It is this conception that Phelps, through Winifred, wants to critique. Winifred’s conversation with Deacon Quirk is illustrative. In response to Winifred’s question “What do you suppose people will do in heaven?,” Deacon Quirk claims that they will

    glorify God, and sing Worthy the Lamb! We shall be clothed in white robes
    with palms in our hands, and bow before the Great White Throne. We shall be
    engaged in such employments as befit sinless creatures in a spiritooal [sic]
    state of existence. (86)

Deacon Quirk’s description of heavenly activity begins with an abstraction; to “glorify God” may take many forms or none at all. Nor does “glorifying God” seem to
participate in the linear temporality that governs action: while one might begin, at some point in time, to glorify God, the act of glorifying can never be completed. Without linear, progressive temporality, Deacon Quirk’s heaven becomes increasingly vague, marked by the undefined “such employments as besit sinless creatures in a spiritoal state of existence.” Winifred’s question about what people will do in heaven confounds Deacon Quirk precisely because neither he, nor Winifred, nor Phelps’s implied readers can imagine human action outside of a linear time that moves from past to present to future. Winifred observes as much when she narrates Deacon Quirk’s heaven back to him:

> do you honestly think that you should be happy to go and put on a white dress and stand still in a choir with a green branch in one hand and a singing-book in the other, and sing and pray and never do anything but sing and pray, this year, next year, and every year forever? (87)

What Winifred knows, and Deacon Quirk does not want to admit, is that Deacon Quirk’s unchanging, atemporal eternity cannot offer a hospitable home for the living. By rewriting Deacon Quirk’s heaven in quotidian terms, Winifred establishes its impossibility. To be in Deacon Quirk’s heaven is not to step out of time into eternity, Winifred argues; it is instead to experience eternity as the infinite repetition of the same, “this year, next year, and every year forever.”

As this atemporal heaven fails to offer comfort to the bereaved, it also fails to be a desirable endpoint or guide for the Christian. Teaching Sunday-school to the young girls in town, Winifred discovers that her properly catechized students believe in a heaven where nothing changes and nothing ever happens. Asked what she thinks she will do in heaven, one girl replies, “I suppose we shall all just stand there!” (82). Eternity, in this vision, equals stasis: as temporal measures lose their meaning, human action becomes impossible. This unchanging heaven holds no charms for Winifred’s
other students, one of whom claims that she would be “as well off” in hell, “except for the fire” (83). Nor does this vision of eternity console Mary, for whom an atemporal eternity promises only eternal separation from Roy. Permanently occupied with the indefinite task of “glorifying God,” Roy will be uninterested in and unable to acknowledge Mary or give her the “one little talk” for which she so desperately longs (8). Mary grieves not only because Roy is physically absent, but also because Roy’s location in heaven means that he is, quite literally, removed from the time of the living.

This atemporal eternity thus abandons Mary to her grief, leaving her “all alone in any world that [she] can ever live in, forever and ever” (30). Mary, like the other characters in the consolation literatures that Dana Luciano discusses, has nothing left but her past memories of time spent with Roy. In consolation literatures, Luciano suggests, grief often appears as an inappropriate, even amoral fixation with the past; consolation is necessary so that the pleasurable memories of the dead do not “congeal into lagging,” into the subject’s refusal to orient themselves to “the requirements of life and the telos of the Christian subject” in eternity (39). A central goal of consolation literatures, then, is to draw those who grieve back into a linear, forward-moving time that is directed toward eternity.

If consolation literatures are trying to reorient the bereaved diachronically—to a sense of time in which events follow one another in sequence—as Luciano suggests, Phelps’s novel also reorients the bereaved synchronically—to a new sense of what goes on in any one moment. Eternity, in Phelps’s novel, is not only the destination to which the living look forward; it is also intimately related to the everyday present. For Winifred, eternity “cannot be . . . the great blank ocean which most of us have somehow or other been brought up to feel that it is” (79). To comfort and console the living, heavenly life must look and feel like everyday life on earth, and therefore must
be measured by a progressive, linear time. Not only do the dead in heaven spend their
time doing what they love to do best, but their actions unfold sequentially, in a time
that moves from past to present to future. In heaven, Winifred suggests, mechanically
inclined Bin Quirk can look forward to building heavenly churches, shepherding them
from conception to completion; Winifred and Mary will interrupt their daily domestic
tasks to have a cup of tea and talk over their past lives on earth (102, 72). Roy will
wait by the fire for Mary, Winifred suggests, and then welcome her in from the cold,
“as he did on earth” (31-2). Winifred’s rendering of heavenly activity transforms
eternity from a “great blank ocean” into a succession of intimate, domestic moments,
and in the process makes it desirable to the living.

If Winifred’s eternity is like the reader’s everyday life, it is also, in her
estimation, a part of that everyday life. For Winifred, heaven exists in the present; the
heavenly activity that she records is not an alternative reality, but instead a part of the
here and now. What had been figured as an epistemological rupture between God’s
time and man’s now appears as a simple spatial distance. If heaven is a place like any
earthly place, its activity is going on at the same time as earthly happenings.

Winifred’s revision to heaven thus allows Mary to think of Roy as sharing her time.
At the beginning of the novel, Mary consistently speaks of Roy in the past tense or the
conditional mood, as when she wonders “how he would like” her plan to share her
household with Winifred permanently (60). Without a sense that time progresses in
heaven, Roy’s wishes and desires become either memories or hypotheticals. In
keeping with her new theology, Winifred corrects Mary’s mistake: “Why put any
‘would’ in that sentence? . . . It belongs in the present tense” (60). The present tense
in which Winifred inscribes Roy, here, is Mary’s present. Mary’s plan to share her
house with Winifred happens, in the novel’s internal world, in the same moment and
at the same time as Roy’s liking.
This new sense of simultaneity is the temporal motor of consolation. Mary responds to Winifred’s correction by declaring, “Then I am sure he likes it, . . . he likes it,” repeating “the words over till [she] was ready to cry for rest in their sweet sound” (60). Eternal life in heaven, here, is not a distant endpoint to daily life; instead, it is a part of the living present, accessible in the experience of the everyday. Thus Winifred suggests that the dead not only share the present of the living, they also “are very present with us” (50). Visiting Roy’s grave, Winifred explains to Mary that the dead continue to minister invisibly to the living, an idea that transforms Mary’s experience of the material world:

And yet I did not seem alone. The low branches swept with a little soft sigh across the grave; the May-flowers wrapped me in with fragrance thick as incense; the tiny sparrow turned her soft eyes at me over the edge of the nest, and chirped contentedly; the “blessed sunshine” talked with me as it touched the edges of the ivy-leaves to fire.

I cannot write it even here, how these things stole into my heart and hushed me. If I had seen him standing by the stainless cross, it would not have frightened or surprised me. There—not dead or gone, but there—it helps me, and makes me strong! (56)

Roy’s imagined proximity restores Mary’s senses to their proper order. Instead of the jarring sounds of the children’s voices, Mary hears the soft, almost human sigh of the branches sweeping the grave; instead of absent sunsets, she sees and hears the sunshine as it transforms the ivy. Though Mary registers the possibility of Roy’s physical presence, she is consoled without it. More important than contact with the dead,128 here, is the way it feels to live in a world where such things are possible—

128 Though Phelps’s family was involved in Spiritualism from the 1840s on, Phelps was careful to distance The Gates Ajar from Spiritualist practice. Winifred openly critiques Spiritualism at moments, declaring, for instance, that “[t]he Spiritualistic
where heaven and earth coexist in the same space and time. In the grammar of the passage, it is the collection of sense perceptions that follow from the interrelation of heavenly and earthly space and time—the sigh of the brush, the touch of the scented flowers—that “stole into [her] heart and hushed [her]” (56). For Phelps, the knowledge that heaven and earth share the same temporality corrects the body’s relation to the material world. Where Mary in her grief experienced the house as “a prison,” she now sits out in the orchard sewing with Winifred, pleasantly devoting an afternoon to “feminine vanities” (70). Where the voices of children playing used to “hurt . . . like knives,” after her experience at the gravesite she looks on and listens approvingly as Faith plays with Dr. Bland’s daughter, and even joins in the play herself (4). Slowly, Mary begins to participate in domestic labors, helping Winifred sew Faith’s clothing and running errands for the housekeeper Phoebe. As it lessens her grief, Mary’s new understanding of heaven and earth enables her to feel “at home” in the domestic sphere again.

As Mary experiences her surroundings differently, her grief is transformed into a quiet, settled benevolence.\textsuperscript{129} Relocated into a world where heaven and earth share the same time, Mary takes pleasure in a new set of responsibilities: “to be pleasant to old Phoebe, and charitable to Meta Tripp, and faithful to my \textit{not} very interesting little

\textsuperscript{129} In pointing to Phelps’s transformation of grief into benevolence, I am mindful of Susan Ryan’s observation that benevolence, in the nineteenth century, denoted both an emotional state (in which one would be predisposed to “doing good”) and a set of actions (charitable giving, reform efforts, and the like). See Ryan, \textit{The Grammar of Good Intentions}. Phelps’s portrait of benevolence similarly straddles both the emotional and the active, encompassing both the sensory experience that make it possible for her to do benevolent work and the benevolent actions that flow from those feelings.
scholars [in the Sunday school], and a bit watchful of worn-out Mrs. Bland” (108). Domestic life, properly recognized in its relation to heaven, becomes synonymous again with good works. But in the process benevolent life in the domestic is transformed. For Winifred, benevolent labor in the present provides the subject with direct access to heavenly life. “God keeps us briskly at work in this world,” Winifred tells Mary, because in heaven “we shall spend our best energies as we spent them here,—in comforting, teaching, helping, saving people whose very souls we love better than our own” (51). For Mary to watch over “worn-out Mrs. Bland” is to do the same work that Roy does for Mary or that Winifred’s dead husband does for Winifred. Doing benevolent work, in the world of the novel, makes everyday life feel like eternity.

In converting grief into benevolence, Phelps’s novel offers its readers a new experience of daily life in time. Benevolence, here, becomes not only a feeling and an action but also a way of experiencing duration, a way of knowing and measuring time’s passages. Brought into relation with heaven, each momentary act of benevolence in the present becomes an experience of the eternal. Knowing that her daily work is heavenly work directs Mary’s attention to a heavenly future; thus Mary declares “that [heaven] is the reality, this [earth] is the dream; that the substance, this the shadow” (109). To feel that heaven “is the reality” is, paradoxically, to become more intensely engaged in one’s immediate present. Minding Faith for Winifred one day, for example, Mary describes how she was so engrossed in their playing that she loses track of the forward movement of time. Mary narrates her play with Faith as an infinite sequence:

She took me up garret, and down cellar; on top of the wood-pile, and into the apple trees; I fathomed the mysteries of Old Man’s Castle and Still Palm; I was her grandmother, I was her baby, I was a rabbit, I was a chestnut horse, I was a
watch dog, I was a mild-tempered giant, I was a bear “warranted not to eat little girls,” I was a roaring hippopotamus and a canary bird, I was Jeff Davis and I was Moses in the bulrushes, and of what I was, the time faileth me to tell.

(126)

Hinted at by the Biblical diction of a time that “faileth” is the way in which Mary’s experience of this engrossing present inscribes heaven’s infinite variety in everyday time. Mary’s sense of the present expands outward until “past and future” are “forgotten” (127). Yet as this expansive present encompasses a seemingly unending sequence of events, so it is enclosed by the progressive time it momentarily erases. Narrating retrospectively, Mary recognizes “with a curious, mingled sense of the ludicrous and the horrible” that while she has been caring for Faith, Winifred has been in Worcester receiving the news from her doctor that she is terminally ill (126-7). The nearness of heaven, here, resolves the tension between Mary’s all-encompassing present and the tragedy that goes on in the meanwhile, for Winifred’s death incorporates Mary permanently into the benevolent caretaking that is the proper aim of domestic life. Acts that are small, time-delimited, and temporary, such as being kind to one’s housekeeper, become equivalent episodes within an eternity of benevolent work. Similarly, the eternalization of benevolence helps to divide and measure eternity into a livable time, keeping it from being the “great blank ocean” Mary so desperately fears. As it mediates grief, Phelps’s portrait of a domestic heaven creates the desire to do good as a way of experiencing time, imbuing those good works with a duration at once temporary and eternal.

In seeking to recreate her readers’ experience of daily life as part of eternity, Phelps had an explicitly public agenda: to make the nation, staggering under the weight of post-Civil War grief, into a livable place again. If this “general grief” drew the nation together after the war, it also deformed it; white feminine misery “crowded”
the streets and darkened the land\textsuperscript{130} (\textit{Chapters 96, 97}). Mary’s restoration to a proper sensory experience of home and friends—to child care, to “feminine vanities”—promises to do the national work of undoing the “general grief” that crowds and darkens the land. In its investment in the most intimate reaches of its readers’ suffering, the novel aims at a national transformation, one that preserves the unification of grief while restoring streets and houses, homes and cities, to their utopian pre-war state. So too it links this national transformation to the recuperation of white sorrow into white benevolence. To live in benevolence’s hybrid time, Phelps’s novel suggests, is to live within a properly constituted nation, a nation that “feels right.”

Yet if we read Phelps’s griefwork and her benevolence from this perspective, we do not see the nation-state that literary scholarship on nationalism has trained us to expect to see. I want to focus here on one construction of the nation—Benedict Anderson’s suggestion that the nation arises from homogeneous, empty time—in order to think about how reading the affects challenges our understanding of the material form the nation takes. Anderson’s account of nation formation originates from the idea that the nation fills a vacuum left by the “dusk of religious modes of thought” in the eighteenth century (11).\textsuperscript{131} As religion’s ability to explain the world diminishes, Anderson suggests, the nation arises as an alternative frame within which people can organize their lives and find them meaningful. What makes the advent of the nation possible, in Anderson’s argument, is a transformation in the way that people

\textsuperscript{130} Phelps writes: “At that time, it will be remembered, our country was dark with sorrowing women. . . . Is there not an actual, occult force in the existence of a general grief? . . . It is like a material miasma. The gayest man breathes it, if he breathe at all; and the most superficial cannot escape it” (\textit{Chapters 96, 97}).

\textsuperscript{131} Anderson is careful to note that nationalism does not “supersede” religion; but with that caveat, he does suggest a linear transition in time from a religious past to a modern world of nation-states (22).
understood and experienced time. Per Anderson, medieval society was governed by a concept of simultaneity “wholly alien to our own” (24). In the medieval’s “Messianic time,” Christianity’s dominant role in Western European society assigns explanatory force to prophetic and religious temporalities (22-3). Christianity links past prophetic utterances with present and future fulfillments, and thus creates “a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present” (24). This Messianic time is displaced by a new understanding of simultaneity as “temporal coincidence” in a shared present that is differentiated from the past and the future by clocks and calendars. Under this simultaneity, time is homogeneous—that is, it is singular and the same everywhere—and empty—that is, it has no intrinsic meaning save whatever event fills its regular divisions at a given moment. Rendered unitary and standardized by the advent of clocks and calendars, time becomes linear and progressive, a succession of moments in sequence in which all subjects, regardless of their religious beliefs, live and move.

What makes this new simultaneity possible, for Anderson, is the circulation of novels and newspapers. With its interior world of simultaneous activity—in which one character talks on the phone while another goes shopping—the novel functions as “a complex gloss on the word ‘meanwhile,’” teaching its readers about the existence of anonymous, spatially distant others who share the same temporal moments (25-26). The novel thus models the kind of internal cohesion by which the national subject will come to feel himself a part of a national collective, made up of anonymous, spatially distant others living in the same time. For Anderson, homogeneous, empty time is what “made it possible to ‘think’ the nation” (22). Inserted into this new simultaneity, subjects can imagine themselves connected to unknown others in a shared present, and can imagine the nation, like a person, as a “sociological organism” moving “steadily down (and up) history” just as the characters in novels do (Anderson 26).
Embedded in Anderson’s concept of nationness is the idea that national times are distinct from religious times. In suggesting that nationalism functions like religion, Anderson draws a clear line between the nation and religion, and between national times and religious ones (5). Implicit in Anderson’s argument, as in Baym’s and Douglas’s, is the idea that religious apprehensions of the world under nationalism become private and individual, while the nation takes up a public explanatory force. What then of the broad swath of fictions at mid-century that, in varying modes and to different degrees, sought to use the novel’s new sense of simultaneity to bring into being deeply Christian (usually white, almost always evangelical Protestant) “modes of apprehending the world” (Anderson 22)? If novelistic simultaneity forms the nation, what are we to make of a novelistic simultaneity turned toward the Christian, marshaled in the service of making heaven real, of placing eternity in the everyday?

While in some senses The Gates Ajar’s Protestantism lends itself to a prototypically Andersonian sense of simultaneity, its offer of consolation is predicated on expanding this sense of simultaneity to include the dead in the world of the living. In making it possible for the reader to experience the everyday present as a part of eternity, The Gates Ajar rewrites the temporal structures that make national community possible. Indeed, the affective power of the material heaven comes from the knowledge that heaven is a part of the “meanwhile” the novel creates. In The Gates Ajar’s world, consolation comes, and grief is transformed into benevolence, when readers understand the meanwhile that binds them to each other in the nation as extending into heaven. This extension of the meanwhile transforms the homogeneous, empty time through which readers, in Anderson’s argument, feel themselves part of a national collective. Extended into heaven in Phelps’s novel, novelistic simultaneity takes part in the revised eternity that governs heavenly life. The idea that eternity can be experienced as a part of everyday life introduces a selective split into the internally
homogeneous time that for Anderson makes the nation possible. Each present moment, in which the novel invites the reader to experience herself as part of the nation, also offers the reader the chance to experience heaven, and to experience present labors as eternal ones. The national time generated by the novel becomes in *The Gates Ajar* internally, and selectively, heterogeneous—simultaneously singular in its assertion that it is the one reality that governs all apart from their belief, and plural insofar as the one time of the nation is both present and eternal, progressive and unending, calendrical and ceaseless. Feeling right about the nation, in Phelps’s novel, requires this doubled experience of national time.

Woven into this benevolent national time is a new concept of possession. The experience of eternity in the everyday that is the preferred mode of good works comes out of a new heaven that replicates earthly materiality, and in the process extends present-tense modes of ownership. When Winifred declares “I expect to have my beautiful home, and my husband, and Faith, as I had them here,” she qualifies this statement by suggesting that there will be “many differences and great ones” between her earthly home and her heavenly one (79). Yet this home, for Winifred, will be “mine just the same.” What remains consistent between heaven and earth are not necessarily the objects themselves—though they often do—but instead the role they fulfill for the individual. If a piano or a heavenly tool-box creates a desire to go to heaven, then Phelps promises them; what is essential is that the need these objects

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132 Gail Smith’s “The Popularization of Hermeneutics” stresses this point, extending it to describe Phelps’s material heaven as a predominantly figurative structure. If Phelps intended her rendering of a material heaven as an image, her contemporary readers, favorable or not, seemed to miss this point; the immense controversy spurred by the book revolved around the audacity of a material heaven, as did the solace described by her readers. Here, I would observe that the very idea of an unknown land made visible in literature relies on the mobility between image and a posited reality that was especially important to literatures of travel and exploration. For an example of this process, see “Razing Arizona” in Mary Pat Brady’s *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies.*
represent is fulfilled. The form of the possession may vary, but the possession itself remains constant. Possession, here, partakes of the simultaneously temporary and eternal time that is constitutive of benevolence. Not only is the desire to do good founded on this mode of possession, but the act of spreading the knowledge that domestic possessions are both temporary and eternal is itself, in the novel, a benevolent deed. These recursive relations between benevolence and possession, set into a time at once eternal and temporary, are central to making a nation that is livable, that feels right.

In Phelps's attempt to make the nation "feel right," we can see the lineaments of a larger cultural work. Motivating Amy Kaplan's important observation that domestic literature conflates the home and the nation is an insistence that these literary conflagrations help to produce, structure, and legitimate the U.S.'s imperial endeavors in the world. In what follows, I want to draw Phelps's retiming of benevolent possession into conversation with one critically-neglected episode in the U.S.'s expansionist history, the postbellum controversy over the legal status of Navassa Island, a tiny atoll in the Caribbean. Declared an "appurtenance" of the United States under an obscure and vaguely-worded 1856 statute, Navassa would in the late 1880s become the proving ground for the logic of the Insular Cases, which defined colonial possessions such as the Philippines and Puerto Rico as "foreign to the United States in a domestic sense." The legal jurisdiction over Navassa that the U.S. would seek to

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133 Recall, for example, the joy and hope that Winifred's promise of a piano inspires in Deacon Quirk's niece (82).
134 In thinking about what Kaplan calls "the cultures of U.S. imperialism," I draw on the critical trajectory outlined not only by Kaplan but also by earlier work on sentimental fictions that insists on the sentimental's cultural work—especially Jane Tompkins' Sensational Designs and Shirley Samuels's edited collection The Culture of Sentiment. Kaplan's turn to empire as a cultural form is presaged by works such as Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands and Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein's "Americanness as a Concept."
define in the 1880s would be intertwined with public demands for that jurisdiction to take a benevolent form. In the interplay between benevolence and possession, between legal jurisdiction and affective responsibilities, we can see not only the development of new temporal modes of U.S. possession, we can also see how these modes of possession depend on a set of affective resonances that make the contradictions of colonial possession register as coherent and proper.

Feeling Right About Empire

It is easy to think of benevolence as imperialism's alibi—as the gentle veneer that obscures colonial power's exploitation and legitimates its repressions and brutalities. Laura Briggs's observation that it was of "crucial importance" that the U.S. "identify the federal role on [post-1898 Puerto Rico] as one of performing good works," for instance, underscores the distance between claims to benevolence and the reality of the colonial situation (13). Writing about the Philippines, Vicente Rafael similarly describes benevolence as a rhetorical construct meant to "efface[] the violence of conquest" (21). Surely, this was one of the important ways in which benevolence worked in the colonial errand, and especially helped to forge consent "back home." The valuable work done by analyses such as these points us to another question. Was the immense cultural effort put into making imperialism feel benevolent meant only to obscure? Or did benevolence's ability to screen the violence of empire speak to another set of connections, a more direct relation between benevolence and the U.S.'s imperial errand? If Phelps's novel infuses benevolence with a set of spatial and temporal structures, then we might see benevolent claims for imperialism as more than simple excuses; they might, instead, be important sites at which the material terms of colonial possession are mapped.
Despite its relative absence from the scholarly discourse on U.S. expansion, Navassa Island and the controversy over how, and especially for how long, the U.S. would possess it were central events in the development of turn of the twentieth century U.S. imperialism. In defining the territory acquired in the Spanish-American War as “foreign to the United States in a domestic sense,” the Supreme Court in the Insular Cases staked out the nation-state’s boundaries through temporal distinctions (qtd. in Burnett 795). Territories that belonged “permanently” to the nation, such as Arizona and New Mexico before statehood, were within national boundaries, while territories temporarily “held” or “possessed by” the U.S., such as the Philippines and Puerto Rico, occupied a liminal state between the “foreign” and the “domestic” (Burnett 795). Navassa Island would be the site at which the Supreme Court would first legitimate the idea that the U.S. might possess territory temporarily, and thus would provide, according to legal historian Christina Duffy Burnett, “an essential foundation for the imperialist policies of the McKinley Administration and the constitutional decisions of the Court that sanctioned those policies” (796).

To trace Navassa’s influence on the logic of U.S. expansion, we have to turn back to the origins of the U.S.’s claim to the island.135 When farmers in the 1840s discovered that guano—the dried droppings of birds and bats, condensed over years into a rock-like substance—made an exemplary fertilizer, the race was on to secure a steady, cheap supply for the United States. Tiny, uninhabited islands in the Caribbean and the Pacific that had seemed useless for capitalist exploitation turned out to have extensive guano deposits, and thus the Congress, led by ardent expansionist William Henry Seward, crafted a statute that would pave the way for U.S. companies to mine guano under the aegis of the nation-state. Declaring that any island on which a citizen

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135 My account of Navassa’s complex legal history, and the public controversy that accompanied it, is indebted to Christina Duffy Burnett’s “The Edges of Empire” and John Cashman’s “Slaves Under our Flag.”
of the U.S. discovered guano could be claimed as an “appurtenance” of the nation, the
Guano Islands Act crafted a new, strictly delimited form of temporary national
authority. Responding to concerns that the U.S. would be acquiring new
responsibilities with this extension of its authority, Seward informed the Congress that
“the bill itself . . . provides whenever the Guano should be exhausted, or cease to be
found on the islands, they should revert and relapse out of the jurisdiction of the
United States” (qtd. in Burnett 786). Navassa, like more than seventy other guano
islands, was thus claimed as a temporary “appurtenance” to the nation.

Central to the afterlife of the Guano Islands Act was the deliberately vague
category of “appurtenance.” Despite the confidently declarative tone of the
legislation, what it meant for a place to “appertain” to the United States was obscure.
What kind of jurisdiction did the nation have over these temporary “appurtenances”?
What kinds of moral obligations did the nation have to them? These questions came
to a head at Navassa during a September 1889 labor uprising. Guano mining, Burnett
notes, was “hellish” work; the nearly 140 African-American men who mined
Navassa’s guano labored under conditions of practical, if not legal, slavery (788).
Denied adequate food, water, and medical care, and frequently beaten by their white
overseers, the Navassa miners revolted on September 14, killing five white men.
Two nearby ships came to the rescue of the remaining overseers; the crew of the
American vessel arrested the leaders of the revolt and transported them back to

136 Press accounts chronicled the frequent physical abuse to which the miners were
subjected, the utter inadequacy of their provisions, and the practical confinement
afforded by Navassa’s isolated location in the Caribbean and decried the “hard terms”
of the miners’ labor contracts, which were so draconian that even the miners who
successfully completed their appointed terms returned to the U.S. with little or no
income. Men whose contracts had ended were frequently kept on the island and
forced to continue to work for months; sick and injured men were on occasion strung
up by their thumbs as an example to others. See Cashman, Burnett, and the newspaper
articles cited below.
Baltimore, where they were tried and convicted of murder. Attorneys for the three convicted miners appealed, arguing that the mode of temporary possession outlined in the Guano Islands Act did not extend U.S. law to these “appurtenances.” Upholding the convictions of the miners, the Supreme Court disagreed. The Court’s decision, published as Jones v. United States, legitimated the mode of temporary possession outlined by the Guano Islands Act:

By the law of nations, recognized by all civilized states, dominion of new territory may be acquired by discovery and occupation as well as by cession or conquest; and when citizens or subjects of one nation, in its name, and by its authority, or with its assent, take and hold actual, continuous, and useful possession (although only for the purpose of carrying on a particular business, such as catching and curing fish, or working mines,) of territory unoccupied by any other government or its citizens, the nation to which they belong may exercise such jurisdiction and for such period as it sees fit over territory so acquired. This principle affords ample warrant for the legislation of congress concerning guano islands. (Jones v. U.S., 137 U.S. 202, 212)

In affirming the U.S.’s jurisdiction over Navassa, the Court in Jones elevated the Guano Islands Act from a narrowly drawn congressional statute to a constitutional principle. Keyed to the capitalist time of resource exploitation, national jurisdiction—over the guano islands or other territories—may cover “such period as [the U.S.] sees fit over territory so acquired.” As “carrying on a particular business” provides an “ample warrant” for the U.S.’s expanded jurisdiction, so the end of this business marks its temporal limit. With this transformation, temporary national authority

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became not a situational exception to the rule of national possession\textsuperscript{137} but instead the rule itself.\textsuperscript{138}

In asserting this newly temporary time for national possession, however, the Supreme Court failed to solve the problem presented by the guano miners: that within the nation’s jurisdiction, if not within its borders, people were suffering. From the start, the press coverage of the Navassa revolt and its aftermath was haunted by the horrifying conditions under which the men labored. Repeatedly, these narratives characterized the miners as \textit{de facto} slaves,\textsuperscript{139} and in the process sought to transform the labor exploitation at Navassa into a lapse in the narrative of the U.S.’s inevitable progress forward, an anachronistic return\textsuperscript{140} to the slavery that the Civil War should have resolved. To understand fully the threat that the outbreak of the “Navassa slavery” posed to a post-emancipation nation, we need to locate U.S. fears about

\textsuperscript{137} While historically the U.S. had defined its territories as future states—hence the protracted debates about the desirability of acquiring territory, and the inhabitants who came with it, from Mexico—the \textit{Jones} decision made it possible for the nation-state to assert control over territory without incorporating it. The shift here is from an eternal and immutable bond between the nation and its territories to a new sense of contingency and flexibility. Particularly striking is the advent of this flexible possessiveness just a few decades after the Civil War, which asserted the impossibility of severing this bond.

\textsuperscript{138} In the Insular Cases, the Supreme Court invoked the language of “appurtenance” crafted in the Guano Islands Act to describe the U.S.’s relation to the Philippines and Puerto Rico. See Burnett 794-5.

\textsuperscript{139} For a broad overview of the press coverage of the Navassa revolt and its aftermath, see Cashman, “Slaves Under Our Flag.” For calls for reform and depictions of the Navassa miners as slaves, see “Slaves Under Our Flag,” “He Predicted a Massacre,” “Driven to Desperation: A Story of the Riot at Navassa Island,” “Benjamin’s Budget,” “Imprisonment for Life: The President Commutes the Sentences of the Navassa Rioters,” “Advice to Congress,” Editorial [“The Conviction at Baltimore”], “Lenient with the Rioters,” “The Navassa Rioters,” and “Navassa Slavery.”

\textsuperscript{140} As Dana Luciano notes, unremediated grief threatens this same move backward. Consolation literatures thus “underscored the need for any subject who wanted a future to forswear the asynchronicity of ‘repining,’ allowing grief to prevent a return to ordinary time, by associating such behaviors with a mode of pastness that was not timeless but simply archaic: the heathen or savage past” (39).
Navassa within the larger context of transnational guano production. As Burnett notes, the U.S.'s investment in guano islands came about because of a Peruvian monopoly on the worldwide guano supply. Most guano, in the 1840s, was mined on the Chincha Islands off the coast of Peru by Chinese contract laborers, brought to the islands "by force and by fraud" (Burnett 783). Accounts of the brutal labor conditions African-American miners experienced at Navassa thus resonated with narratives of the similarly horrifying suffering of the Chinese workers in the Chinca Islands' guano mines (788). Indeed, as cultural historian Moon-Ho Jung notes, Chinese "cooie" labor in the postbellum United States "embodied slavery after emancipation" (698). Facilitating the comparison between Navassa's workers in the present and the slaves of the past was the slippage between guano mining, "cooie" labor, and slavery. By making this equation, press accounts reframed the nation's response to the "Navassa slavery" as a reprisal of the labor of emancipation. As Saidiya Hartman observes, postbellum culture sought to claim emancipation as a benevolent errand. In exchange for "the gift of freedom and wage labor," Hartman writes, the former slave became the perpetually indebted object of benevolence (119-121, 130). The recurrence of slavery at Navassa imperiled this narrative of national benevolence; left unremediated, press

141 Jung's insightful article traces the history of attempts to outlaw "cooies" in the United States. Recounting the history of the 1882 debates on the Chinese Exclusion Act, Jung quotes a senator from California who declared that "those who had been 'so clamorous against what was known as African slavery' had a moral obligation to vote for Chinese exclusion, 'when we all know that they are used as slaves by those who bring them to this country, that their labor is for the benefit of those who practically own them'" (677). "Cooie" labor in the U.S. was inseparable from the exploitation of "cooies" abroad, as a Nevada Republican senator observed in 1870: "'These people are brought here under these infamous cooie contracts . . . the same contracts that have disgraced humanity in the taking of these poor people to the West India islands and various portions of South America as slaves'" (qtd. in Jung 698).

142 For the phrase "Navassa slavery," see the article of that name in the Waterloo (Iowa) Daily Courier. In seeing emancipation as benevolent, we might also hear echoes of what Vicente Rafael, writing about U.S. imperialism in the Philippines, calls "white love." See White Love, 19-23.
coverage asserted, the exploitation of the guano miners would mark a public undoing of the benevolent labor of emancipation.\textsuperscript{143}

Yet this moment of risk also allowed for the nation to reassert its identity as benevolent. Claiming that the conditions at Navassa "call[ed] loudly for reform" (qtd. in Cashman 19), press accounts demanded that the Congress and the President put regulatory flesh on the jurisdictional bones formed by the Supreme Court. Responding to a mounting sense of public outrage, President Benjamin Harrison issued a public statement decrying the conditions at Navassa and commuting the convicted miners' death sentences to life imprisonment. In a widely reprinted statement, Harrison condemned the "cruel" treatment the miners received at the hands of their overseers, claiming that conditions were such that they would "drive men to desperation" ("Benjamin’s Budget," "Advice"). There, and in his address to the Congress at the end of the year, Harrison argued that the U.S. should "enforce a just and humane treatment" of the miners by stationing a government officer, charged with the duty to supervise the miners’ living and working conditions, at Navassa and other guano islands ("Benjamin’s Budget").\textsuperscript{144} The Jones court’s extension of jurisdiction, here, was through Harrison’s statement transformed into a benevolent errand by which the U.S. made good on the good work of emancipation. Government oversight, Harrison argued, would fulfill the promise of emancipation and ensure that the African-American miners continued to receive the "gift" of the right to contract their labor.


\textsuperscript{144} Benjamin’s discussion of the Navassa riot and his call for government invention to secure humane treatment for the miners was widely reprinted in accounts of the address. See, for example, its appearance in the Cedar Rapids (Iowa) Evening Gazette, the Lock Haven (Penn.) Evening Express, and the Oakland (Calif.) Daily Evening Tribune.
Through its insistence that the U.S. act to end the suffering at Navassa, Harrison’s statement made the Jones court’s warrant of “such jurisdiction . . . for such period as [the U.S.] sees fit” meaningful, material, and intelligible. In giving benevolent form to the Jones court’s temporary jurisdiction, Harrison’s statement reshaped the temporal boundaries of that jurisdiction as well. Framed as a benevolent undertaking, the U.S.’s jurisdiction over Navassa became curiously unmoored from the temporal endpoint that capital exploitation had been meant to provide. Guano production on Navassa has long since ceased, as has any form of industry. Yet the now-uninhabited island remains an “appurtenance” of the United States, which declared it a National Wildlife Refuge under the supervision of the Department of the Interior (CIA). Replacing the government official charged with “just and humane” treatment are the preservationist and the research scientist. The concrete form of the U.S.’s jurisdiction has altered—its objectives, methods, and imperatives have changed—but the U.S.’s benevolent possession of Navassa lives on.

What accounts for the ongoing expansiveness of this ostensibly temporary possession? Certainly Navassa’s relative obscurity helps to keep the U.S.’s contradictory possession out of national view. Spoken or unspoken, however, these contradictions continue. What sustains them may be the temporality of benevolent possession we see outlined in The Gates Ajar. Living benevolently, in The Gates Ajar’s world, enables the subject to occupy two times at once: the limited, ever-shifting successiveness of the present and the infinite forward expanse of the eternal. It is this hybrid, plural time that binds up the nation torn by the Civil War and makes life within it bearable again. From Phelps’s perspective, life in the U.S. nation-state feels most livable, most right at this moment of paradox, when the temporary, transient experiences of the everyday collapse into the eternal. What appears initially as a contradiction within national power—an 150-year jurisdiction implausibly named
as "temporary"—might be better understood as the very form by which national life makes itself sustainable and attractive. For if the expansive temporal reach of benevolence opens up a contradiction in national rationality, it simultaneously offers a resonant collection of richly lived sensory experiences that make forever feel as short as the everyday.

National Heterogeneities

Subtending this rereading of Phelps's worldmaking is a set of questions about what "religion" is and about how our models of nation and territory depend on how we understand "religion" and its place in the world. As the large-scale revivals of the Second Great Awakening in the U.S. spread a particular form of intensely Protestant religiosity, they also succeeded in riveting the category "religion" to the experience of "feeling." What was felt might vary, but feelings were of primary importance in understanding and assessing "religion" in all its forms.145 In this chapter, I have taken "feeling"—both emotions and sensations—as what collapses Phelps's theological and national projects, her desire to remake heaven and to remake the territory of the nation-state. Recognizing affect as a middle term between "religion" and "geography" points us toward the fact that neither religion nor geography are stable terms. Both are sites of intense debate, of social labor to construct them. In the intense labor in early America to popularize geographic literacy, we can see an effort to define what it meant to write the earth;146 in the repeated naturalization of certain things as

145 Compare, for example, Maria Monk's depiction of Catholic religious practice as mindless, routinized bodily devotion within which one cannot "truly" feel, or Lydia Sigourney's depiction of Hindu men in "The Suttee" as "infuriate priests" whose hearts are "soften'd" by the bond between mother and child.

146 See Martin Brückner, "Literacy for Empire."
“religious” we should see not a category wrought out to our hands but an intense labor of creation.

What secures something as “religious” or “sacred” are the feelings and sensations that are constructed into it.\textsuperscript{147} If feelings construct the religious, they also always exceed it—bearing out the affiliations and geographies that scholars name “religious” into a national public sphere from which they are ostensibly excluded. From this perspective, the division between “sacred” and “secular” seems to utterly break down, giving way to a constellations of interchanges and slippages that confounds our attempts to name where “religion” stops and “nation” begins in Phelps’s novel. Our task as readers of The Gates Ajar should be less to investigate its “sacred” geographies than to question what makes them “sacred” or quotidian in the first place—and what the feelings and sensations the sacred secures tell us about the nation-state and the world.

This returns us, then, to the heterogeneous time that Phelps’s novel creates. When scholars of nationalism have asserted the existence of heterogeneous times, this heterogeneity frequently takes the form of a challenge to the nation-state or a revelation of its internal contradictions. Homi Bhabha argues that “[t]here is, however, always the distracting present of another temporality that disturbs the contemporaneity of the national present,” the homogeneous, empty time of which Anderson writes; this alternative temporality, produced out of cultural difference, “continually introduces an otherness or alterity” to national time that reveals its inherent ambivalence (295, 308). In a critique of Anderson’s Imagined Communities, Subaltern Studies scholar Partha Chatterjee similarly describes “the presence of a dense and heterogeneous time” in the “postcolonial world” and elsewhere. When

\textsuperscript{147} Charles Hirschkind observes that secularization was facilitated by a shift in cultural understanding of the senses; becoming a “modern secular subject” meant learning to see and hear differently (23).
work in a factory is delayed until a new piece of equipment is "consecrated with appropriate religious rites," or "industrial capitalists wait[] to close a business deal because they hadn’t yet had word from their respective astrologers," Chatterjee suggests, the individuals who act in these scenarios invent a heterogeneous, "unevenly dense" time that for Chatterjee is the true condition of "modernity" (132). The existence of this heterogeneous time demonstrates that the homogeneous, empty time of Anderson’s imagined community “is not located anywhere in real space” but is instead an utopian fiction (131). Talal Asad likewise locates heterogeneous times in opposition to the nation; religious practice, in his assessment, operates outside of the secular, homogeneous time that makes the nation, creating “simultaneous temporalities” that “embrace both individuals and groups in complexities that imply more than a simple process of secular time” (179). These complex senses of space and time, for Asad, “reduce the scope for ‘national politics’ with its exclusive boundaries and homogeneous temporality” because they are inherently incommensurable with the “homogeneous time of national politics” (179). Religious and national temporalities are incommensurable, for Asad, because the national has a “rational/instrumental orientation” to which “[t]he body’s memories, feelings, and desires” are opposed (179-80).

Phelps’s novel, however, troubles this neat dichotomy between homogeneous-national and heterogeneous-resistant times. Far from challenging the supremacy of the nation form, The Gates Ajar’s heterogeneous time recuperates a war-torn nation into a satisfyingly unitary collective. The Gates Ajar’s transformation of grief into benevolence suggests that the nation is already invested in, and preferentially disposed

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148 Working in a similar vein, Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that “the secular code of historical and humanist time—that is, a time bereft [of] gods and spirits” cannot adequately render the religious practices and beliefs that threaten to disrupt it. See Provincializing Europe, especially chapter 3.
toward, certain complexities and heterogeneities of space and time. The heterogeneous times about which Bhabha, Chatterjee, Chakrabarty, and Asad write are times produced and occupied, from the point of view of Western and colonial powers, by subjects of racial and religious difference. Phelps’s white feminine Protestantism, however, occupied a central role in the nation’s consciousness at the middle of the nineteenth century. Phelps’s novel was positioned, from its first writing, within the mainstream of a New England culture that took itself to represent the nation. The Gates Ajar’s heterogeneous time can become national because of the marked preference that the secular U.S. nation-state has historically shown for white Protestantism. At the same time, heterogeneities such as Phelps’s can be erased from the dominant narrative of the nation-state by the fiction that secularism cordons off “religion” into the “private” sphere of individual experience. Viewed from this perspective, the national investment in homogenizing and standardizing time coexists amicably with a selective set of pluralizations that resonate at the heart of national culture.

As The Gates Ajar’s newly heterogeneous time is meant to make grief safe for the nation, it is also meant to incorporate emotional and bodily experience into the bonds that forge national collectivity. Theories of nationalism that stress the homogeneity of national time have also often stressed the rationality of the nation-state and its otherness to emotional experience. Scholars such as William Connolly and Ann Laura Stoler, however, have of late established the nation-state’s investment in producing, directing, and regulating affect. Likewise, Lauren Berlant’s work on...

149 Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini argue that secularism in the West “remains tied” to a specifically Protestant form of Christianity (3).
150 See especially William Connolly’s Why I Am Not a Secularist, in which he argues that political decisionmaking depends in part upon instinctive “culturally formed moods, affects, and situations . . . visceral modes of appraisal” that form “an infrasensible subtext from which conscious thoughts, feelings, and discursive
national sentimentality has located sentiment at the heart of citizenship. If affects join the self to the nation, however, they also bear with them their own spatial and temporal coordinates that shape the world within which this affiliation happens. The scholarship on sentimental nationalism thus opens up a reassessment not only of national feeling but also of national form.

judgments draw part of their sustenance” (27) and Ann Laura Stoler’s “Affective States,” in which she suggests that “management of the agents and subjects of colonial rule depended on reformatting the visceral and mediating the ties that bound families” (7). Thus, Stoler argues, colonial power invested intense effort to “produce sensibilities that were fitting, aspirations that were appropriate, dispositions that would confirm the explicit and implicit entailments of social membership and the truth-claims that distinguished ruler from ruled” (7, emphasis in original).

151 See, for example, “Poor Eliza” and The Queen of America Goes to Washington City.
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