



LITERATURES, CULTURES, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Environmental Knowledge, Race, and African American Literature

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Matthias Klestil

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Literatures, Cultures, and the Environment

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CONTENTS

| | | |
|--------|---|-----|
| 1 | Introduction: African American Environmental Knowledge at Niagara | 1 |
| Part I | Foundations: Antebellum African American Environmental Knowledge | 43 |
| 2 | Claiming (through) Space: Topographies of Enslavement, the Literary Heterotopia of the Underground Railroad, and the Co-agency of the Non-human | 45 |
| 3 | Resisting (through) the Eye: Antebellum Visual Regimes, the Slave Narrative's Rhetoric of Visibility, and African American Strategic Pastoral | 85 |
| 4 | Negotiating (through) the Skin: The Black Body, Pamphleteering, and African American Writing against Biological Exclusion | 125 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| Part II Transformations: African American Environmental Knowledge from Reconstruction to Modernity | 167 |
| 5 Transforming Space: Nature, Education, and Home in Charlotte Forten and William Wells Brown | 169 |
| 6 Transforming Vision: The Pastoral, the Georgic, and Evolutionary Thought in Booker T. Washington | 213 |
| 7 Transforming the Politics of the Black Body: Trans-corporeality, Epistemological Resistance, and Spencerism in Charles W. Chesnutt | 251 |
| 8 Conclusion: African American Environmental Knowledge at Yellowstone | 285 |
| Index | 293 |



CHAPTER 1

Introduction: African American Environmental Knowledge at Niagara

After his escape from slavery in 1838, Frederick Douglass not only turned himself into the mystically brilliant orator we celebrate until today, but also became widely travelled in the northern and mid-western parts of the United States. Settling down in the fugitive haven of New Bedford, Massachusetts, where he changed his name, joined the AME Zion Church, and subscribed to William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*, Douglass began working as a general agent of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society in 1841. While his ensuing travels, which took him as far as Ohio, Indiana, and ultimately across the Atlantic to Great Britain, have been well-documented by biographers and historians, what has largely escaped notice so far is a visit Douglass paid to Niagara Falls in 1843.¹ Apparently fascinated with this icon of "Nature's Nation," Douglass recounts his first impression of the cataracts in an "Anti-Slavery Album of Contributions From Friends of Freedom" of the Western Abolitionist Society in a handwritten note dated "Aug 2d 1843" as follows:

When I came into its awful presence the power of discription [sic!] failed me, an irresistible power closed my lips completely, charmed I stood with eyes fixed, all, all absorbed.—Scarcely conscious of my own existence, I felt as I never felt before. The heavy trees all around me quivered the ground trembled,—the mighty rocks shook!—as its awful roar gave them its terrible mandate. My courage quailed. In unison with tree rock hill and water, I trembled totally subdued I stood in solemn reverence. The awful God—was there! (Douglass, "Niagara" 184)²

The passage, at first sight, appears strikingly similar to the responses of Douglass's Euro-American contemporaries. It is oozing with sublime rhetoric, as it includes the common reference to God, displays stock vocabulary of a multi-sensorial experience that witnessing the cataracts entailed ("awful roar"; "with eyes fixed"), and involves a rhetoric that presents Niagara Falls as transcending representability ("the power of discription [sic!] failed me"). Moreover, Douglass's note exposes a typical reflection on preconceptions while or before witnessing Niagara's monumental nature:

I went to this wonderful place with the most lofty expec[ta]tions. I had heard—read—thought and felt much in regard to it. I had frequently gazed with extreme delight upon its mini[a]ture I longed to go behold the original. In my imagination, I had often seen its broad-blue waters rushing on amidst the dim-dark gloom of its own creation—toward the awful cataract—threatening total distruction [sic!] to any power interposing a barrier to its onward progress. Its in[s]piration of beauty—grandness—wonder and terror (long before I saw it) danced sportively in my soul [...]. (183)

These lines reveal not only how quickly and impressively Douglass had familiarized himself with dominant aesthetic conventions of his day. Moreover, they highlight his engagement with the idea of the visitor's (and his own³) preconceptions, which was characteristic of a Niagara discourse that began to flourish from the 1830s on. As the site lost its remoteness with the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, travelers' accounts increasingly came to weigh their witnessing of the natural spectacle against their anticipatory imaginations and assessed their actual experience both positively in terms of exceeding admiration and negatively in terms of disappointment.⁴ Even as Douglass's text moves exclusively in the former, more appreciative, direction, his note in this respect embraces yet another characteristic facet of Niagara writing. It seems, so far, a prototypical example of antebellum sublime discourse on Niagara Falls.

Significantly, however, Douglass adds a distinctive element to his portrayal by inserting a game-changing sentence: "As I approached it [Niagara Falls] I felt somewhat as I did at the approaching how [sic!], when for the first time I was to stand on free soil. And breath free air" (183). At the interstice between revealing his preconceived idea of Niagara Falls and representing his encounter of the cataracts, Douglass thereby explicitly draws attention to his former enslavement by analogizing the experience of overcoming slavery with a sublime experience of Niagara. The

distinctiveness in perspective that results from this strategy of adding a more self-referential dimension to his record of encountering Niagara interrupts a process of transcendence and a universalism characteristic of the sublime as a concept, which was “not restricted to value judgments,” but also described “a state of mind” (Shaw 1). The sublime, after all, emerged as a category and marker of enlightened humanity and implied a form of humanizing universalism that “naturalized” the sublime experience of sites like Niagara Falls as characteristically human experience.⁵ In his note, Douglass sets himself apart from this (supposed) universalism of the sublime by introducing the particular perspective of one who had been enslaved and whose enslavement had been justified by a *de*-humanizing racialization. Likening the experience of “standing on free soil” for the first time to experiencing Niagara’s sublime nature marks sublime sentiment and language as socially conditioned. Douglass’s intervention deflates a supposed universalism, de-naturalizes the sublime with respect to Niagara Falls, and grounds the sublime within social experience, hinting at its constructedness and “whiteness” as a rhetorical mode and aesthetic category that racialized experiences of nature. By inserting his experience within the *social* as significantly shaping his experience of the *non-human natural*, and implying that an unmarked and seemingly universal but thereby privileged position postulated in the sublime must also always be a construed one, Douglass’s note signifies on the sublime, strategizes its rhetoric, and simultaneously celebrates and politicizes Niagara’s nature from an African American perspective.

Almost 60 years later, another African American writer, Charles Waddell Chesnutt, places Niagara Falls at the center of one of his texts. In “The Passing of Grandison,” part of the celebrated short story collection *The Wife of His Youth* (1899), the North Carolinian author of mixed racial heritage employs Niagara not merely as background and setting, but as a vital part of his narrative strategy. The story, a trickster narrative set in antebellum times, proceeds straightforward enough, as a seemingly omniscient voice relates how a well-off adolescent Southerner, Dick Owens, attempts to win the heart of a *belle*, Charity Lomax, by secretly running off one of his father’s (Colonel Owens) enslaved to the North. As Charity dares him to do “something heroic,” Dick sets out for the Free states with Grandison, a trusted enslaved individual whom the Colonel deems “abolitionist-proof” (111, 116). They travel through New York and Boston where every effort to entice Grandison to take his freedom fails, and finally reach Niagara Falls, where, Dick hopes, once they arrive on the Canadian

side, Grandison will realize “that he is actually free” and will “stay” (120). He seems, however, mistaken once more as Grandison’s response to his young master’s “raising his voice above the roar of the cataract” to propose the enslaved’s legally being free, is a mere uneasy “Let’s go back ober de ribber, Mars Dick” (121). As a last resort, young Owens, the text suggests,⁶ pays locals to abduct Grandison while sound asleep on Niagara’s shore. Dick’s last view of Grandison before setting out for his journey home is “the familiar form of his servant stretched out on the ground, his face to the sun, his mouth open sleeping the time away oblivious alike to the grandeur of the scenery, the thunderous roar of the cataract, or the insidious voice of sentiment” (122).

At this point, Chesnutt’s story portrays an enslaved African American’s relation to Niagara that seems almost diametrically opposed to Douglass’s openly revering perspective. Here is an individual apparently perfectly unimpressed by Niagara’s sublime nature; Grandison is depicted as “turning his eyes away from the grand and awe-inspiring spectacle that lay close at hand, [...] looking anxiously toward the inn where his master sat cursing his ill-timed fidelity” (122). Looking after the master appears to negate the capacity of recognizing and appreciating the beauties of (sublime) nature. In representing a denial of visual and aural contact as a sign of Grandison’s supposed obliviousness to the magnificence of Niagara as well as a human urge for freedom, Chesnutt’s text, on the one hand, echoes a racialized antebellum discourse that categorically excluded African Americans from representing Niagara Falls—and non-human nature generally—in terms of the sublime.⁷ Reaching back to Jefferson’s infamous claim that there was “no poetry” in blacks, this longstanding violent discourse insinuated not only a black body and mind’s incapacity of “culture” and “civilization,” but by extension also of “cultured” or “civilized” perceptions of nature, a view that is entangled with the Colonel’s “faith in sable humanity” as an “obedient” race in need of guidance (126). On the other hand, it is exactly this notion that Chesnutt’s story exposes in its falseness by presenting an unforeseen plot development: after his abduction (or perhaps better, in light of Chesnutt’s ambivalence, his “disappearance”) at Niagara, Grandison initially returns to the South only to escape with his entire family to Northern territory three weeks later. The story ends with a first-rate deception of a slaveholder; Colonel Owens first rejoices in the (supposed) “rescue” of Grandison from abolitionists, only to shake “his fist impotently” at a band of fugitives aboard a steamboat headed for Canada in the closing scene (125; 127).

Chesnutt's narrative strategy both undermines the knowledge of the master and suggests a hidden knowledge of the enslaved that, in this text, centrally involves Niagara's nature. The story's play with the masters' and the enslaved's knowledge works via creating a specific relation between the text's levels of *discours* and *histoire*. On the level of *discours*, Chesnutt employs a voice that appears to be omniscient yet turns out to be limited as it focalizes solely through the master's perspective. As readers encounter a heterodiegetic narrative voice that sounds reliable and objective, also because it seemingly satisfies (yet eventually mocks) generic conventions of the romance and the plantation tradition (cf. Cutter 51–53), they are tricked into perceiving the story exclusively from the point of view of Colonel Owens and his son. On the level of *histoire*, however, the last turn of events marks the existence of a knowledge of the enslaved that has been there all along but has remained veiled and silenced so far. In perplexing ways, it becomes clear to readers only in the end that Grandison was pursuing an ingenious scheme all along, as he could not bear leaving his family enslaved. Neither was he afraid of contact with abolitionists, whom he probably collaborated with in New York and Boston (possibly even earlier) to engineer collective liberation, nor did he feel contented in slavery. And by no means, Chesnutt implies, did he feel oblivious to the nature of Niagara, which is revealed as a significant place at last: here, Grandison for the first time gains the legal freedom that he envisions not only for himself but employs for attaining collective freedom for his extended family. Thus, Grandison's escape, on the plot level, not only complicates passing into freedom as more than a binary, legal matter, but also highlights a broader epistemological conflict at the heart of the text and reveals what Chesnutt actually has to say, namely that antebellum masters—and those late-nineteenth-century readers who take their perspectives to be objective and reliable—have a very limited point of view and know only one side of the story. The other side is a hidden knowledge of (formerly) enslaved blacks that, through a narrative technique that involves the tricksterism of Chesnutt's narrator as much as that of his titular character, suddenly bursts into visibility through a last turn of events and an ambivalent moment on Niagara's shores.

In "The Passing of Grandison," Niagara Falls therefore figures as a meaningful liminal space between bondage and freedom that emphasizes the intricate nature (in a double sense) of Emancipation precisely because it is *not* visible as such from the perspective of the oppressor whose assumed dominance the story echoes through its focalization. It is significant,

however, that Chesnutt's text, by not addressing Niagara Falls through Grandison in the vocabulary of the sublime, goes beyond demonstrating a one-sidedness and inadequacy of the master's knowledge, as it becomes complicit in hiding Niagara and its meaning and reflects the strategic veiling of Niagara as part of the secret network known as the Underground Railroad through its form. Eventually, it is in large part because Grandison went to Niagara and cunningly employed its hidden meanings and beauty that his escape becomes possible. Niagara is what helps open up his flight space and enables making arrangements for a collective flight, as "the underground railroad seemed to have had its tracks cleared and signals set for this particular train" (126).⁸ The story is thus not only a prime example of how Chesnutt sought to realize his famous dictum to strategically "accustom the public to the idea" of racial equality (Chesnutt, *Journals* 140), but also becomes what Lawrence Buell calls an "environmental text" not by overt description of Niagara as sublime nature but by subversively ascribing central meaning to this place (cf. *Imagination* 6–8). Niagara Falls figures indeed "not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history," yet it does so precisely because that "presence" is *not* openly described from Grandison's perspective in conventional terms or aesthetic frameworks such as the sublime (7). Paradoxically, Chesnutt's text signifies through a strategic silence on a hidden African American knowledge about Niagara's nature.

I begin with these two examples, representatives of a broader nineteenth-century African American tradition of writing about Niagara,⁹ because they point to a host of broader questions that are central to this book, questions such as: how did nineteenth-century African American writers relate not only to Niagara but to the non-human natural world more generally? By what means did writers express relationships with non-human nature in a (written) literary tradition that emerged in the context of racial slavery and racialized discourses of "nature" and the "human" that sought to exclude them from the realm of the latter? Which aesthetic modes were employed, which literary spaces and tropes engaged, created, or transformed? How and where did the African American literary tradition, in other words, create its own places and patterns through which writers articulated and intertextually developed epistemological, ethical, and aesthetic ideas about and relations to nature, and how can we make those places and patterns visible?

Raising such questions, Douglass's and Chesnutt's Niagara writings help clarify the scope and aims of *Environmental Knowledge, Race, and African American Literature* as they represent the time frame and (some of) the kinds of material considered, and suggest how I wish to understand my primary texts and their engagements with the non-human natural world. First, they reflect the breadth of narrative texts considered in this study both historically, as they correspond with its two main parts on the antebellum period (Part I) and the latter decades of the nineteenth century (Part II), and with respect to treating material ranging from understudied texts (such as Douglass's manuscript) to well-known ones (such as Chesnutt's story). In Part I, I turn to antebellum African American writing (pamphlets, fugitive slave narratives) to sketch foundations of an African American environmental knowledge in a broader discourse analytic manner. Part II proceeds in a slightly different way by considering texts of the post-Emancipation era, in order to spotlight how writers like Charlotte Forten, William Wells Brown, Booker T. Washington, and Charles W. Chesnutt "signified" (Gates) on foundational African American environmental knowledge to articulate their ideas about the future of African America. Through material ranging from fugitive slave narratives and pamphlets, to a mid-nineteenth-century journal, autobiography, and fiction, this book suggests new places for recovering an African American ecoliterary tradition as well as some lines along which such a tradition developed, in order to provide new directions and input for further research in both ecocriticism and African American studies. While ecocriticism (still) needs to further expand its canon (and it is my belief that African American literature and literary theory will have to play a vital role in this), this study also demonstrates how African American studies may benefit from ecocritical approaches to uncover new facets of canonical and find value in understudied texts in ways that at the same time do not draw attention away from central issues of race and social justice.

Second, Douglass's and Chesnutt's texts hint at how I view the primary texts treated in this study in the context of what could broadly be called the relation between (racial) politics and nature. Some of the general problems of reading African American literature from an environmentally oriented perspective have to do with the ways in which, from an African American studies perspective, writing about nature has oftentimes been taken either as a trivial or accommodationist form of art that directed attention away from the issue of racial justice, while, from an (often still too "white") ecocritical perspective, ideas about what counts as

environmental writing have left something of a suspicion against too “politically oriented” texts that (over-)emphasize trauma or alienation from nature at the expense of its appreciation. By contrast, Douglass’s and Chesnutt’s Niagara writings, like the other texts I consider in this study, reveal that nineteenth-century African American writing was often both (a form of) nature writing as well as political writing. Douglass’s antebellum critique of the sublime as well as Chesnutt’s late-nineteenth-century play with racialized perspectives both celebrate Niagara’s non-human nature in its own right and simultaneously expose and employ a strategic potential of writing about the non-human natural world. While paying close attention to forms of alienation stemming from the traumatic experiences of slavery or racism and to the ways in which they shaped writing about non-human nature, my treatment of the texts in this study therefore aims to show the many things nineteenth-century black writing about nature could be: it could be just that, a form of nature writing; it could be a vehicle for political thought; or it could be (as I found in most cases) both, in intricate ways adding strategic dimensions to environmental literary discourse. Accordingly, one important objective of *Environmental Knowledge, Race, and African American Literature* is *not* to read African American texts as concerned either with “race” or with “nature” (or as “natureless” or “raceless”). Rather, this book is driven by the perceived need to overcome such either-or thinking patterns, which, at a closer look, have more to do with (thereby potentially exclusionary) (eco)critical traditions than with an African American literary tradition itself. More often than not, the texts I consider do not envision depicting nature and writing about race as “competing” issues, but emphasize their importance as intertwined aspects that inform one another.

To achieve my aims of spotlighting places of environmentally oriented writing in nineteenth-century African American narrative literature and offering new directions for both ecocriticism and African American studies, the six thematic chapters of this book explore nineteenth-century African American writing through the lens of “environmental knowledge.” I combine ecocritical, Foucauldian, and African American literary theory, in particular Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s concept of signifying, to trace foundations and transformations of such knowledge in a literary tradition that, for a long time, has not been read as significantly concerned with nature, and that may not easily be read as “environmental” when looking through a traditional ecocritical lens. As one of the pioneering ecocritical studies on African American literature, Kimberly K. Smith’s *African*

American Environmental Thought (2007), puts it: “We may not discover a black Thoreau—nor should we expect to” (4). The latter part of the phrase is illuminating in the context of this project, in the sense that my research through the lens of environmental knowledge has been driven by an impulse *not* to “expect” an African American literary tradition that would be easily identifiable as “environmental” in a conventional sense. How could we possibly assume that a nineteenth-century African American literary tradition would use frameworks, concepts, or genres commonly associated with environmental writing in the same way as mainstream writers, if such frameworks, concepts, and genres were intertwined with the culture that produced the violent de-humanizations that formed the backbone of slavery and racism?

To contribute to refuting the idea that this by extension means that there was no environmental literary tradition or that there is something of a “deficit” in this respect in nineteenth-century African American writing is the overall aim of this book. For this, *Environmental Knowledge, Race, and African American Literature* proposes to change the perspective, read against the grain, look with a difference. It proposes, to use Camille T. Dungy’s words, to “change the parameters of the conversation” in order to fulfill the imperative task of “bring[ing] more voices into the conversation about human interactions with the natural world” (xxi), by reading through the lens of environmental knowledge. The Niagara-texts by Douglass and Chesnut, for example, highlight that an ecocritical reading of nineteenth-century African American literature must pay close attention to how writers strategically signified on dominant environmental literary modes and rhetoric, and must take into account how African American literature may speak environmentally with a difference, through silences, forms of strategic veiling, through what is at times half-hidden. It must ensure, in other words, a critical distance that allows for going beyond traditional ecocritical models and concepts in order to discover alternative African American frameworks, places, and patterns for expressing relations to non-human nature. To play with Toni Morrison’s succinct phrase from *Playing in the Dark* (1992), such an approach must “romance the *green* shadows” of this literary and cultural tradition to uncover literary African American environmental knowledge.¹⁰ If Morrison has proposed “reading black in white,” in the sense of tracing a Euro-American literary tradition for a subversively hidden Africanist presence, this book suggests ways of “reading green in black.” It explores an African American

writing tradition for literary forms of environmental knowledge shaped by the history of race, mainstream environmental writing traditions, and distinctly African American forms of expression and intertextuality.

FOUCAULDIAN ENVIRONMENTAL KNOWLEDGE

Environmental Knowledge, Race, and African American Literature breaks new ground by employing Foucauldian theory to offer an alternative eco-critical perspective on nineteenth-century African American literature. Apart from using specific concepts such as heterotopia or panopticism, and tracing an environmental consciousness in nineteenth-century African American literature through Foucauldian dimensions, a Foucauldian eco-critical approach is rooted in a set of general premises. I want to slow down for a moment to briefly introduce these by providing a definition of “environmental knowledge.” In the context of this book, “environmental knowledge” means *such formations of power-knowledge that negotiate and constitute the human in relation to its non-human non-discursive material conditions*. Thus, three clarifications concerning terminology. Firstly, “environmental” in “environmental knowledge” is not to be confused with “environmental(ist)” in the sense in which the term is broadly used today. I do not mean to suggest, in other words, an African American “environmental(ist) activism” or “movement” for the period under consideration. Rather than that, I employ the term “environment/al” in its more general and more original sense of non-human and not humanly built material “surroundings” or “conditions.”¹¹

Secondly, “environmental knowledge” is not the same as what has sometimes been referred to as “indigenous” or “local” knowledge, that is, forms of knowledge that developed in response to specific regions or that were developed by a particular, largely homogeneous, group of people.¹² African American environmental knowledge *did* develop (and was expressed in the writing tradition) to a significant extent in response to specific locales in the New World, especially, as will be seen, in the context of the U.S. South. However, to think in this respect of an “indigenous” knowledge would not only be outright cynical to the extent that it refers to a forcibly displaced, enslaved, ethnically and culturally diverse diasporic group. Moreover, referring to African American environmental knowledge as “local” knowledge would falsely imply discursive formations and practices largely separated from broader contexts, when tracing African American *literary* environmental knowledge in this study in fact reveals

that such knowledge emerged as an inter-discursive part of larger epistemological processes, exchanges and struggles around the question of what it means to be (or become accepted as) human.

Thirdly, and here is a core assumption of a Foucauldian ecocritical framework, it is crucial that the given definition of environmental knowledge does not speak of “non-human *natural*” but of “*non-human non-discursive material*” conditions. In other words, what I mean by “environmental knowledge” is not a “knowledge of nature,” although historically changing conceptions and discourses of “nature” are most often central to formations of environmental knowledge. Significantly, however, environmental knowledge in a Foucauldian sense turns to “nature/the natural” as an object of discourse analysis, not as a stable or positivistically knowable essence, although it does not deny the existence of such a (non-human, non-discursive material) essence and its “real” effects and mutual interactions with the discursive within knowledge formation. Hence, when referring in this study to “nature,” I do not mean an absolute or stable entity but a discursive category, a signifier that has fulfilled historically changing functions within the production of forms of power-knowledge of the human in relation to its non-human non-discursive material conditions. Such a perspective is particularly valuable in the context of African American culture, where environmental dimensions of the writing tradition have been shaped not only by articulating relations to various kinds of non-human non-discursive materialities but also by challenging harmful discourses that employed concepts of “nature” to devalue and dehumanize blacks.

In designating this use of central terms, I am drawing from insights of scholarly work over the past decades that has increasingly come to recognize the potential of Foucauldian theory for environmental thought. For some time, environmentally oriented scholars tended to perceive Foucault not only as impracticable, but also as problematic, as too radically constructivist and denying agency through the idea of the “death of the subject.” An anthropocentric stance of Foucault’s analytics, the general hostility towards poststructuralist and postmodernist theory in early ecocriticism, and the fact that Foucault was “far from being an environmental thinker” and mentioned environmental concerns only marginally,¹³ are some of the main reasons for this traditionally problematic relationship between Foucauldian and environmental thought (Alberts 544). The situation has somewhat changed over the past two decades, however, as environmentally oriented scholarship and ecocriticism have come to revalue

once despised “high theory,” including Foucauldian thought. While pioneering work, for instance by Darier (1999), Goodbody (2009), and Alberts (2013) more generally proposes the usefulness of Foucault for environmental thinking, two classic Foucauldian concepts in particular have triggered responses from environmentally oriented literary and cultural critics, sociologists, and historians, namely “biopolitics” and “governmentality.” Studies by P. Rutherford (1994, 1999), Darier (1996), Luke (1997, 1999), Agrawal (2005), Bäckstrand and Lovbrand (2006), S. Rutherford (2007, 2011), and M. Smith (2011) have productively taken up this part of Foucauldian theory in the environmental humanities, while, in ecocriticism, Greg Garrard has suggested the rise of a “Foucauldian ecocriticism” (“Introduction” 2). By now, environmentally interested scholars across disciplines have begun to find their way with Foucault, especially with his “genealogical” work of the 1970s, recognizing that Foucault’s “concepts can be made highly relevant to environmental thinking, whatever attitude to ‘nature’ Foucault himself might have held” (Darier “Foucault” 6).

This recognition and body of scholarship have inspired my definition of “environmental knowledge” to the extent that using a Foucauldian lens in this study not only means thinking knowledge in terms of formations, discourse, and power, but also tracing the manufacturing of knowledge as multi-dimensional. Two insights captured in the notions of “*non-discursive material*” and “*non-human*” dimensions of environmental knowledge are particularly important at this point. First, there is the observation that the involvement of what we may call the *non-discursive material* dimension of the production, distribution, and circulation of knowledge was never irrelevant to, and, more importantly, never categorically denied in Foucauldian thought. Although there have been (mis-)perceptions along those lines, Foucault is not radically constructivist in this sense, as scholars such as Susan Hekman have suggested. Rather, as Hekman points out in *The Materiality of Knowledge* (2010), Foucault in many of his studies “far from emphasizing discourse to the exclusion of the material or ‘reality,’ is, on the contrary, always acutely aware of the interaction between discourse and reality” (48).¹⁴ True, one of the premises of Foucault’s analytics is that we cannot analyze and historicize knowledge manufacturing apart from discourse. However, this does not automatically mean a denial of the interrelations between the discursive and the non-discursive material within processes of knowledge formation. This is especially true, if we take

seriously Foucault's emphasis on the ways in which discourse, in an imagined primal state (cf. "Order" 66), was fundamentally marked by material threats as an "action situated in a bipolar field of sacred and profane, lawful and unlawful, religious and blasphemous," i.e. as a material "gesture charged with risks" ("Author" 124). In its imagined *Urzustand*, the discursive has always been seen as emerging within and in relation to "really" existing external, non-discursive materialities that could be as much as life threatening, and there is no indication of Foucault's ignoring of such materialities in his genealogical work on specific bodies of knowledge, e.g. regarding the penal system or sexuality. A Foucauldian analysis of knowledge therefore always turns to both the discursive and the non-discursive material.¹⁵

A second important insight is that this implies the possibility of recognizing *non-human* dimensions of knowledge formation. While a *discursive* dimension of knowledge formation pertains to the realm of the human—speaking of a "human knowledge" would be tautological from a Foucauldian perspective—a *non-discursive material* dimension within a Foucauldian-inspired framework potentially involves both the human and the non-human. On the one hand, there are *human* non-discursive materialities interacting with the discursive in the production of knowledge, which can be traced through political, economic or institutional events and the human body to the "material reality" of the human product discourse itself, as "a thing pronounced or written" ("Order" 52). On the other hand, the *non-human* non-discursive material dimension, too, becomes a potential, intersecting part of knowledge formation, as it figures in events such as non-anthropogenic catastrophes or disasters (e.g. the breakout of the plague, cf. *Discipline* 195–199), or, more generally, in the conditions provided by non-human surroundings including what we would commonly refer to as "nature." In both cases, the relations between the discursive and the non-discursive material as well as the human and the non-human are regarded as mutually constitutive within the process of knowledge formation (implying that the *modern* "human" itself is not regarded as an essence); Foucault posits their relation as neither one of determination nor of expression. Therefore, even if a discourse analysis works from the premise that one may only access formations of knowledge via discourse, its aim can also be to trace forms of the non-human non-discursive material in the production of a knowledge surfacing in this discourse. When read not as a radical constructivist or relativist but as "a

contextualist of the statements of observers of ‘objective reality,’” Foucault has the potential to enable an analytics that aims to identify interdependencies between the discursive and the non-human non-discursive material (Darier, “Foucault” 10).

In this sense, a Foucauldian framework of environmental knowledge represents a form of what Ursula K. Heise calls a “weak constructionism” that “analyze[s] cultural constructions of nature with a view towards the constraints that the real environment poses on them” (“Hitchhiker’s Guide” 512). Foucauldian ecocriticism in this sense means, on the one hand, taking a step back to analyze “nature” not as the stable essence as which it has often been mobilized throughout history, but as a historically changing, functionalized signifier.¹⁶ Environmental knowledge through Foucauldian concepts offers the means to analyze this signifier in its uses, implications, and multiple effects within the production of power-knowledge. On the other hand, analyzing environmental knowledge also means tracing the involvement of the non-human non-discursive material as a shaping force within the production of power-knowledge. Such a mode of analysis does not leave out what Hayles calls the “unmediated flux” (cf. “Common Ground” 53–54; “Simulations”), or what Morton conceptualizes as “the mesh” of interconnection that is “the ecological thought” (*Ecological Thought* 1). Instead, it critically addresses the complex networks unfolding between the signifier “nature” and the non-human non-discursive material conditions within the manufacturing of a power-knowledge that creates (rather than discovers) the modern human and that intersects with social constructions of race. In this sense, the concept of environmental knowledge bridges poststructuralist and ecocritical theory to provide a basis for a skeptical ecocritical project that recognizes the necessity of combining an investigation of “the connections between the making and evolution of nature and the making and evolution of the discourses and practices through which nature is historically produced and known” (Escobar 46). Within such a project, Foucault, after all one of the most influential critics of our modern “grand narratives of liberation” that first “created the conditions for ecological ‘crises,’” should not be missing (Darier, “Foucault” 19–20). Foucauldian thought, through a concept of environmental knowledge, offers productive “weak constructivist” analytical means, and can be one “promising theoretical ground from which to pursue the analysis of environmental literature in its relation to cultural and rhetorical traditions, on the one hand, and social as well as scientific realities, on the other” (Heise, “Hitchhiker’s Guide” 512).

ENVIRONMENTAL KNOWLEDGE AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

A Foucauldian ecocritical lens offers a perspective that is particularly valuable in the context of nineteenth-century African American literature, as it allows taking into account the intersections between discourses of nature, the human, and “(de)humanization,” elements of a violent U.S. racial history that are crucial from an African American perspective. Drawing on the concept of environmental knowledge, my research for this study has shown that a specifically African American environmental knowledge expressed in nineteenth-century black writing may be systematically described by focusing on three primary “dimensions”: the *spatial*, the *visual*, and the *biopolitical*. Both the discourses treated in Part I (fugitive slave narratives, pamphlets) and the texts I turn to in Part II in order to highlight a “signifying” tradition of environmental knowledge suggest that the spatial, visual, and biopolitical are central to developments within the black environmental literary tradition, and may be useful as tools for further research beyond the necessarily limited scope of this book.

The importance of these dimensions is also visible in Douglass’s and Chesnut’s literary encounters with Niagara Falls. With respect to the *spatial*, for example, Chesnut’s text is an instance that strategically plays with Niagara Falls’ subversive meanings as an underground space. Through its narrative technique, “The Passing of Grandison” not only mocks the slave master’s perspective, but also signifies on the Underground Railroad as a specific form of heterotopic, subversive literary space first created in the antebellum slave narrative that could function, as I will argue in Chap. 2, as a “loophole” for expressing environmental knowledge. Regarding the *visual*, Douglass’s note draws attention to the importance of literary-aesthetic modes as ways of “visualizing” non-human environments. Modes such as the sublime, the pastoral, or the picturesque, which involve viewing and describing non-human non-discursive materialities in particular ways and from specific positions, were denied or obliterated, adapted, transformed or expanded in diverse ways in nineteenth-century African American writing. Douglass’s “Niagara” gives an example of such a process when it appreciates Niagara’s nature in its own right, while strategically adding a social dimension to the supposedly universal sublime, and signifies on the position and visual and imaginative perspective of this mode by appending the altered perception of one formerly enslaved. With respect to the *biopolitical*, both Douglass’s and Chesnut’s

Niagara-writings draw attention to a particular position of the black body and written word. Douglass by revealing the sublime as a racially charged concept that normalized nature experience, Chesnutt by demonstrating the constructedness of a white master's perspective that falsely assumes a black enslaved's obliviousness to Niagara's nature. In different ways, both writers emphasize how the fundamental idea of biopolitics of subdividing and structuring the body and life of human populations, involved the production of both racial and environmental knowledge. They imply, in other words, that knowledge of the human in relation to its non-human non-discursive material conditions had effects on the construction of race and vice versa.

By using the spatial, the visual, and the biopolitical as central critical lenses that help systematically describe some of those places in nineteenth-century African American literature where we find environmental knowledge, I take an *explicitly* Foucauldian approach that goes beyond what Greg Garrard, in his introduction to the *Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* (2014), more generally calls a "Foucauldian ecocriticism" ("Introduction" 3).¹⁷ While such explicitly Foucauldian approaches have been present in environmentally oriented scholarship for some time, a Foucauldian ecocritical perspective to my knowledge has not been taken in African American studies and in environmentally oriented work on African American literature and culture so far. The former, African American studies, has traditionally been critical, sometimes (understandably) hostile, towards Western high theory and poststructuralism, and has not extensively used Foucault.¹⁸ As for the latter, environmentally oriented work on African American literature and culture, much of the existing scholarship that has emerged over the past two decades does not belong to ecocriticism in a narrow sense, but to the environmental humanities. A number of book-length historical and sociological studies like those by D. Taylor (2002), Proctor (2002), Carney (2001), Stewart (2002), Washington (2005), Glave and Stoll (2006), or Glave (2010), as well as a variety of contributions across areas as diverse as eco-musicology (Rosenthal (2006)), religious studies (Clay 2011; Holley 2005), or food studies (Covey and Eissach 2009) have dealt with environmental issues in African American culture. I am no less indebted to such studies than to historical scholarship in African American studies on subjects ranging from the history of black seamen (e.g. Bolster 1997) to the role of steamboat workers (Buchanan 2004) or black labor history (Montrie 2008), for drawing attention to various aspects pertaining to environmental knowledge, even

if my explicit literary focus differs from their broader historiographic approaches. The same holds true regarding the considerable amount of research on “environmental justice” and “environmental racism.”¹⁹

The immediate scholarly context of *Environmental Knowledge, Race, and African American Literature*, however, is ecocritical work on African American literature. This steadily growing body of scholarship, located at the intersection between two academic fields, African American Studies and ecocriticism, often in conjunction with postcolonial studies,²⁰ has been responding productively to the admonition that “[e]cocritics who continue to resist or reject African American concepts as foreign to their concerns risk a hardening of their developing discourse into a reactionary and racist defense of an essentialized idea of nature” (Tidwell qtd. Wardi 14). The current convergence between both fields is enhanced by the “political” nature of both ecocriticism and African American Studies. While ecocriticism is driven by the conviction that “our most pressing current environmental problems come from systemic socioeconomic and cultural causes” (Conway et al. 3), African American studies is essentially shaped by its deep political “commitment to critique the relationship of race and power in America” (Davidson ix). As ecocritics “tie their cultural analysis explicitly to a ‘green’ moral and political agenda” (Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 3), and since African American studies “was meant to try to redefine what it means to be human, what it means to be modern, what it means to be American” (C. West 542), both fields have the potential to talk productively to each other.

Ecocritical work on African American literature, which had a forerunner in Melvin Dixon’s *Ride Out the Wilderness* (1987), continues to be driven by the observation that “literary critics have largely overlooked African American literary traditions” (Ruffin 10). Forming only in the first decades of the twenty-first century, the field comprises by now a number of book-length studies (K. Smith 2007; Outka 2008; Finseth 2009; Ruffin 2010; Wardi 2011; Posmentier 2017; L. Johnson 2018; Claborn 2018; and Newman 2019), a pioneering essay collection (Mayer 2003), and a steadily growing number of scholarly articles (recently those by Beilfuss 2015; D. Anderson 2016; Volanth Hall 2018). In this expanding corpus, critics have come to address a variety of specific themes and regions, dealt with genres ranging from autobiography and fiction to poetry (cf. e.g. Dungy 2009; Shockley 2011; Posmentier 2017) and film (Monani and Beehr 2011), and with questions of teaching African American literature environmentally (Myers 2008; Haladay and Hicks 2010). Historically,

much scholarship has focused on contemporary African American writing, e.g. by Octavia Butler, Toni Morrison, or Alice Walker,²¹ although there are also readings of nineteenth-century African American texts.²² Initially designed to open up a once narrow ecocritical canon, and aiming to validate the existence of an engagement with environmental issues in African American writing, such studies have at times remained somewhat undertheorized. This tendency is, however, being overcome as the field diversifies, for instance, through work by Outka (2008), who uses trauma theory, L. Johnson (2018), who theorizes a “fugitive humanism,” or Claborn (2018), who combines an eco-historical method with Marxian ecology and intersectional ecocriticism.

While standing in this tradition of methodological diversification and drawing extensively from the insights of such scholarship, this book departs from previous studies in several ways. Beyond using an alternative Foucauldian framework of environmental knowledge that aims to provide groundwork for a more systematic analysis of the nineteenth-century African American environmental literary tradition, I turn to a timeframe and corpus of primary texts that is different from those of previous studies, and engage critically with some of the dominant assumptions of the field. To begin, I have a focus on African American writing,²³ which sets the study apart from more comparative approaches like Outka’s, Finseth’s, and Newman’s.²⁴ Moreover, I consider a timeframe that differs from those of existing book-length ecocritical studies focusing on specifically African American environmental traditions like those by Posmentier and Claborn, which do not turn to the nineteenth century. With respect to those monographs that (partially) turn to the nineteenth century, I consider a more extensive period than Finseth, yet a more concise timeframe than Ruffin’s and Wardi’s broad surveys, or K. Smith’s, Outka’s, and L. Johnson’s studies, which also include chapters on the twentieth century. My aim is thus to combine an ecocritical re-assessment of canonical African American texts and authors with drawing attention to lesser-known writing and archival material and to highlight how foundational antebellum forms of African American environmental knowledge (Part I) were taken up and transformed within the nineteenth-century tradition (Part II).

Moreover, a focus on environmental knowledge bears the potential to complicate and refine some of the long-standing (eco)critical ideas regarding environmental dimensions of African American literature. One of these, for instance, is the notion, influentially put forward by Michael Bennett, “that the nature of slavery in the United States created the link

between anti-pastoralism and African American culture that has been operative from Douglass's day to our own" (195). Bennett reflects a more general claim articulated in both African American studies and ecocriticism that, since the pastoral was closely tied to images of the plantation that misrepresented slavery and de-humanized blacks, and since there is a traditional identification of blacks with the liberating potential of the city, the African American literary tradition is marked by an antipastoral impulse.²⁵ Although my rereading of the tradition through environmental knowledge does not dispute this assessment, it has the potential to somewhat challenge its universality and suggest an alternative terminology, as I examine literary aesthetic modes (including the pastoral) through the broader Foucauldian lenses of the spatial, the visual, and the biopolitical. Douglass's note on Niagara, for instance, when taken as a material, bodily encounter and an expression of visual relations to Niagara Falls, makes clear that African American texts did not necessarily negate modes such as the sublime, but instead often problematized and signified on their validity while embracing their potential to consciously value natural environs whilst uttering social critique. If it would therefore be somewhat simplifying to speak of an "antisublime" with respect to Douglass's depiction of Niagara, my readings (esp. in Chaps. 3 and 6) suggest that the same might be true for African American writers' use of the pastoral, which, despite its entanglements with imagery of plantation slavery, was often strategized in complex and radical ways, and played an important role for the black environmental writing tradition.

Another feature of (some) ecocritical readings of African American literature that approaching the nineteenth-century part of the tradition through the lens of environmental knowledge potentially complicates is the assumption of an analogy or causality between the workings of racism and (African American) environmental alienation. Ruffin, for instance, speaks of "the coupling of racism and ecological alienation" (2), James suggests that "the legacies of trauma and injustice have attenuated African Americans' connection to nature" (164), and Myers has claimed that "Euroamerican racism and alienation from nature derive from the same source and result in the joint and interlocking domination of people of color and the natural world" (*Stories* 15). While the intricate connection and mutual effects between racism and environmental alienation as such must be at the heart of a field that explores the complexities of non-human nature in an African American context, drawing a general analogy that implies a simple causality between the two veils more than it reveals. To

suggest a “coupling” (Ruffin), a “same source” (Myers), or some other form of “double oppression” exerted by an exploitative Euro-American worldview is a valid observation at many points, but it neither adequately explains the complex processes at work in the intertwined U.S. American histories of race and relations to the environment, nor does it take into account the diversity of African American responses to non-human nature. An advantage of a deconstructive, historicizing Foucauldian genealogy in this respect is that it enables exploring this connection in a more fundamental way by understanding power relations as productive and looking for moments of writing about nature as moments of resistance and struggle rather than repression and hegemony. Tracing literary environmental knowledge in this book means to look through and beyond the repression of African American environmental knowledge in order to focus on the alternative forms and strategies of its articulation.

In Chesnutt’s story, for example, Grandison is, as the text eventually suggests, not oblivious to Niagara’s grandeur. Yet, to focus primarily on the repression of African American environmental knowledge by (over-)emphasizing a simple causality between racial oppression and black environmental alienation, repeats, from a critical perspective, what Chesnutt mocks through his narrative technique. To consider the story through the notion of a “same source” of racial oppression and African American environmental estrangement to some extent echoes the master’s heterodiegetic voice of Chesnutt’s story that negates both the humanity and environmental knowledge of his enslaved; it runs danger to overlook the subversive processes at work in Chesnutt’s and others’ articulation of environmental knowledge. Focusing overly on a causal link between racism and African American environmental alienation risks missing the central point Chesnutt makes—and the claim that lies at the heart of this book—namely that there indeed *is* a rich tradition of nineteenth-century African American environmental knowledge. This knowledge may have been hidden at times, but sometimes, as Chesnutt’s narrative tricksterism suggests, it was precisely its hidden-ness, the fact that the master’s perspective was blind to it, that was employed as a means of expression and resistance. By extension, this means that one must not turn solely to the master’s attempt to silence but instead trace the ways in which this attempt shaped the articulation of environmental knowledge in African American writing. In other words, one should not primarily understand the tradition as marked by a “lack” or “deficit” due to (white) oppression causing (black) repression, but as characterized by a “difference” in terms of strategies of expression.

Apart from outlining my diverging approach and corpus with respect to existing studies and some of the central claims of the field, a more general note on my selection of texts is in order. Obviously, there are a great many (narrative) texts and genres of the nineteenth-century African American tradition that—despite the breadth of my corpus as it is—could have been chosen (not to mention poetry or drama, which are not the focus of this study). While I do not wish to suggest that my choice of texts is in any way inevitable, I want to mention two guiding principles that have influenced the selection process, namely the chosen texts' diversity and their ability to highlight some of the broader lines of development within the tradition.

First, the texts in this study were chosen for their diversity, their capacity to represent some of the breadth and richness of African American environmental writing of the period considered. In this sense, the high degree of variety that marks my corpus reflects the high degree of variety I encountered through my research with respect to the ways in which narrative texts depicted and related to non-human natural environments. The resulting diversity of the selected texts becomes visible on (at least) three levels. First, I have chosen to treat both texts firmly established in the canon (fugitive slave narratives by Douglass and Bibb, works by B.T. Washington and Chesnut) as well as much lesser studied ones (those by Forten, W. W. Brown, or the pamphlets by Hosea Easton and John Lewis). To combine both well-read texts and writing obscure even among well-informed readers opens up the possibility to show not only how well-known texts may be read anew through alternative ecocritical lenses, but also to highlight the importance of (future) archival work to recover understudied material. Moreover, it enables me, for example in the case of Charlotte Forten's journals, to address some of the long-standing, partly institutional, reasons for why certain texts have largely (but unduly) fallen out of consideration, and to exemplify how an ecocritical perspective might help recover and revalue underrepresented parts of the tradition. (Forten's journals had for a long time only been available in an abridged edition that identified race as her single most important subject matter while leaving out ecocritically relevant parts of her writing. The history of such cases in particular demonstrates the importance of bringing together the fields of ecocriticism and African American studies, as there is much to learn from the combination.) Second, it is vital that my examinations demonstrate how African American writers articulated environmental knowledge through a variety of genres. While most will agree that it is reasonable to consider a formative genre like the fugitive slave narrative for tracing

the development of African American environmental knowledge, it is my conviction that it is just as important to see how environmental knowledge found expression across generic boundaries, e.g. in journals, (short) fiction, or even early forms of black historiography (W. W. Brown). Of course, much more remains to be done in this respect, more than could possibly be accomplished in the pages of this study. Readers might ask about—and subsequent scholars will hopefully turn to—genres such as African American sea narratives, spiritual narratives, didactic writing by black women of the late nineteenth century like Frances Ellen Harper, Pauline Hopkins, or Anna Julia Cooper, or work by writers like Paul Laurence Dunbar or W.E.B. Du Bois (not to mention a rich (nature) poetic tradition). Third, it is critical to my approach that the chosen texts are diverse regarding their representation of a wide range of (environmental as well as social) conditions under which their authors articulated environmental knowledge. In this respect, I demonstrate that it was highly significant, for example, whether environmental knowledge was expressed in private (Forten) or in public (e.g. pamphlets), in generically highly circumscribed contexts (fugitive slave narrative), by an established writer (W.W. Brown), a race leader (Washington), or by an aspiring author (Chesnutt). That my material shows a host of different vantage points from which African Americans expressed relations to the non-human natural world is paramount, given that one goal of this study (and one advantage of a Foucauldian approach) is to stress the importance of the conditions under which environmental knowledge found expression through thoroughly contextualized readings.

A second criterion that has influenced my choice of texts is their ability to help demonstrate some of the interconnections that mark the nineteenth-century African American ecoliterary tradition. Apart from pointing to diverse places where nineteenth-century African American writers expressed environmental knowledge (and issuing a call for future research), another central goal of this study is to systematically identify broader lines of development to begin tracing what could be called, alluding to Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s influential concept, a tradition of “green signifying” in African American writing that involved both mainstream and black traditions. Although I have to note, again, that other material could have been (and will hopefully in the future be) included, it is my understanding that those texts and writers chosen for my close readings serve well for sketching out a systematic framework for tracing some of those developments and thus provide a useful starting point and directions

for future research. To this end, I work with Gates's idea of "signifyin(g)," also with the aim of providing an approach that links (Foucauldian) ecocritical and African American literary theory. Note here that I have been refraining from speaking of "African American ecocriticism," primarily because I believe that the term (misleadingly) implies that ecocriticism and African American studies were truly conjoined in a combined effort or field. As of yet, however, this seems rarely the case, as African American studies are only beginning to pick up ecocritical concerns as extensively as desirable, while ecocritical studies at times seem to run danger of simply "applying" their theory to a new set of texts, therein neither taking into account the specificity of the black literary tradition nor the rich tools African American studies has to offer for analysis. From an ecocritical perspective, there is a vital need to realize that it is not just African American *literature* that "has much to tell us, if we pay close enough ecocritical attention" (Dodd, "Forum" 1095), but an African American *literary criticism* as well.

In this spirit, *Environmental Knowledge, Race, and African American Literature* combines its Foucauldian ecocritical approach with a twofold distinction based on Gates's concept of "signifyin(g)." In his seminal *The Signifying Monkey* (1988), Gates famously described the principle of "signifyin(g)" as "repetition and revision, or repetition with a signal difference," proposing that African American texts be read as "double-voiced in the sense that their literary antecedents are both white and black" (xxiv, xxiii). This notion of a double-voiced African American intertextuality implies two basic forms of "signifyin(g)" that are vital to tracing environmental knowledge and that can be demonstrated through the texts chosen for this study. On the one hand, African American writers repeated and revised dominant Euro-American environmental knowledge traditions—instances of this can be seen in Douglass's adaptation and transformation of the sublime in my introductory example but also in the ways in which environmental knowledge of writers treated in this study signifies on aesthetic traditions like the pastoral, the picturesque or the georgic. On the other hand, writers repeated and revised African American environmental knowledge of their predecessors—authors discussed in the second part of this book like W.W. Brown or Chesnut are just as exemplary in this respect as Chesnut's use of Niagara as part of the Underground Railroad, a central literary space through which antebellum slave narratives had articulated environmental knowledge.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Building on Gates's idea, the two main parts of *Environmental Knowledge, Race, and African American Literature* trace antebellum foundations of African American environmental knowledge that often entailed signifying on Western traditions, and then turn to postwar transformations of African American environmental knowledge that worked centrally through "repetition and revision" within the African American literary tradition. Part I, "Foundations: Antebellum African American Environmental Knowledge," explores emerging forms of antebellum African American environmental knowledge in the formative genre of the fugitive slave narrative and in pamphlet literature. Considering a broad range of canonical and lesser-known texts, I focus on the spatial, the visual, and the biopolitical, as foundational dimensions of African American environmental knowledge.

While narrators of the antebellum fugitive slave narrative often displayed a tendency to disjoin themselves from "nature" with which they were associated through racial discourse, the first two chapters demonstrate how the genre nevertheless found ways of expressing environmental knowledge. In Chap. 2, "Claiming (through) Space," I read the Underground Railroad ecocritically as a "literary heterotopia" of the fugitive slave narrative that became vital to an African American spatial and environmental imagination, arguing that representations of Underground Railroad space could figure as a "discursive loophole" for articulating environmental knowledge via an otherwise confining genre. My selection of a wide range of (primary) texts in this chapter, ranging from abolitionist writing to slave narratives including those by Bayley (1825), Curry (1840), Douglass (1845), Bibb (1849), and J. Brown (1855), reflects my aim to trace a broader discursive functioning of the literary heterotopia of the Underground Railroad. I demonstrate that this literary heterotopia became a means of "claiming (through) space" in a twofold sense: First, it enabled fugitives' reclaiming themselves through space, by reinterpreting relations between space and body, and by subversively playing with an antebellum popular discourse of the "Liberty Line." Second, I show how this subversive play provided a means of claiming space in the sense of imagining a literary Underground Railroad space that could be employed to express African American environmental knowledge, which makes it an important object of study from an ecocritical perspective.

Chapter 3, "Resisting (through) the Eye," turns to a mode, the pastoral, that is deeply connected with what may be seen as the opposite of

heterotopic space, namely the normalizing, controlling space of the plantation, and to its problematic involvement in African American expressions of environmental knowledge. I employ the idea of a “strategic pastoral,” understood as such moments in which pastoral elements become part of a doubled (visual) perspective in slave narratives, to examine how this technique enables an articulation of environmental knowledge, social critique, and utopian hope. As in the first chapter, I use a variety of (con-)texts, here in order to sketch antebellum visual regimes and their relation to the emergence of the genre, but focus on two narratives in particular, those by Frederick Douglass (1845) and Henry Box Brown (1849). Through these texts, and using a basic distinction by Susan Snyder between “temporal” and “spatial” aspects of the pastoral, this chapter demonstrates where, how, and with what effects slave narratives strategized pastoral elements to express environmental knowledge and criticize racial slavery, and suggests an alternative framework for thinking about the pastoral in ecocritical readings of African American literature.

Chapter 4, “Negotiating (through) the Skin,” turns to antebellum African American pamphlets, a part of the tradition that is generally somewhat underrepresented in comparison with the fugitive slave narrative. Considering the ways in which antebellum black pamphleteers dealt with the pressing task of attacking stereotypes and racialisms that sought to “biologically” exclude the black body, I analyze how their strategies of writing against this “biological exclusion,” which often revolved around notions of “birth,” “blood,” and “nature,” could become another means for expressing environmental knowledge. While including well-known texts such as David Walker’s “Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World” (1829), I also focus in-depth on lesser-known pamphlets by Hosea Easton, John Lewis, and William Whipper, in order to draw attention to alternative lines within the tradition and to suggest their (and the pamphlet tradition’s general) relevance to ecocriticism.

The second part of *Environmental Knowledge, Race, and African American Literature*, “Transformations: African American Environmental Knowledge from Reconstruction to Modernity,” focuses on revisions of environmental knowledge in African American writing in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Turning to slave narratives after slavery, fiction, and a journal, I show some of the ways in which post-Emancipation black writers signified on foundational forms of African American environmental knowledge, took up new models and modes for writing environmentally, and interacted with shifting epistemological contexts and racializing

discourses. Part II does not seek to imply a simple teleology or progressive development, but spotlights various texts as instances that give an impression of the complexity and diversity of African American environmental knowledge. Nevertheless, the correspondence between the chapters of Part I and Part II also suggests a sense of continuity, demonstrating that the post-Emancipation part of the tradition often took up and transformed previously developed forms of environmental knowledge to articulate their ideas for the future of African Americans.

Chapter 5, “Transforming Space,” looks at Charlotte Forten’s journals, written mostly during the Civil War, and William W. Brown’s *My Southern Home* (1880), as indicating a broad reconfiguration of literary space in African American writing that offered new ways for expressing environmental knowledge. One significant effect of this reconfiguration, I argue, was that articulations of environmental knowledge shifted from “loop-holes” like the slave narrative’s literary heterotopia of the Underground Railroad into broader literary spaces of education and home. In Forten, for instance, a writer-activist understudied in African American studies and not yet considered by ecocritics, we register a host of such spaces in her picturesque imagery of houses and schools, which become a means of creating an alternative discourse of nature as a multifaceted refuge that is also used to condemn slavery and racism. Brown’s *My Southern Home*, his traditionally least-studied book, on the other hand, is a more subversive trickster narrative that expresses relations to the non-human natural world by negotiating the ambivalent relationship of African Americans to the South. His place-based environmental knowledge is indicative of a post-war form of black agrarianism and an important element of Brown’s vision for a post-Emancipation America.

The last two chapters turn to Booker T. Washington and Charles W. Chesnutt, two canonical writers who are more and more included in ecocritical considerations, in order to highlight particular aspects of their work that become visible by reading their texts through the (Foucauldian) lens of environmental knowledge. In Chap. 6, “Transforming Vision,” I propose an alternative angle on two of Booker T. Washington’s autobiographies, *Up From Slavery* (1901) and the less famous sequel *Working with the Hands* (1904), to demonstrate some of the ways in which Washington’s post-Emancipation vision rests on (revised) forms of environmental knowledge and how this environmental knowledge interacts with contemporary evolutionary ideas. Washington’s environmental knowledge transforms the strategic pastoral of the fugitive slave narrative and introduces,

in *Working with the Hands*, an African American georgic that seeks to root African American life and culture in dignified and communal forms of labor. Moreover, I suggest that his (pastoral and georgic) environmental knowledge is both part of his own evolutionism and a means of criticizing racist evolutionary ideas.

Chapter 7, “Transforming the Politics of the Black Body,” considers Charles W. Chesnutt’s Uncle Julius stories as texts that revise the black body as an environmental entity. I argue that stories such as “Po’ Sandy,” “Sis’ Becky’s Pickaninny,” or “The Gray Wolf’s Ha’nt” are expressions of a trans-corporeal (Alaimo) African American environmental knowledge and of Chesnutt’s broader philosophy of epistemological relations to the material world. Beyond showing how Chesnutt’s trans-corporeal environmental knowledge self-reflexively draws attention to the difficulties of depicting links between the black body and non-human nature, while emphasizing the empowering potential that lies in imagining this body environmentally, I suggest that his philosophy of environmental knowledge signifies on Herbert Spencer’s social evolutionary ideas. Chesnutt’s stories epistemologically resist Spencerism to offer a philosophical reflection on the possibilities and limits of environmental knowledge as such. In this respect, his stories are particularly rich and useful “environmental texts” (L. Buell) that are not only crucial within a nineteenth-century tradition of African American environmental knowledge, but more generally of interest to ecocritics as thought-provoking comments on the epistemological and ethical interrelations between race, discourses of nature, and the non-human non-discursive material.

The chapters on Washington and Chesnutt as well as my closing remarks on Obama’s 2009 visit of Yellowstone in the conclusion reflect how this study conceptualizes African American environmental knowledge. On the one hand, such knowledge emerges in specific, racialized epistemological contexts (scientific racism, Spencerism), which often violently mobilized discourses of “nature” and of the “human”; texts must be understood within broader histories of racial and environmental knowledge. On the other hand, the aim of this book is to demonstrate that there are distinct forms of African American environmental knowledge and characteristic lines of development within the nineteenth-century black literary tradition, as writers frequently signified on their predecessors. We find an interconnectedness through environmental knowledge within this tradition, which often celebrates yet also problematizes and strategizes relations to non-human non-discursive materialities, and which has effects up until

today. A Foucauldian genealogy is, after all, a “history of the present,” and writing such a history of the present of African American literary environmental knowledge seems of importance if we want to improve our understanding of the relationship between race and relations to non-human nature. As ecocritics stress that environmental problems are social problems, and since there is much truth in Frantz Fanon’s claim that the “social constellation, the cultural whole, are deeply modified by the existence of racism,” African American writing is a critical place for investigating such problems more thoroughly (36). Rereading such writing through the lens of environmental knowledge may thus do more than enable scholars to rethink the black literary canon from a changed perspective and to spotlight alternative forms of environmental writing. Ultimately, going back to writers like Henry Bibb, Charlotte Forten, or Booker T. Washington—or exploring how Douglass and Chesnut wrote about Niagara Falls—may also enhance our understanding of the social and cultural dynamics involved in the environmental crises the world faces today.

NOTES

1. On Douglass’s travels through the U.S. in the early to mid-1840s, see Quarles 25–37; McFeely 91–118; Levine, *Politics* 28–57. While none of these accounts mention Douglass’s visit of Niagara Falls in 1843, it seems reasonable to assume that the visit took place in connection with Douglass’s attendance of the “National Convention of Colored Citizens” at Buffalo, New York, in August 1843 (cf. McFeely 105–107; Levine, *Politics* 28–29; Quarles 31, 120–121).
2. The unpublished manuscript of Douglass’s note titled “Niagara” is part of the holdings of the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress. Western Anti-Slavery Society Records, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. The original spelling, punctuation, and grammar have not been altered in my transcription.
3. Douglass, becoming widely read in the literature of his day after attaining freedom, must have formed preconceptions of Niagara prior to his visit in August 1843. The mention of a “miniature” of Niagara Falls in the cited passage, too, suggests that this natural monument held significant meanings for Douglass. While I have not been able to confirm his actual possession of such an object, other clues suggesting Douglass’s fascination with the natural monument lie in his reference to visiting Niagara prior to the Civil War in his last autobiography (cf. Douglass, *Life* 327), and in the fact that he spent his second honeymoon at Niagara.

4. On the involvement of expectations in nineteenth-century Niagara writing, see Revie 59–112; McKinsey 189–202. Especially after 1850, disappointment of Niagara dominates and culminates in satirical accounts such as M.N. Thomson’s “Doesticks on a Bender” (1854) or Mark Twain’s “A Day at Niagara” and “English Festivities” (1869), mordant burlesques that depict disillusioning visits of Niagara Falls.
5. Out of eighteenth-century theorizations (Burke, Kant), the sublime signaled a mind’s distinctly human quality of “rationality” and acted as a universal “proof” of a subject’s humanity. It is such claims to “universality” and a “naturalization” of the sublime as part of “human nature” that Douglass’s note undermines by suggesting that the sublime cannot be disconnected from social experience; on the intersection of racism and the sublime cf. Hubbard; and Armstrong. Additionally, Douglass’s unmasking of the sublime as mere rhetoric may also be read as a critique of a shallow mid-nineteenth-century American sublime that, as Nash has observed, often came to be used “so indiscriminately as to lose meaning” (61). On the development of a specifically U.S. American form of the sublime, cf. Nash 44–83; Nye 17–43; on nineteenth-century sublime language on Niagara Falls, cf. Revie 5–10, 59–112.
6. Chesnutt leaves open what exactly happens to Grandison at Niagara Falls and subsequently. While the text gives enough clues to assume that Owens pays locals to kidnap his servant, which is also the assessment of several scholars (cf. Cutter 47; Hurd 82; Kang 441), much remains in the dark. It is unclear, for example, who the “young men from the neighborhood” are, whether Owens knows who they are and what their (possibly abolitionist?) views, or whether Grandison was indeed imprisoned or mistreated (the account he gives upon his return appears unlikely, as readers eventually learn to trust neither what Grandison says nor what the Colonel thinks). What is important for my reading in light of these ambivalences is that the story suggests that Grandison evidently *has* plotted his escape all along, that this implies a *hidden* strategic knowledge of the enslaved, and that, crucially, this hidden knowledge also involves alternative epistemological relations to non-human natural environments like Niagara Falls.
7. If we find African Americans in antebellum mainstream discourses on Niagara Falls at all, they are most often objects, not subjects of sublime experience. Historically involved in the tourism industry as waiters, drivers, guides, and servants, African Americans most often figure as passive “black accessory parts” that haunt mainstream depictions of Niagara like a Morrisonian Africanist presence.
8. Madigan provides additional evidence that suggests that this story—and its Niagara scene—should be read in the context of the Underground Railroad by connecting “The Passing of Grandison” to the historical Dillingham

- case and drawing attention to Chesnutt's fascination with Wilbur H. Siebert's monumental *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom* (1898) (cf. 172–174).
9. On closer examination, there are various instances attesting to nineteenth-century African Americans' engagement with Niagara. The region was part of the Underground Railroad, cf. Hudson 157, 186, 221–222; or Thomas 41–43. Moreover, we find a range of references in antebellum abolitionist poetry and throughout the second half of the nineteenth-century, up to the 1905 Niagara Movement. On the history of African Americans at Niagara Falls cf. Thomas; Dubinsky 259–262; Winks 146–150, 325–336.
 10. Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* (1992) has inspired this study in at least two ways. First, Morrison's notion of a “dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence” has shaped my conceptualization of African American environmental knowledge as a culturally specific yet fundamentally hybrid knowledge that developed due to both Western and African diasporic influences (5). Secondly, Morrison's suggestion that an often hidden “contemplation of this black presence is central to any understanding of our national literature” parallels the motivation of this study to turn to a literary tradition with a changed perspective (5). The aim of this book, too, is to reverse the optics of interpretation, to “romance a *green* shadow” of the black literary tradition.
 11. On a broader and older meaning of “environment,” based on the verb “to environ” meaning “to surround,” and its etymological history, see Buell, *Future* 140–141. The necessity of using the term “environment/al” in a wider sense when examining African American literature and culture ecocritically has been emphasized by others as well, see e.g. Wardi 12; Hicks 206. My broader notion of “environmental” in “environmental knowledge” is also indebted to these scholars' insights.
 12. “Indigenous knowledge,” sometimes also called “traditional ecological knowledge,” is often contrasted with scientific knowledge and can be defined as “knowledge held by indigenous people, where ‘indigenous’ stands for aboriginal, native or autochthonous” (Heyd 63). On indigenous knowledge, see e.g. the contributions in Inglis; and Heyd.
 13. Alberts suggests that, since “Foucault wrote virtually nothing on environmental issues [...] it has been the task of interpreters to draw out and elucidate possibilities” (544). Darier agrees that there are thus only “unintended Foucauldian effects on environmental critique” (“Foucault” 6, 28). Nonetheless, (rare) moments in which Foucault explicitly touches upon environmental issues may be found in the lecture series of 1975/76 (cf. *Society* 245), or in a late interview (“Ethic of Care” 15).
 14. Hekman's goal in *The Material of Knowledge* is to lay the groundwork for a new “approach that brings the material back in” by incorporating “the

insights of linguistic constructionism without falling into its error of rejecting the material” (4). In her argument, Foucauldian thought has an exposed position (Chapter 3), as it “can be interpreted as accomplishing precisely what postmodernism claimed but generally failed to do: a deconstruction of the discourse/reality dichotomy” (8).

15. I have chosen to use the term “non-discursive material” as it indicates that I seek to refine and expand Foucault’s own dichotomic use of the terms “discursive” and “non-discursive.” For Foucault, “non-discursive” meant broadly “any kind of extrinsic” that may be involved in the production of subjectivities and that is *not* discursive. Employing the term “non-discursive material” places stronger emphasis on the physical, the material, as something that *shapes* the discursive and that involves *different types* of materialities.
16. In this respect, an analysis of environmental knowledge is related to a “nature-scepticism” characteristic of a number of ecocritical and environmental philosophical studies of the last decades that have questioned the viability of the term “nature” as such. Consider, for instance, Bruno Latour’s influential call to abandon the idea of an autonomous nature, or, as one of the most radical examples in this respect, Timothy Morton’s work, which is driven by the notion that “the very idea of ‘nature’ [...] will have to wither away in an ‘ecological’ state of human society” (*Ecology* 1). While a Foucault-inspired genealogy of environmental knowledge likewise questions nature as an objectively verifiable essence, “nature” must nonetheless remain central to this mode of ecocritical analysis as the discursive entity—the “name”—it seeks to deconstruct and investigate in its relations to non-human non-discursive materialities.
17. Garrard’s claim is that ecocritics have taken up and expanded the notion of biopower to include non-human forms of life: “While for Foucault, the sole organism of interest is the human animal, the institutions of bio-power the prison, the asylum and the sex clinic, ecocritics have extended his analysis far beyond our own species” (“Introduction” 2). The argument is, using Foucault’s words, that ecocritics have broken up an anthropocentric notion of biopolitics that saw an “entry of [*human*] life into history” and have in turn given rise to “the entry of [*non-human*] life into history” (*Will* 141). However, while Garrard suggests that the second part of the *Handbook of Ecocriticism* “attests to the prevalence of Foucauldian ecocriticism” (“Introduction” 3), he refers to an abstract—not a concrete or explicit—kind of Foucauldian ecocriticism, as many of these contributions do not mention or employ Foucauldian concepts.
18. Foucauldian ideas about space, power, or discourse are, of course, not entirely absent from African American studies. Some scholars, for instance, have used panopticism as a model to explain facets of African American

enslavement (cf. DeLombard; Axelrod and Axelrod; Nielsen). Moreover, a notable exception of African American studies scholarship that centrally relies on Foucauldian (archaeological) theory can be found in works by H. Baker (e.g. *Turning; Blues*); other contributions inspired by Foucauldian thought are the studies by McBride; and Tuhkanen; and the collection by Plasa and Ring. Otherwise, however, the field has often remained skeptical towards “white” high theory, in part because of a perceived indifference in poststructuralism’s “death of the author” to the question of “who is speaking” (cf. Erkkilä).

19. Some of the most influential work on environmental justice of the past decades has been done in the fields of sociology, by scholars like Robert D. Bullard, Bunyan Bryant, or Beverly Wright, and in ecocriticism, by Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, Scott Slovic, or Rob Nixon. See for a general overview Mohai et al.; for scholarship that deals with a specifically African American context, see Kaalund; S. Washington; and Bullard’s extensive work.
20. “Postcolonial ecocriticism” has emerged as a burgeoning scholarly field over the past years, as both ecocritics and postcolonial scholars have recognized crucial overlaps of their concerns in a globalizing world. Although there are points of intersection between this field and ecocriticism on African American literature, the latter has its specific perspective, as it has to take into account not only a distinct literary history but also a particular tradition of literary criticism that provides its own approaches and concepts. For an impression of the rapidly growing field of postcolonial ecocriticism, see e.g. DeLoughrey/Handley; or Banerjee; on the possible dialogue of postcolonial studies with ecocriticism on African American literature, see Gerhardt, “Greening.”
21. Contemporary African American authors that ecocritics have more recently focused on are, for example, Morrison (Wardi, chapters 2–3), Butler (Grewe-Volpp), and Walker (James). There is also work on Charles Johnson (Geilern), Michael S. Harper (Dodd, “Swamp”), or Toni Cade Bambara (C. Walker). For ecocritical engagements with African American film, see Scruggs; Monani/Beehr.
22. Apart from (chapters of) the book-length studies mentioned above, by Finseth, Outka, Ruffin, K. Smith, Johnson, Claborn, and Newman, a variety of ecocritical contributions have focused on the nineteenth-century African American tradition by now. Treatments of the antebellum period are found, for instance, in articles by Bennett; Finseth, “Walker”; Gerhardt, “Greening,” “Border”; Hunter; K. Smith, “Agrarianism”; Kilcup; and Finley. Ecocritical readings of African American literature of the latter half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century are provided in essays by Myers, “Other Nature”; Hicks; Claborn, “Canyon”; Miller; Raine; and Beilfuss.

23. This study understands “African American literature” in a broad sense as literature written by U.S. Americans of African descent. I am aware of the criticism this may trigger in the face of ongoing debates over what “African American literature” actually is (or was), what terminology to use, or what to include under this rubric, yet this study is not designed as the place to tackle such questions directly. Let it suffice to say at this point that I do not follow a definition as narrow as Warren’s, who locates “African American literature” in the context of Jim Crow, but a more general one that sees African American literature as formed to a large extent out of “a prolonged engagement with the problem of slavery” (2).
24. I should note that Outka’s *Race and Nature* in particular has been inspiring for this study, especially its important argument that, as the pastoral was linked to the trauma of slavery, American Romanticism turned to the sublime and the wilderness as providing a psychological distance, an escape from the haunted pastoral. Taking up this general idea regarding African American literature, which Outka likewise reads as seeking to escape or repress the traumatic (plantation) pastoral, e.g. through “the anti-nature writing tendency of the slave narratives” (172), *Environmental Knowledge, Race, and African American Literature* is, among other things, an attempt to reconsider Outka’s theses in more specific (African American) contexts. The aim is, for instance, to show not only how a (strategic) pastoralism developed within the black literary tradition, but also how the wilderness and the sublime, as concepts that, according to Outka, were used by the Euro-American literary tradition to repress the trauma of the pastoral, came to function in African American letters.
25. A handful of scholars in African American studies have considered the pastoral in the black literary tradition prior to Bennett, see Bone; Mootry; Shields; and E. Jones. These critics, too, have usually stressed the problematic history of the pastoral in African American letters. It was, however, Bennett’s argument that turned the antipastoral of African American literature into a relatively prominent (ecocritical) theme that has influenced a variety of readings, e.g. those by Scruggs; Martin; Myers, “Pastoral”; Preston-McGee; and Beilfuss.

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PART I

Foundations: Antebellum African
American Environmental Knowledge



CHAPTER 2

Claiming (through) Space: Topographies of Enslavement, the Literary Heterotopia of the Underground Railroad, and the Co-agency of the Non-human

From the early 1850s on, William Still, one of the most effective “conductors” of the Underground Railroad, entrusted his records to a Philadelphia graveyard. Whether he snuck out at night-time, hastily rushing to his secret hiding place, as romantics of the “Liberty Line” might imagine, or placed his notes there in broad daylight we may never know for sure. What is known, however, is that Still literally buried his risky memories in a crypt, where they remained hidden throughout some of the most eventful years of U.S. American history.¹ The Civil War came and went, and it was much later, in the late 1860s, that Still finally recovered his material from the vault that held his treasure “in the very midst of the region of the dead and the land of forgetfulness” (Boyd xxxiv). His purpose then was to commence writing, as he terms it in a letter to his daughter of August 13, 1867, “the History of the U.G.R.R.,” and his efforts were finally crowned in 1872 with the publication of *The Underground Rail Road: A Record of Facts, Authentic Narratives, Letters, &c* (qtd. Hendrick/Hendrick 17).

The story of Still, his records, and his book is revealing, as both the manner in which he employed his secret hiding-place and the reception of his work by contemporaries and subsequent generations are representative of the Underground Railroad and its legacy. On the one hand, the decade-long secrecy surrounding Still’s writings mirrors the subversive spatial

matrix commonly associated with the Underground Railroad. The crypt was a perfect choice in this sense, not only as the Greek term “krypte” means “hidden, secret,” but also because a burial ground coincides with an imagery of “entombment” and “rebirth” often found in fugitives’ descriptions of slavery and their escapes. On the other hand, the fairing of Still’s work through time is in many ways characteristic of a long-standing discourse on the Underground Railroad since Reconstruction. While favorably received upon its first publication in 1872, *The Underground Rail Road* was largely ignored afterwards and rarely reprinted in its entirety,² a process emblematic of some of the turns that engagement with the “Liberty Line” has taken in both the American imagination and in academic scholarship.

For a considerable time, such Underground Railroad scholarship remained under the influence of the post-Civil War reminiscences of white abolitionists such as Levi Coffin (1876), Eber M. Pettit (1879), Laura Haviland (1881), Robert C. Smedley (1883), and, in particular, Wilbur Siebert’s pioneering academic work. While Siebert’s *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom* (1898), the first major scholarly study on the subject for which its author had contacted hundreds of former abolitionists, remains a significant source until today, working with Siebert’s material often meant tacitly accepting his idea of the Underground Railroad as a “great and intricate network” of stations run by white abolitionists (62). Thus, as Bordewich points out in *Bound for Canaan* (2005), “[f]or generations, Americans thought of the Underground Railroad as a mostly monochromatic narrative of high-minded white people condescending to assist terrified and helpless blacks” (4), a view that decisively changed with Larry Gara’s critical work in the early 1960s. In *The Liberty Line* (1961), Gara attacked both Siebert’s exaggerated idea of an elaborately organized underground network and a scholarly focus on white male protagonists that often ignored the role of the fugitives themselves, free blacks, and women. As his argument was in tune with the changing climate of the 1960s, Gara’s study set up a lasting Underground Railroad skepticism that effected a temporary neglect of the phenomenon as a mere “myth” in scholarly work.³

More recent academic engagement with the Underground Railroad, however, tends to be more equilibrated between the extreme poles of Siebert’s “intricate network”-idea and Gara’s vehement skepticism,

turning its focus, for instance, onto the biographical and the local.⁴ While denying the notion of a coherent large-scale organization once suggested by Siebert, the general understanding at present is that the Underground Railroad was nevertheless “much more than a picturesque legend” (Bordewich 8). It should be understood, as historian Eric Foner proposes in his recent *Gateway to Freedom* (2015), “not as a single entity but as an umbrella term for local groups that employed numerous methods to assist fugitives, some public and entirely legal, some flagrant violations of the law” (15). This more balanced perspective and a broadening of scope in Underground Railroad scholarship cannot belie the fact, however, that the overall focus remains largely historiographical, centered on the myth-vs.-reality debate. Underground Railroad scholars of the twenty-first century, although meticulously attending to specific localities and regions, largely continue to be driven by the question Gara poses through the title of his contribution to Miller’s *Complete History of American Slavery* (2001), namely, “Was there really an underground railroad?” (439).

My approach in this chapter shifts the focus from this predominantly historiographic perspective to a (so far rarely taken⁵) literary one, aiming to demonstrate the relevance of the Underground Railroad, despite its conventionally anthropocentric understanding,⁶ for ecocriticism. For that purpose, I propose to rethink the Underground Railroad ecocritically as a “literary heterotopia.” “Heterotopia” (Foucault) is a particularly productive concept in the context of a foundational African American environmental knowledge and the fugitive slave narrative. On the one hand, forms of an African American environmental knowledge often emerged, as scholarship in African American studies and black geographies implies, in what could be called heterotopic spaces beyond or subversive to the confines of the normalizing spaces of the plantation system. They were tied, for instance, to the semiautonomous provision ground of slave plots (cf. e.g. McKittrick; Wynter), to swamps (Lockley), or to hunting and fishing grounds (Giltner). On the other hand, it is important to note that the kinds of spaces usually depicted in fugitive slave narratives did not readily lend themselves to articulating such forms of environmental knowledge. Generic conventions and abolitionist politics demanded that narratives primarily represent “normal” (not heterotopic) and harmful topographies of enslavement that corroborated the atrocious character of the dreaded system. This, as well as the need for narrators to ‘humanize’ or ‘civilize’

themselves as beings of ‘culture’ rather than ‘nature’ effected a general tendency to disengage the non-human non-discursive material world; it gave the slave narrative what Paul Outka terms an “anti-nature writing tendency” (172). In this sense, the conventional space of the genre left little room to articulate environmental knowledge.

By contrast, I argue, the Underground Railroad functioned as a discursive other-space, a locus in the slave narrative for expressing such knowledge, gained during enslavement. Just as heterotopic spaces under slavery became pockets of freedom that could facilitate the development of environmental knowledge, the literary Underground Railroad with the relative autonomy it meant for writers (due to a necessary air of secrecy) became a “discursive loophole” within an otherwise confining genre that could facilitate the expression of relations to the non-human non-discursive material world. To explore the functioning of this discursive loophole as a literary heterotopia that enabled an articulation of African American environmental knowledge is the aim of this chapter. To this end, I will first outline the heterotopic function and subversive employment of the Underground Railroad in the discourse of the fugitive slave narratives more broadly, by focusing on a range of abolitionist texts and narratives including those by Douglass (1845), H.B. Brown (1849), J. Brown (1855), and Craft (1860). Subsequently, I go on to highlight the potential of reading the Underground Railroad from an ecocritical perspective by demonstrating how narratives such as those by Bayley (1825), Curry (1840), and Bibb (1849), employed this literary heterotopia to express what I call a hermeneutics of freedom and a co-agency of the non-human. My selection of a wide range of (primary) texts in this chapter reflects my aim to trace a broader discursive function of the literary heterotopia of the Underground Railroad, as it suggests how fruitful an ecocritical engagement with the Underground Railroad can be. The genre, I argue, functionalized what was popularly known as Underground Railroad during the antebellum period to carve out its own, often de-anthropocentrized version of that space. Literary Underground Railroad space held the potential for imagining identifications and alliances with the non-human and opened up a way for spatially articulating environmental knowledge, which makes it an important object of (future) study from an environmentally oriented perspective.

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD AS AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERARY HETEROTOPIA

In “Of Other Spaces,” Foucault introduces his “heterotopology” as “the study, analysis, description, and ‘reading’ [...] of these different spaces” (240), and suggests six general principles of heterotopias (cf. 240–244). Some of these appear to correspond with the kind of space imagined in the popular notion of the Underground Railroad still cherished by many Americans, as “a mysterious Underground Railroad with tunnels and hidey-holes” (Foner 11). For example, the “Liberty Line” might be imagined as a space that included several spaces (heterotopic principle III); that involved a system of opening and closing, as fugitives entered into its matrix once they found one of its “operators” (principle V); and that had an obvious overall function—remaining hidden until achieving freedom—with respect to all other spaces (principle VI).

The matter appears in a different light, however, when considering the Underground Railroad as a *literary* heterotopia, i.e. a heterotopia emerging through the discourse of the antebellum slave narrative in its cultural dynamics and in its play with relations of race and power. In this context, it is essential to take into account the topographies of Southern enslavement against which formerly enslaved narrators set and recount their experiences. While there were, as various scholars have suggested, complex ways in which the enslaved often gained (minimal) forms of agency even if they did not take flight, e.g. through everyday resistance and constant power negotiations with plantation owners, the space portrayed in slave narratives usually stresses confining spatial patterns as part of an “anti-slavery gothic mode” (Newman 57) to serve the political aims of abolitionism. The grand spatial divide of the general “map” fugitives most often draw in their accounts, for example, is that between a free North and a slaveholding Southern “prison house” (even if this does not necessarily correspond with historical assessments that show that flight patterns involved much more diverse forms and directions⁷). Moreover, slave narratives depict Southern topographies of enslavement as centrally involving a sense of immobility produced by a seemingly ubiquitous hierarchization of spatial patterns. The discourse of the antebellum slave narrative frequently describes a system that, adhering to the dominant racial order, perpetually sought to control movements, directions and placements and thus excessively compartmentalized space into confining units for the

enslaved's body. Consider, for instance, laws such as the following, cited by numerous narratives and abolitionist texts of the period, like Theodore Weld's *American Slavery As It Is* (1839):

If more than seven slaves together are found in any road without a white person, twenty lashes apiece; for visiting a plantation without a written pass, ten lashes; for letting loose a boat from where it is made fast, thirty-nine lashes; for having any article for sale without a ticket from his master, ten lashes; for traveling in any other than the most usual and accustomed road, when going alone to any place, forty lashes; for traveling in the night without a pass, forty lashes; for being found in another person's Negro quarters, forty lashes; for hunting with dogs in the woods, thirty lashes; for being on horseback without the written permission of their master, twenty-five lashes; for riding or going abroad in the night, or riding horses in the daytime, without leave, a slave may be whipped, cropped, or branded in the cheek with the letter R, or otherwise punished, such punishment not extending to life, or so as to render him unfit for labor. (Weld 144)

Such statutes articulate enslavement primarily in terms of a confining and normalizing spatial control. Designed in accordance with the slaveholder's ultimate goal of controlling his "property," their punishments are predominantly punishments for the commitment of "spatial" crimes, as the use of verbs like "visiting," "traveling," "riding," or "going abroad" indicates. Space itself becomes corrupted through the production and sanctioning of "crimes" that break with a dominant racial hierarchy, and that furnish a sense of immobility pertaining to man-made as well as non-human natural environs that became one of the earmarks of fugitive slave narratives' depictions of Southern enslavement.

Coincidental with this immobility, fugitives' accounts continually emphasize the forced mobility that characterized Southern chattel slavery. After all, the enslaved were "herded" together in units, as extensively described, for instance, in William Wells Brown's *Narrative* (1847), or hired out, sent off, or sold away in slave auctions that are depicted in seminal narratives such as Douglass's (*My Bondage* 412, 444–447) or Jacobs's (14–17). Thus, formerly enslaved narrators often underlined that the only kind of "mobility" the black body underwent in normalized spaces of enslavement was an enforced, haunting one that produced trauma and often caused the separation of families. The sole kind of motion officially sanctioned was in itself an articulation of the inertia the enslaved's body attained in spaces of enslavement, since the fundamental principle,

Douglass retrospectively points out, was that “the slave was a fixture; he had no choice, no goal, but was pegged down to one single spot, and must take his root there or nowhere. The idea of removal elsewhere came generally in the form of a threat, and in punishment for a crime” (*Life and Times* 119).

Moreover, narratives often stress and vividly describe how the (im) mobility which laws officially sought to impose on the enslaved body was, from a practical point of view, enforced through a variety of extra-legal social practices and institutions that ranged from plantation overseers to slave patrols and professional slave-hunters with their bloodhounds. As Benjamin Drew, in his *North-Side View of Slavery* (1855), concluded from interviews he had conducted with fugitives in Canada, there appeared to be a “strong police [which] must watch the motions of the oppressed” and which “usually answers its atrocious purpose very well” (4). Thus, the background against which fugitives recounted their flights involved a combination of means of visual control with corporeal punishments that functioned together to confine the enslaved body in space, including non-human natural space. Many fugitives presented what emerged as the peculiar institution harnessed natural environs as a “prisonhouse,” a “fortress,” in which nature was made complicit in their enslavement, as its elements were made to correspond with the master’s point of view, spatial patterns and logic of confinement. This was, to borrow a term introduced by Walter Johnson, a “carceral landscape,”⁸ which, I would add, employed an ensemble of spatial as well as visual practices to ensure the slaveholder’s ultimate goal of “maintain[ing] complete authority over his slave” and exerting a “constant vigilance” (Douglass, “Lecture on Slavery” 27). The enslaved, by these combined means, from the perspective of the plantation system depicted in fugitive slave narratives, had to be held in and had to know her/his place, but was not allowed a sense of space.

Against this framework and its aim of an “ideally” complete confinement and functionalization of the enslaved body, the notion of an Underground Railroad, which emerged in slave narratives from the mid-1830s on, held the potential for narrators of inserting their own reinterpretations of spatial and power relations, reinterpretations that had their roots in a “heterotopic thinking” of space under enslavement. It provided narrators with the means of performing and representing a conceptual transformation of spaces of confinement within topographies of enslavement into empowering spaces of (mobile) concealment. Thus, the Underground Railroad, even if the actual number of fugitives may have

been relatively low,⁹ had a significant political and cultural impact, as well as a profound “literary” effect for formerly enslaved writers. On the one hand, it was instrumental in aggravating sectional tensions, as slaveholders, especially in the upper South, came to fear a significant loss of “property,” while abolitionists felt reassured of their course of action by the powerful statement of discontentment with slavery each runaway represented. On the other hand, the notion of an Underground Railroad meant the entry of a discursive space to be negotiated in an imaginative task by the escapees themselves, a task which echoed material practices of spatial resistance and heterotopic thinking performed under slavery. No matter the mode of travel chosen by fugitives, narrators retrospectively had to come to terms not only with what freedom actually meant, but also with how the process of gaining freedom was rooted in conceptualizations of a transitory space. The task was also one of turning what had continually developed as heterotopic thinking during enslavement into imagining and claiming a sense of space against the “map” which was the background for recounting their experiences, one of rooting freedom and identity conceptually within spaces of flight.

Two cases, both widely celebrated as Underground Railroad stories in their time, are particularly revealing examples of how this task was performed, as they illustrate how the Underground Railroad became a literary heterotopia that allowed for a representation of reinterpreting confinement into empowering concealment. A first case is that of Henry “Box” Brown, whose means of escape from slavery in Virginia in March 1849 instantly made him a celebrity, first in the U.S. and then in Britain. His *Narrative of Henry Box Brown* (1849; a British edition appeared in 1851) is somewhat atypical, as its author, having been treated comparatively well, admits to only giving the “beautiful side” of slavery, having left “for other pens far abler than mine [...] the labor of an exposé of the enormities of slavery” (Brown, *Narrative* 11). Hence, after a relatively brief, generically obligatory description of slavery’s atrocities, the text focuses instead on Brown’s means of escape, becoming an Underground Railroad story par excellence. The narrative extensively describes how Brown, inspired by what he views as a god-given vision, thinks up a plan to convey himself to freedom in a crate. He employs a carpenter to furnish this device, and receives help from a sympathetic white man, Samuel A. Smith, who “packs” him into the box and has him shipped for \$86 by Adams Express Company to Philadelphia (cf. 59–62).

Throughout the portrayal of this journey, Brown, on the one hand, repeatedly refers to his ordeal as one of traumatic confinement by recounting the hardships of travelling in what he first terms a “portable prison” (*Narrative* v), then “a moving tomb” (vii), a “narrow prison,” and a “darkened home of three feet by two” (60). On the other hand, however, after Brown’s eventual safe arrival in Philadelphia, and standing “erect before my equal fellow men; no longer a crouching slave” (63), his reinterpretation gains the overtones of self-empowerment *through* self-confinement. His previous rhetoric that emphasized the trauma of confinement changes to a celebratory one that highlights the power of concealment, which is also conveyed through Brown’s changed use of personal pronouns, especially in the British version of his narrative. Only enduring spatial confinement in “*my* box,” he retrospectively argues, i.e. only deliberately thinking heterotopically and employing space in this specific, personal way by concealing his body heterotopically out of the spatial matrix that enslaved him enables freedom (*Life* 54, 56, my emphasis). As merging into his alternate other-space becomes the cause for a celebratory “song” about “*my* fete in the box,” Brown demonstrates an appropriation of his confinement as concealment within a self-created, transitory heterotopia that facilitated “*my* resurrection from the grave of slavery” (60, 57, my emphasis).

Another telling instance where Underground Railroad space enables a heterotopic reinterpretation of confinement that emerges from heterotopic thinking during enslavement can be found in the narrative of William and Ellen Craft, a text that is noteworthy for describing the flight of more than one (typically male) enslaved individual. The couple, in comparison to Brown, travelled not only a much greater distance, approximately *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* (1860), as the title of their pamphlet suggests, but also employed a different but by no means less original scheme of escape. Their narrative, which is “not intended as a full history of the life of my wife, nor of myself, but is merely an account of our escape,” presents its Underground Railroad story as a tale of disguise (iii-iv). Ellen, the nearly white (unacknowledged) daughter of her master, dresses up as William’s ‘master,’ and takes a four-day journey with her ‘slave’ from Macon, Georgia to Philadelphia, which is hailed as a Bunyanesque “great city” (70). It is the intimate knowledge of the spatial system surrounding them and, ironically, the fact that in accordance with the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 “slaveholders have the privilege of taking their slaves to any part of the country they think proper,” that leads to

their eventual success (29). Only by becoming a master/slave-couple are William and Ellen able to make their way into free territory. Through crossdressing and devices such as “poultices” for the “right hand in a sling” to avoid signing paperwork (36, 34), the Crafts’ Underground Railroad experience, which technically employs overt transportation in trains and steamers, effectively undermines the spatial matrix they are confined by. The space the couple carve out for themselves is a heterotopia that employs both the body and systemic heterotopias (trains, ships) for its own purpose. Their Underground Railroad thus reveals in paradigmatic ways its consciously realized heterotopic qualities, as the story emphasizes how their space of resistance is ultimately rooted in language, performance and their “concealing” bodies themselves, which attain the function of heterotopic signatures subversively cutting through the social and spatial texture of Southern enslavement.

Taken together, such cases attest to the slave narrative’s reinterpretation of confinement into concealment through the notion of the Underground Railroad, as they hint at the roots of this reinterpretation in resistance practices and heterotopic thinking during enslavement. In numerous instances, fugitives’ bodies themselves are depicted as acting heterotopically within carceral landscapes and topographies of enslavement, thus offering the means of escape by complying with the relations and obliging to the rules of the very spatial and racial system they seek to transcend. By entering into a box (obliging to the “rules of shipment”) or by entering into pre-defined roles (complying with the racial logics of topographies of enslavement), fugitives retrospectively demonstrate how confinement could be subversively employed and become a means of concealed, heterotopic resistance.¹⁰ If, as Douglass wrote, the slave “must take his root there or nowhere,” i.e. if an enslaved individual had to know their place during slavery but was not allowed a sense of space, the notion of an Underground Railroad provided fugitives with a means of (re-)imagining a heterotopic form of concealment through which identity could be rooted in space (*Life and Times* 119). In this sense, the Underground Railroad gave formerly enslaved narrators’ an opportunity to remind readers of their resistance and agency even under slavery and of their skills of re-conceptualizing themselves in their spatial relations; it enabled highlighting a subversive use of space by showing how the formerly enslaved body could self-consciously be transformed into a sign of empowerment and resistance.

Beyond offering formerly enslaved writers a way to demonstrate a skillful resistance through heterotopic thinking developed under slavery and to gain a new sense of space, the literary heterotopia of the Underground Railroad had another important strategic function within antebellum culture. As a literary heterotopia, a “realized utopia” in the Foucauldian sense (“Of Other Spaces” 239) that emerged through the African American word, it subversively interacted with a wider popular discourse on the Underground Railroad. To understand this additional facet of the slave narrative’s Underground Railroad heterotopia, one has to take into account what the “Liberty Line” meant more broadly culturally in the decades leading up to the Civil War, especially to abolitionists.

As we know, abolitionism was by no means unanimously supportive of Underground Railroad activities, which were after all both risky endeavors and open violations of the law.¹¹ However, despite the controversies the Underground Railroad sparked, abolitionist circles eventually turned out to be more than willing to gain momentum through this part of antislavery work as well, as a broader Northern public increasingly came to employ a celebratory rhetoric with respect to the “Liberty Line.” In the decades marked by a rapid spread of “Vigilance Committees” across the North from the mid-1840s on, and by the pivotal Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, the Underground Railroad grew into an influential concept. No matter where and when the term “Underground Railroad” actually emerged,¹² it quickly gained discursive currency throughout the 1840s in a variety of ways. To begin with, there was a tendency, in some of the “Committees,” to broadcast their achievements as part of what became mystified as an elaborate network aiding fugitives in their escapes. At the same time, a myth of the Underground Railroad seems to have catered to the sentimental and sensationalist tastes of a broader antebellum public, which may be sensed from its widespread presence in abolitionist songs and visual representations of the time,¹³ literary works from Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) to Thoreau’s “A Plea for Captain John Brown” (1859), or the legendary status of figures such as “General” Tubman, “Father” Robert Purvis, or “King” Jermain Loguen (cf. Foner 14). Moreover, major abolitionist works such as Weld’s *American Slavery As It Is*, Drew’s *Northside View of Slavery*, or Redpath’s *The Roving Editor* (1859), contributed continuously to the popularity of the idea, as did the printing press in general, in which the phrase “Underground Railroad” soon became ubiquitous. Hence perfectly understood in antebellum America, and although the Underground Railroad may factually have been characterized by a

“minimum of central direction and a maximum of grassroots involvement” (Bordewich 5), its discourse became a powerful reality.

While the concept thus “fired the public imagination” (Gara, *Liberty Line* 114), the perspective from which fugitives’ related to the Underground Railroad through their narratives was markedly different. Although some willingly gave up information on the modes of their escapes and were broadcasted as Underground Railroad heroes (e.g. Box Brown or the Crafts), there prevailed at once a general anonymity and necessary obscuration with respect to this part of the experience of the formerly enslaved. What emerged in fugitives’ texts was a twofold movement: while often giving some information about their modes and means of flight, therein reinterpreting enslaving confinement into liberating concealment, the fugitive slave narrative at the same time created a characteristic silence around the Underground Railroad. The genre’s discourse came to oscillate between veiling and unveiling, hiding and revealing, thereby strategically creating the Underground Railroad as truly heterotopic space, i.e. as simultaneously “utopic” and “realized.”

Marking one pole within this spectrum, fugitive slave narratives consciously and consistently covered up their Underground Railroad space, cutting it off from clear referents by leaving out the names of persons and places involved and remaining vague in their descriptions. Henry Watson, a runaway from Virginia, is exemplary in denying information “lest I should block up the way, or affect the business of the under-ground railroad” (40); Thomas Smallwood, while promising in the title of his 1851 *Narrative* to give “an account of the underground railroad,” leaves his portrayal by and large intangible (20); and William Wells Brown, in his description of William Still in *The Black Man* (1863), refrains from saying “how many persons passed through his [Still’s] hands” (211). As expendable as this list is, it would be false to assume that all white abolitionists carelessly published their “honorable” deeds¹⁴ while all black narrators were constantly cautious in terms of leaving out explicit references to underground activities. As a tendency, however, the pattern of veiling the Underground Railroad as a strategic space certainly prevailed in fugitives’ narratives. Notwithstanding the pressures they would face in this respect from a public that was craving for more information, and as patronized as the process of writing and publishing may have been, writers of slave narratives often managed to throw a veil over “their” Underground Railroad.

They did so with a purpose beyond simply averting immediately impending dangers too much openness bore, and with far-reaching

strategic implications (that are also highly relevant for an ecocritical perspective, as will be seen below). For while *veiling* and thus rendering Underground Railroad space almost utopic in its intangibility, slave narratives simultaneously deliberately sought to co-create the Underground Railroad as a discursive space that ought to be conceived as real as possible. This corresponding process of *unveiling* lies at the heart of the representation of the Underground Railroad in many narratives of the 1840s and 1850s, for instance those by Frederick Douglass (1845) and John Brown (1855). The latter, having escaped from bondage in Georgia, recalls encountering a “friend [who] gave me a full account of the Underground Railroad” and the name of one of its members,

and precise instructions to find out his residence; but, for obvious reasons, I do not think it prudent to mention his name, or that of the town in which he lived; nay, perhaps lives now. His was the first station of the Underground line, in that part of the country, and it was absolutely necessary for me to reach it that night. (John Brown 154–155)

Brown employs a characteristic mode of veiling the “Underground line,” as he omits references to both helper and place. Simultaneously, however, his narrative engages the public discourse of the Underground Railroad by both embracing a typical “railroading” vocabulary (“Chapter XVII. I AM BOOKED TO CANADA, EXPRESS, BY THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD” (163)) and by adding that “I have been permitted to add, in another chapter, a brief history of it [Underground Railroad], penned by the Editor of my Narrative” (154).

With “the Editor,” an abolitionist, the attached “Chapter XXI. THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD,” employs precisely the kind of figure often responsible for creating the Underground Railroad as a legendary space in a broader public discourse. The chapter, not falling short of what may be expected, inscribes into Brown’s work a popular version of the “Liberty Line” as a “complicated machinery of vigilance committees, spies, pilots, conveyances, and signals” (217), and conjures up the powerful image of an Underground Railroad, which

[...] may be said properly to commence at what is technically known as Mason and Dixon’s line; that is at the junction of the Slave States with the Free States: and to terminate at the southern frontier of Canada. Its course is by no means regular, for it has to encounter the Alleghany range of

mountains and several considerable rivers, including the Ohio. Lake Erie too lies in its track, nor is it altogether independent of forests. In spite, however, of all these, and numerous minor obstacles, the line has been constructed with admirable skill, as they can testify whose circumstances have compelled them to avail themselves of this mode of transit. Travelling by it cannot strictly be said to be either pleasant or altogether safe; yet the traffic is greatly on the increase. It is exclusively a passenger traffic; the trains are all express, and strange to add, run all one way, namely, from South towards the North: there are no return tickets. (Editor's comment in Brown 210–211)

By incorporating the editor's chapter, which creates the potent myth of an actual railroad ("track," "traffic," "express") and uses the idea of a one-way northbound line ("no return tickets"), the strategy of Brown's text as a whole is altered. His narrative, at the intersection between an abolitionist's and a formerly enslaved's voice, merges both veiling and unveiling. It denies the Underground Railroad as a concrete, real space, while allowing and fueling its qualities as an imaginary space, strategically functionalizing its mythic potential.

Douglass's text, the most famous antebellum fugitive slave narrative, is likewise revealing in this respect, even though it appears, at first glance, to be driven exclusively by an impulse of veiling. In fact, Douglass at one point formulates what is perhaps the most outspoken antebellum critique of giving explicit accounts of the Underground Railroad. He complains:

I have never approved of the very public manner in which some of our western friends have conducted what they call the *underground railroad*, but which, I think, by their own declarations, has been made most emphatically the *upperground railroad*. I honor those good men and women for their noble daring, and applaud them for willingly subjecting themselves to bloody persecution, by openly avowing their participation in the escape of slaves. I, however, can see very little good resulting from such a course, either to themselves or the slaves escaping; while, upon the other hand, I see and feel assured that those open declarations are a positive evil to the slaves remaining, who are seeking to escape. (Douglass, *Narrative* 65–6, emphasis in original)

Thus, Douglass, who was himself actively engaged in Underground Railroad work from the 1840s on, emphasizes that it is unwise to divulge too much information about the workings of the underground.¹⁵ Too dangerous would be, in his view, the possibility that "others would thereby be involved in the most embarrassing difficulties" (64).

Read with respect to the creation of a literary heterotopia, however, Douglass's text is not merely an instance of critique of the production of an "upperground" railroad, but also a crucial example of the twofold process that furnishes a strategic Underground Railroad space through veiling and unveiling. That is to say, not although but because Douglass does not give concrete information despite being pressured on this point,¹⁶ his text produces the Underground Railroad as even more powerful. The creation of a non-referentiality of the Underground Railroad in itself, Douglass implies, is to become the means of making its power even more real:

I would keep the merciless slaveholder profoundly ignorant of the means of flight adopted by the slave. I would leave him to imagine himself surrounded by myriads of invisible tormentors, ever ready to snatch from his infernal grasp his trembling prey. Let him be left to feel his way in the dark; let darkness commensurate with his crime hover over him; and let him feel that at every step he takes, in pursuit of the flying bondman, he is running the frightful risk of having his hot brains dashed out by an invisible agency. Let us render the tyrant no aid; let us not hold the light by which he can trace the footprints of our flying brother. (Douglass, *Narrative* 66)

In the sense of a reversed gaze, one turned back onto the slaveholder who has to feel "at every step he takes" the power of the Underground Railroad, Douglass plays with the two great fears of the slaveholding South: insurrections and the loss of slave property. Thereby, he co-creates Underground Railroad space as a heterotopia, a "realized utopia," through the slave narrative. The Underground Railroad is to remain intangible and non-referential; it must indeed be *utopic* and veiled in "darkness" in this sense. Yet, it must do so precisely in order to enact, through the discourse of the slave narrative and the popular concept of the Underground Railroad, the *reality* that may effectuate a power that strikes back at the slaveholder, who has to feel "the frightful risk of having his hot brains dashed out by an invisible agency" (*Narrative* 66). The literary heterotopia of the Underground Railroad thus offered more than a means of demonstrating an ability of heterotopic thinking and spatial resistance, reinterpreting confinement into empowering concealment, and gaining a sense of empowerment through space. Its true strategic potential resided precisely in the production of a "realized utopia" that ultimately relied on the material existence of the formerly enslaved's word itself. As a discourse that simultaneously veiled the referents due to which it existed and unveiled a

mythic space to which such referents belonged, the slave narrative created a reversed gaze on the slaveholding system using itself as the ultimate proof of a heterotopia of the Underground Railroad. What weighed down Underground Railroad space in reality and made it more than anything else a heterotopia was the fugitive's word.

HERMENEUTICS OF FREEDOM AND CO-AGENCY OF THE NON-HUMAN

Identifying the Underground Railroad as a literary heterotopia in this way opens up the possibility of reconsidering this space through its characteristic function: where it begins, what it includes, and how far it extends. While scholarly definitions commonly emphasize one function in particular, namely aid and (interracial) collaboration,¹⁷ the question of a spatially understood Underground Railroad potentially shifts from an (anthropocentric) *who* rendered assistance to *how and where* collaboration was enacted. This is not to suggest that literary Underground Railroad space does not represent the forms of human assistance conventionally associated with the term. It includes the more or less well-organized networks of "agents," "stationmasters," and "conductors," but also the more spontaneous help provided by free blacks, which was perhaps the most effective form of assistance and the crucial part of the story that historians have painstakingly recovered over the past decades.¹⁸ In this respect, narratives often portray a gradual opening up of the Underground Railroad, as help was encountered rather spontaneously underway. Craft, for instance, coincidentally receives assistance from abolition-minded train passengers, who give him "a good deal of information" (78), and Douglass has his first contact with the Underground Railroad network of New York City through the spontaneous help of a sailor, who refers him to David Ruggles (cf. *My Bondage* 340). In addition to such modes of help given in a space in which "[p]ractically every clump of Negro settlers in the free states was an underground depot by definition" (Furnas 214), one has to take into account the references to and work of prominent African American Underground Railroad conductors. In this category, we find, for example, William Still, John Malvin, W.M. Mitchell, or the Rev. Jermain Wesley Loguen, and those who did the most daring work of all, namely heroic figures such as Harriet Tubman or the so-called "Knights of Liberty," who ventured back into Southern slaveholding territory to save family members and others from their fate in bondage (cf. Buckmaster 106–126).

Apart from these forms of human collaboration, which are all part of a literary Underground Railroad, however, reading the Underground Railroad as a literary heterotopia defined by a function of collaboration suggests yet another form of assistance that formerly enslaved narrators portrayed as vital to their flight experiences, namely non-human assistance. In this respect, the literary heterotopia of the Underground Railroad came to function as a space of collaboration that was more than a “container” for human agents as it included non-human co-agencies as well. Rather than depicting non-human non-discursive materialities in terms of spaces to *move through*, slave narratives often present flight spaces as Underground Railroad spaces to *interact with*. Where the non-referentiality that resulted from the delineated strategy of veiling and unveiling made the space of a *human* Underground Railroad non-representable, slave narratives could fill in another, representable space of a *non-human* Underground Railroad that enabled an articulation of environmental knowledge. The production of the Underground Railroad as an African American literary heterotopia in the fugitive slave narrative therefore entailed more than the described processes of veiling and unveiling. It also involved imagining an alternative Underground Railroad space through which narrators continually emphasized that the Underground Railroad—to them—was more than a network of human sympathizers and held the potential for articulating environmental knowledge.

This environmental knowledge expressed in conjunction with the literary heterotopia of the Underground Railroad did not emerge out of thin air or without foundation. It was not something that formerly enslaved writers suddenly or inadvertently thought up after they had attained freedom when they sat down to compose their texts. Instead, my observation is that the Underground Railroad heterotopia acted as a “loophole” in the genre in the sense that it allowed for the articulation of diverse forms of environmental knowledge that had been developed all along. In other words, the alignments and identifications with non-human nature that found expression through the literary heterotopia of the Underground Railroad reflect practices and forms of environmental knowledge acquired under slavery. Such knowledge could include, for example, geographical (local, regional or sometimes more cosmopolitan), agricultural or botanical knowledge, or wisdom about flora and fauna acquired through hunting, fishing, or gardening. Often, therefore, this knowledge was connected to heterotopic spaces beyond or at least subversive to the plantation order, gained, for instance, from “laying out” (i.e. being absent for shorter

periods) or marooning in swamps, from the (permitted) cultivation of slave plots, or from (largely prohibited) movement between plantations. It could be used in various ways, as studies such as those by Giltner (2006), Montrie (2008), or Glave (2010) suggest, whether in planning and successfully executing flights or for somewhat ameliorating conditions under slavery. Accordingly, these forms of environmental knowledge are a testament to how the topographies of enslavement (as powerfully as they were as spatial backdrop in slave narratives) failed. They provide evidence, as Montrie suggests, of how “[s]laves redefined the landscape around them for their own purposes and by permission or through truancy [...] escaped to woods, swamps, ponds, and streams where they could restore a sense of self and even cultivate a collective identity that was essential to continued defiance of masters” (41). As African American environmental knowledge is therefore in its emergence tied to resistance strategies, forms of agency and heterotopic thinking during enslavement, the place of its articulation in the slave narrative is fitting in the sense that it is, as my readings so far have suggests, no less subversive. The literary heterotopia of the Underground Railroad as discursive other-space epistemologically connects with but also reflects the subversive strategies of a knowledge developed (often) in those other-spaces of slavery that could not easily be represented directly through the generically required topographies of enslavement of the fugitive slave narrative. It offered a way to incorporate and transmit an environmental knowledge rooted in African American resistance to enslavement.

One way in which fugitive slave narratives link environmental knowledge developed under slavery with the literary heterotopia of the Underground Railroad is by portraying reflections on non-human non-discursive material environments during enslavement as opening up the possibility and motivation for flight in the first place. Narrators often suggest that such environments incited processes of reading freedom in and conceptualizing freedom through a discourse of nature; they initiated what could be called a “hermeneutics of freedom.” Freedom, a concept and discourse by definition central to the fugitive slave narrative, became even more prominent from the 1840s on, as formerly enslaved writers increasingly came to articulate their right to freedom in terms of a natural right.¹⁹ While narrators had previously often portrayed the immediate motivation for taking flight to lie in excessive punishments, imminent family separations, or being sold away or cheated out of buying themselves, there is a tendency in texts of the last two decades before the Civil War to

emphasize the importance of freedom as a fundamental right given “by nature.” Freedom as inherent, natural right became a vital theme not only in the narratives themselves, but also, as numerous sources suggest, in discourse among the enslaved. “Of course, no slave would dare to say, in the presence of a white man, that he wished for freedom,” James Curry conceded in his 1840 *Narrative*, only to point out: “But among themselves, it is their constant theme. No slaves think they are made to be slaves” (28).²⁰

The increasing prevalence of the idea that freedom was given *by* nature coincided with the emergence of forms of expression that literally rooted this idea in a discourse and depictions *of* nature. Melvin Dixon, in the first chapter of *Ride Out the Wilderness*, emphasizes the particular role of wilderness in this respect, and links moments of slaves’ (self-)interpretations through the natural world with religious conversion: “Nature offered examples of the harmony of life similar to those in traditional religious thought; for enslaved Africans the wilderness in America simply offered another covenant between man and God” (23).²¹ Even as Dixon substantiates this argument with evidence from slave songs and narratives, one could expand his idea regarding the antebellum slave narrative both in terms of his emphasis on “the wilderness, the lonesome valley and the mountain” (16), and respecting (an absence of) religious dimensions. There certainly is religious conversion in some narratives of the 1840s and 1850s, but others do not stress this aspect in their acts of reading freedom through a discourse of “nature.” Moreover, while various articulations of freedom through depicting the non-human material world employ settings of wilderness, e.g. when Bibb recalls envying the freedom of “the fishes of the water, the fowls of the air, the wild beasts of the forest” (*Narrative* 30), or Northup the liberty of the “birds singing in the trees” (57), there are also instances in which other kinds of environments become the catalysts of a hermeneutics of freedom.²² Douglass, for instance, in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), views even the plantation itself as “a scene of almost Eden-like beauty” that could initiate an articulation of freedom through ‘nature’ (67).

Whether in the nearby woods, on the shores of rivers (Bibb) and bays (Douglass), or even in plantation settings, non-human natural environs frequently turn into places that could incite thought-provoking reflections on liberty and a questioning of one’s own position as enslaved. Taken together, such moments highlight the link between an environmental knowledge acquired under slavery and the literary heterotopia of the Underground Railroad as they mark a first way in which elements of the

non-human natural world became connected to an Underground Railroad experience in the plot developments of fugitive slave narratives. As a variety of texts suggest, entering the Underground Railroad first became possible through understanding a kind of freedom at display in this world. Revealing in this way that consciously reading in the “book of nature” had the potential of inciting reflections that led to the recognition that the natural order is freedom and that thereby conceptually initiated a fugitive’s Underground Railroad space stresses the significance of a hermeneutics of freedom as part of a foundational African American environmental knowledge. Moreover, the fact that freedom as such was “a constant theme” among the enslaved (Curry 28), and the strong links between concepts of freedom and a discourse of nature in the slave narrative imply a broader collective experience. Although most scenes depict individuals engaged in reading nature, the highly efficient communicative patterns within enslaved communities, which often had trans-regional ties, e.g. through river workers or seamen (cf. Buchanan (2004); Bolster (1997)), support the assumption that this facet of an African American environmental knowledge in particular had an important communal dimension as well.

A hermeneutics of freedom that hints at the ways in which environmental knowledge was gained during enslavement is typically involved in portrayals of acts that first define freedom *before* taking flight. Depictions of experiences *during* escapes, by contrast, are frequently endowed with a more explicit vision of the non-human as a collaborator and co-agent that could reflect diverse facets of antebellum African American environmental knowledge. In this respect, narrators often stress that the non-human itself rendered assistance and became part of the Underground Railroad.

This is not to suggest that the non-human non-discursive materialities involved in spaces of flight generated a discourse of nature marked by positive connotations. On the contrary, and although there was the potential to read freedom in the ‘book of nature’ and the possibility of collaboration with the non-human, literary representations of spaces of flight are often depicted as challenging or, in Dixon’s reading, as a “zone of trial and deliverance” (13). In many ways, spaces of flight were presented as an extension of the topographies of enslavement and as ripe with dangers. There were, for instance, the obstacles and threats inherent to the environs fugitives entered, where beasts such as the “howling wolves in the Red River Swamp” were constantly lurking (Bibb, *Narrative* 131), torrential rivers had to be crossed, and where the practical problems of

surviving without sufficient nutrition or means of orientation had to be mastered. In this sense, depictions frequently involved a menacing non-human nature that was complemented by yet another form of threat, apart from moving through oftentimes harsh territory, which was perceived as infinitely more haunting. Jermaine Loguen, for example, refers to this second facet when he writes: “I had broken from the sunny South, and fought a passage through storms and tempests, which made the forests crash and the mountains moan—difficulties, new, awful, and unexpected, but not so dreaded as my white enemies who were comfortably sheltered among them” (339). The real danger, and the most dreaded part of a fugitive’s space as an extension of the topographies of enslavement was therefore, as Loguen and others suggest, a corrupted human one, namely the gangs of man-hunters and their bloodhounds. The manner in which the latter were specifically trained for slave chases²³ highlights how the human and the non-human dimensions of threat could merge. The bloodhound became an emblem of both the enforced complicity of the non-human that characterizes topographies of enslavement, and of the extension of this process into spaces of flight.

In spite of these dangers and obstacles, however, which were often anticipated by fugitives before taking flight (and which do not necessarily hinder the expression of environmental knowledge, which could be a means of survival), there is at the same time a strong sense of collaboration with the non-human. This aspect at points becomes central to the slave narrative’s depiction of spaces of flight and functionally turns such spaces into Underground Railroad space. In this respect, literary Underground Railroad space denotes more than what Dixon traces in his metaphorical reading of fugitives as engaging in a “zone of trial and deliverance” (13). Beyond recognizing that a “test of the wilderness [...] required a code of situational ethics” that was mirrored in fugitives’ relations to wilderness (25), reading their relations to the non-human world through the lens of Underground Railroad space shows material, epistemological, and ethical engagements *with* that space. Fugitive slave narratives did not simply conceptualize spaces of flight anthropocentrically as a “container” or as a “mirror” in which to act out or make visible a “situational ethics,” but turned the literary Underground Railroad into a locus that enabled articulating an environmental knowledge and ethos acquired under slavery that emerges *from* the non-human non-discursive materiality of that situation. The three examples I want to turn to for illustration, highlight what I believe are some of the most important aspects of the Underground

Railroad from an ecocritical perspective, as they show some of the forms, practical values, and ethical dimensions of African American environmental knowledge expressed through this literary space.

An example that illustrates how the hostile aspects of spaces of flight converged with a form of co-agency of the non-human that turns such spaces into Underground Railroad space may be found in the *Narrative of James Curry* (1840). In one passage describing his flight from Person County, North Carolina, Curry writes:

In that afternoon I was attacked by a wild beast. I knew not what it was. I thought, surely I am beset this day, but unlike the men, more ferocious than wild beasts, I succeeded in driving him away, and that night crossed a branch of the Potomac. Just before I reached the town of Dumfries, I came across an old horse in a field with a bell on his neck. I had been warned by a colored man, a few nights before, to beware of Dumfries. I was worn out with running, and I took the bell off the horse's neck, took the bell collar for a whip, and putting a hickory bark round his head for a bridle, I jumped on his back, and thus mounted, I rode through Dumfries. The bull-dogs lay along the street, ready to seize the poor night traveller, but, being on horseback, they did not molest me. I have no doubt that I should have been taken up, if I had been on foot. When I got through the town, I dismounted, and said to my horse, 'go back to your master, I did not mean to injure him, and hope we will get you again, but you have done me a great deal of good.' And then I hastened on, and got as far from him as I could before morning. (36–7)

The beginning of the excerpt is in many ways exemplary of a hostile space of flight, as Curry refers to both non-human as well as even greater human threats. Non-human animals are central to this passage and Curry's articulation of environmental knowledge. He presents three types of (relations to) non-human animals: first, we find a "wild beast" that attacks the protagonist in the wilderness. While this non-human animal serves his narrative to stress that the slave patrols are "more ferocious than wild beasts," suggesting the immorality of the slave system and its in-humaneness, its more-than-beastly nature, it also enables Curry to separate himself from a "beast" and, by extension, from a 'beastly nature' ascribed to black men (36). Moreover, his survival hints at skills and a knowledge of the wilderness acquired earlier on and serves to emphasize his strength and status as a human who masters the wilderness. Second, there are the domesticated non-human animals, namely the "bull-dogs" (36). In this respect, it is important to note that, although the bloodhound was, as mentioned

above, emblematic of slave chases, dogs were also part of enslaved African Americans' daily lives and could be companions. As Giltner suggests, dogs "helped slaves drastically improve their chances of supporting themselves and their families," and could be, in the case of hunting dogs, "a rare part of slave life that was controlled and cared for almost exclusively by the slave" (26). Although Curry's narrative does not give explicit information about his relation to dogs in particular, the way in which he proceeds to deal with the "bull-dogs"—his implied notion that they will not attack him if he is on horseback—suggests an intimate (environmental) knowledge about canines.

Third, and centrally, the passage features a non-human animal that becomes Curry's companion, a co-agent of his flight. Thereby functionally transforming flight space into Underground Railroad space,²⁴ the text not only expresses environmental knowledge, but also enables the articulation of an ethics with respect to the non-human natural world. Not only does Curry know how to ride on horseback, is expert enough to employ the "old horse" by using "a hickory bark round his head for a bridle," but he uses his wisdom about a relation between two different kinds of non-human animals to succeed in crossing the town (Curry 36). The horse alone would not be of much use. On the contrary, only the runaway's knowledge of how to employ the animal's service in relation to Dumfries makes him a companion and co-agent and provides a means of deceiving that part of non-human nature that has been thoroughly corrupted and harnessed by slavery, the bloodhounds. Curry, at this point, spatially cuts through a Southern topography in ways functionally not unlike those described by the Crafts, as he reclaims himself through space by relying on the assistance of a non-human animal. Moreover, he clearly acknowledges the significance of this process, thanking the horse for having "done me a great deal of good" (37). Thus, while Curry's space of flight may be read in terms of Dixon's "situational ethics"—stealing is implicitly recognized as morally wrong ("I did not mean to injure him [the owner]") but justified ("but you have done me a great deal of good")—the example also attests in various ways to an African American environmental knowledge gained under slavery. Curry uses a heterotopic literary Underground Railroad not only to expand that space to tell his own story, but also to articulate environmental knowledge and ethical relations to both human and non-human nature.

Another instance that suggests, in a parabolic way, the potential often ascribed to a collaboration with the non-human non-discursive material

world during flights may be found in Solomon Bayley's *Narrative of Some Remarkable Incidents* (1825). Having fled from slavery in Delaware, Bayley describes how, after coming to a Virginian place called "Anderson's Cross-Roads," he "met with the greatest trial I ever met with in all my distress" (120). Pursued by two locals into the woods, Bayley eventually hides in a "thin place" where

I felt very strange: I said to myself I never felt so in all my distress: I said something was going to happen to me today. So I studied about my feelings until I fell to sleep, and when I awoke, there had come two birds near to me; and seeing the little strange looking birds, it roused up all my senses; and a thought came quick into my mind that these birds were sent to caution me to be away out of this naked place [i.e. thin place]; that there was danger at hand. And as I was about to start, it came into my mind with great energy and force, 'If you move out of this circle this day, you will be taken;' for I saw the birds went all around me: I asked myself what this meant, and the impression grew stronger, that I must stay in the circle which the birds made. (121)

Even though Bayley's description, from this point on, involves a fair amount of superstition and seems less "practically" significant than Curry's, the passage is equally important for drawing attention to elements of an African American environmental knowledge. While it suggests a concrete potential for resistance that lay in employing the non-human non-discursive material world (literally) as underground space, Bayley's text also proposes the strength that could be drawn from entering into spiritual relations with non-human nature as another important aspect of environmental knowledge. We may not actually believe that "these birds were sent to caution me," yet the effects of such a belief and the assumption that "I must stay in the circle which the birds made" hint at a significant epistemological relation to nature that endows its elements with spiritual meaning and that is connected to a hermeneutics of freedom (121). Bayley, after all, indeed manages to remain undiscovered by these means in a hair-breadth moment in which one of the men "stopped and looked right down on me, as I thought, and I looked right up into his eyes" (123). The "thin place" marked by Bayley's reading of nature ("the circle") becomes one that enables a heterotopic concealment and resistance that is just as effective as Henry Brown's box. Moreover, the process of retrospectively recognizing and ascribing meaning to this potential of

the non-human world as part of the Underground Railroad reveals Bayley's ethics. The way in which he places such a moment at the center of attention, reading it as the "greatest trial" of his story and stressing the involvement of "two great powers [which] have met here this day; the power of darkness, and the power of God" (123), lends weight to the general importance attributed to the non-human as collaborative underground in fugitives' experiences. Through this scene and its religious overtones and parabolic manner, Bayley's narrative not only highlights that it was collaborating *with* a natural space (and not merely the aid of human helpers or acting out a particular ethics *within* that space) that bore the potential to overcome enslavement, but also hints at the spiritual elements of an African American environmental knowledge.

A third text that highlights how environmental knowledge is expressed through a co-agency of the non-human is Henry Bibb's *Narrative of the Life and Adventures* (1849), perhaps the representative of the genre that like no other captures the multiple dimensions of collaboration involved in an African American literary heterotopia of the Underground Railroad. In many ways a typical antebellum slave narrative with its focus on issues such as family separations, corporeal punishments, and religion,²⁵ Bibb's text is nevertheless remarkable with respect to its vivid depiction of multiple flights and the explicitness and detail in which it describes a broad range of terrains and regions. The author-narrator's going back and forth between slave and free territory in order to save his family lets him learn "the art of running away to perfection" (Bibb, *Narrative* 15), and turns his account, as Gerhardt has pointed out, into a text that "correlates the formulation of an African American cultural identity with detailed reflections about nature" (13).²⁶

Moreover, Bibb's *Narrative* uncovers and exemplifies various facets of the slave narrative's Underground Railroad space. His depictions range from moments inciting a hermeneutics of freedom via a discourse of "nature," e.g. in a memorable scene on the shores of the Ohio River (29–30), to representations of what was conventionally understood as the Underground Railroad and acts of spontaneous help (cf. 51–57). Most importantly, however, Bibb's topographical descriptions rarely remain without an emphasis on the role of the non-human, as they expose flight movements as shaped by non-human non-discursive materialities that sometimes come to function as collaborative Underground Railroad space. Whether regarding prairies, the woods, or swamplands, Bibb's text never conceptualizes spaces of flight as mere containers to merely move through.

Instead, he constantly stresses the potential of human/non-human collaboration that the specific elements of different kinds of regions, places, and environments had to offer, thereby expressing various forms of environmental knowledge. With respect to a sense of shared agency and collaboration pertaining to Underground Railroad space, Bibb becomes most explicit in a chapter entitled “Adventure on the Prairie,” when he describes his flight on a horse:

[T]he horse carried me safely across at the proper place. After I got out a mile or so from the river, I came into a large prairie, which I think must have been twenty or thirty miles in width, and the road run across it about in the direction that I wanted to go. I laid whip to the horse, and I think he must have carried me not less than forty miles that night, or before sun rise the next morning. I then stopped him in a spot of high grass in an old field, and took off the bridle. I thanked God, and thanked the horse for what he had done for me, and wished him a safe journey back home. (*Narrative* 162–163)

The scene, which shows parallels to the passage from Curry’s text,²⁷ attests once more to an environmental knowledge gained under slavery, its practical usefulness, and its ethical implications, as non-human aid becomes a means of escape and resistance. On the one hand, we see again the very practical, material dimension of assistance often provided by a specific setting. Although Bibb’s first attempts to catch one of the horses “running at large in a field” are in vain (161), he eventually succeeds in securing a “noble beast” in the “barn-yard” of a plantation (162).²⁸ Thus spatially cutting his way through a Southern middle landscape, Bibb finds practical aid when fashioning himself a bridle “cut [from] a grape vine” (161), and collaborates with a non-human co-agent. As in Curry’s case, this only becomes possible under the condition that he has gained a certain wisdom about equine animals. Both texts thereby make clear via their Underground Railroad space that horses in particular were not just the pride of plantation owners (cf. Douglass, *Narrative* 20–21) or harnessed as elements of torture instruments in the antebellum South (cf. Roper 47), but were instead regarded as potential companions by enslaved African Americans. Accordingly, as his companion “seemed willing,” Bibb rigorously employs the potential the space he encounters has to offer by hurrying across a prairie on horseback and crossing a “large stream of water,” in which “finally the water came over his [the horse’s] back and he swam over” (162). Bibb presents an explicit example of environmentally rendered

assistance that stresses how his means of escape emerge out of a specific setting but also require previously gained environmental knowledge; he roots his resistance in a non-human co-agent belonging to the very materiality of such a space while demonstrating his own skills.

On the other hand, the moment also reveals Bibb's ethics in the ways in which he consciously appreciates this form of collaboration by "thank[ing]" the horse and "wish[ing] him a safe journey back home" (163). In addition to his use of personal pronouns ("his"/"him") and his explicit empathy with his companion ("I know the poor horse must have felt stiff, and tired from his speedy jaunt" (163)), it is especially the last sentence of the above-quoted passage that emphasizes Bibb's ethical understanding of the assistance rendered by a co-agency of the non-human. Here, he acknowledges both the non-human animal's belonging ("home") and his companion's personhood, by "thank[ing]" him (163). More than merely representing his human performance in a "test of wilderness" (Dixon 26–27), the passage therefore suggests that Bibb's relation to the more-than-human world, like Curry's and Bayley's, is not restricted to selfishly employing and exploiting nature in the way the slave system systematically did. Instead, as Bayley highlights a spiritual element that could provide a material refuge while Curry's and Bibb's equine scenes stress non-human animals' role as highly valued co-agents, their environmental knowledge is marked by a sense of care for and interaction with the non-human. Their de-anthropocentrized versions of a literary Underground Railroad space that extends beyond human networks of assistance express both epistemological and ethical relations to the non-human non-discursive material world African Americans developed during enslavement.

While the cases of Curry, Bayley, and Bibb highlight why a turn to the Underground Railroad can be fruitful for ecocritics (and will hopefully provide a starting point for further research), I want to conclude with a reminder of the more general potential that "heterotopia" as a concept may have for African American studies as well as environmentally oriented perspectives. Perhaps, the most significant advantage of the concept despite its Foucauldian fuzziness is that it enables rethinking space as simultaneously environmental and social. While the latter was central in Foucault's own work (in fact, his definition depended on it), environmentally oriented scholarship may fruitfully use heterotopia precisely for its strength in that area, but expand its parameters to examine and describe how a (human) social "other-ness" of heterotopic spaces interacts with forms of environmental "other-ness." For an African American

(antebellum) context, at least, heterotopia has shown itself a highly significant concept, first, because forms of an African American environmental knowledge historically often emerged in heterotopias subversive to normalizing and racializing (plantation) spaces, and involved heterotopic thinking as a form of resistance. Second, and this has been my specific focus in this chapter, the Underground Railroad can be read as a *literary* heterotopia of the fugitive slave narrative that became a vital means of “claiming (through) space” in a twofold sense. On the one hand, it enabled fugitives’ reclaiming themselves through space, by presenting and performing reinterpretations of relations between space and body, and by subversively playing with an antebellum popular discourse of the “Liberty Line.” On the other hand, this subversive play provided a means of claiming space in the sense of imagining a heterotopic Underground Railroad that could become a locus for articulating African American environmental knowledge, for example, through a hermeneutics of freedom or by depicting co-agencies of the non-human. Read in this way, I believe, the Underground Railroad is significant from both an ecocritical and an African American literary historical perspective, because it attained the function of a discursive loophole for an African American environmental knowledge and imagination.

NOTES

1. Still’s records consisted of notes taken from interviews with fugitives and correspondence of the “Philadelphia Vigilance Committee.” Initially, the committee did not keep records of its activities. Still’s accidental reunion with his long-lost brother Peter, however, made him aware that others, “separated by Slavery, were in a similar way living without the slightest knowledge of each other’s whereabouts,” and that their potential future reunion may depend upon saving information (xx). For more biographical information on Still cf. Boyd; Khan.
2. Still’s work went through three consecutive editions between 1872 and 1883 and, despite its enormous length of almost 800 pages and its organizational deficits, “circulated more widely than any other first-hand account of the underground railroad,” as Gara observes (“William Still” 50). Unabridged editions were published by Arno Press/*New York Times* in 1968, and by Plexus in 2005 (subsequent references will be to this edition). Apart from these reprints, two recent editions (Hendrick/Hendrick (2004); Finseth (2007)) incorporate longer excerpts of Still’s monumental work; the original records are also available on the internet by now (cf. Foner 238).

3. Both the profound impact of Gara's argument and the subsequent tendency to ignore the Underground Railroad must be read in the context of "a much broader literature that challenged the idea that slaves were generally pliant and resigned to their roles as human chattel" (Carbado/Weise xi). Studies that fall into this category (and by extension neglect the Underground Railroad as myth) range from Quarles's *Black Abolitionists* (1969) to works such as Kolchin's *American Slavery 1619–1877* (1993), and Franklin/Schweninger's *Runaway Slaves* (1999).
4. A trend towards the biographical in Underground Railroad scholarship may be noted with respect to a number of book-length monographs that have turned to figures such as Jermain W. Loguen, Robert Purvis, or David Ruggles, and a growing number of histories and studies that reconsider the workings of the Underground Railroad with a focus on specific regions suggests an ongoing "local" turn in the twenty-first century (e.g. LaRoche). Moreover, recent Underground Railroad scholarship has broadened its scope thematically, engaging in aspects such as the (disputable) role of quilts as a means of secret communication (Tobin/Dobard) or the Underground Railroad as an American "Road Narrative" (Eke). The publication of encyclopedic works on the Underground Railroad (e.g. Hudson), too, suggests its ongoing popularity.
5. While historiographical approaches routinely deploy slave narratives as sources, a deliberately literary perspective that turns specifically to the fugitive slave narrative's depiction and employment of the Underground Railroad can hardly be found. A rare exception that has an explicit literary focus is Earhart's short entry in Gabler-Hover/Sattelmeyer's *American History through Literature* (2006). Moreover, two approaches that are somewhat related to an examination of the Underground Railroad from an African American literary perspective can be found in Zabel (2004) and Dixon (1987). However, both take a different direction than my argument, as Zabel primarily focuses on how "twentieth-century African American writers use the train as a literary symbol" (1), and Dixon reads the "underground" metaphorically as "the region in slave songs that lies 'down in the lonesome valley' where individual strength is tested and autonomy achieved" (4).
6. Here, in the anthropocentrism that usually pertains to the idea of the Underground Railroad, lies a possible reason why ecocriticism on African American perspectives has hardly dealt with the (immensely popular) phenomenon so far. The only ecocritical study that makes a brief mention of the Underground Railroad is Ruffin's *Black on Earth* (2010).
7. Note therefore, again, that I am making this observation with respect to the *discourse* of antebellum fugitive slave narratives, not in terms of a historical thesis. The latter could hardly be upheld, as various studies have

demonstrated the diversity of fugitives' flight behavior. The actual direction of flights, for example, was by no means exclusively that from South to North, as numerous fugitives, especially in the Deep South, remained in the vicinity becoming maroons or sought to reach Southern cities seeking to blend in with the free black population (cf. Franklin/Schweninger). This said, however, the South/North axis is nonetheless predominant in the literary representations considered in this chapter and the space they mapped out.

8. In chapter eight of *River of Dark Dreams* (2013), Johnson uses the term to claim that "enslavement was a material and spatial condition, as much as an economic and legal one" (210). He broadly conceptualizes "carceral landscapes" as such organizational principles with respect to (natural) space that work towards controlling, subjugating and hindering flight movements of a group of humans.
9. On this point, estimates vary. Most historians assume that, in the last decades before the Civil War, only between one and five thousand individuals per year reached freedom through the activities of the Underground Railroad (cf. Foner 4).
10. The manner of concealed escape depicted in the chosen examples was by no means unique. As the antebellum period saw a diversification of forms of escape, other cases in which crates were employed can be found, for example, in William "Box" Peel Jones (cf. Still 21–22) and Lear Green (Still 203–205). Disguise, too, as another form of concealing the body, was chosen as a means of escape by a considerable number of fugitives. Still refers to a variety of elaborate strategies of disguise, e.g. in the cases of Clarissa Davis (33–34) or Anna Maria Weems alias Joe Wright (123–132). Cf. also Hendrick/Hendrick 7; Horton 191.
11. Although it is striking how few activists were legally pursued considering how prominently some of them acted within the public sphere, a number of those engaged in the Underground Railroad were substantially fined (e.g. Thomas Garrett in Delaware; John van Zandt in Ohio), pursued (e.g. William Henry Johnson in Philadelphia) or arrested (as in the well-known case of Charles T. Torrey, who eventually died in a Maryland prison in 1846). Evidence suggests, however, that a significant number of antebellum Northerners performed such acts of "Civil Disobedience," even if they did not necessarily count themselves as abolitionists. Cf. Foner 21; Earhart 1207; Ripley 63.
12. According to one legend, the term was coined by a Kentucky slave-owner, who could not keep track of a fugitive named Tice Davids who seemed to have disappeared and "gone off on an underground road" (Hendrick/Hendrick 3; see also Blight 3). Other accounts attribute the term to an enslaved boy who wished to go "underground all the way to Boston" (cf.

Foner 6); and yet others to an enslaved who revealed the term under torture (Hendrick/Hendrick 3). The name itself seems well-chosen as it connotes some of the central ideological and economic tensions between North and South. The popularity of the railroad in the antebellum North as a symbol of the expanding industrial economy, where “the press kept up the excitement with stories about every imaginable aspect of the new technology,” was by no means equally strong in a South that based its wealth on a rural, slave-based plantation economy (Marx 184).

13. Advertisements like the one published in *The Western Citizen* in 1844, entitled “Liberty Line. New Arrangement Night and Day,” for example, which shows an actual train entering into a mountain hole (cf. Hendrick/Hendrick), convey a sense of the Underground Railroad’s popularity. Other instances that attest to the visual culture of the Underground Railroad are signs broadcasting the “Stockholders of the Underground R.R. Company” (cf. Ripley 69); or a Cleveland Vigilance Committee banner described in *Frederick Douglass’s Paper* (cf. Foner 22).
14. This was, however, a significant point of debate among abolitionists. The *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, for example, officially warned abolitionists of the “disposition to boast publicly of the success with which the slave hunter has been foiled” (qtd. Foner 22), and, according to Chesney, the operators of the Underground Railroad “seldom asked the name of an escaping slave [...]. Neither would they ever disclose to a fugitive their own names, and, hence, escaped detection unless the slaves were found hidden on their premises, or were apprehended while in the act of conveying him away” (Chesney 124). Thus, many of those immediately involved—and many abolitionist authors such as Benjamin Drew, who deleted “the real names which appear in the manuscripts of the narratives published” for his *North-Side View of Slavery* (xxviii)—certainly did act with due care on this point.
15. Douglass stresses this point even more in his second book, *My Bondage and My Freedom*. As Andrews notes, by the time Douglass wrote *My Bondage*, he had “gained a perspective that allowed him to see signs of ‘oppression’ in the very ‘form’ of the fugitive slave narrative that he had written in 1845” (217). One way in which this perspective seems to have manifested in the 1855 text is the even more outspoken critique of the overtness often displayed in relation to Underground Railroad activities. Douglass argues that this practice “has neither wisdom nor necessity” and explicitly criticizes abolitionists as well as Henry Box Brown and William and Ellen Craft for their frankness (*My Bondage* 323). Part of the reason for this even more critical stance may also have been Douglass’s frustration with (Garrisonian) abolitionists; he emphasizes almost sneeringly that “[n]o anti-slavery man can wish” him to give away his means of escape

- (322), and sarcastically adds that revealing and celebrating one's deeds "may kindle an enthusiasm, very pleasant to inhale" (324).
16. Correspondence suggests that there was considerable pressure on Douglass with respect to revealing more about the manner of his flight, which may also be sensed from Douglass's apologies in his first two books for having to "deprive [...] the curious of the gratification" of learning the full story of his escape (*My Bondage* 323). Some scholars have pointed out that such refusals are an important part of Douglass's overall strategy of resistance. Ernest, for instance, argues that one means of Douglass's resistance to the confines of writing according to abolitionists' expectations lay in "withholding information, refusing to satisfy mere curiosity" (98).
 17. Whether understood in terms of Whitman's idea of the Underground Railroad as "organized networks of principled men and women who assisted fugitives" (164), Eric Foner's concept of an "interlocking series of local networks [...] which together helped a substantial number of fugitives" (15), or Bordewich's definition, which maintains that "the essential nature of the Underground Railroad lay in the character and motivation of the people who made it work, not in bricks and mortar" (xv), the central defining marker generally agreed upon is that of assistance. A broader use of the term occurs in LaRoche, who defines the Underground Railroad in terms of "escapes, assisted or not, which originated after 1830 where escapees either used known routes or accepted aid once they crossed into the border states" (xii).
 18. On the involvement of free black communities in the Underground Railroad, cf. LaRoche; on African Americans in the abolitionist movement more generally, see Coddon; and Quarles.
 19. This is not to suggest that natural rights philosophy was not present in abolitionist discourse prior to the 1840s. William Lloyd Garrison's immediate abolitionism, for instance, was firmly rooted in the general idea that, as he put it in a speech delivered in June, 1831, in Philadelphia, a natural right made *every* human being "but a little lower than the angels" (5); and William Ellery Channing, the influential Unitarian clergyman, was one of the most pronounced proponents of natural rights philosophy with his claim that "a human being cannot rightfully be held and used as property" due to "human nature" (29). With respect to fugitive slave narratives, however, such ideas were adapted more regularly and forcefully from the 1840s on.
 20. William Still, too, notes that many fugitives coming through his Philadelphia "station" had often "deeply thought on the subject of their freedom," and that many had been planning their escapes "very early in life" (qtd. Foner 22–23); cf. for an insightful reading of how enslaved blacks thought about freedom, Blassingame's chapter "Runaways and Rebels" in *The Slave Community* (esp. 192–195). In this context, one should also be aware of

the elaborate networks of communication that existed among the enslaved. As Pharaoh Chesney asserted, “[i]t was not necessary that the missionary of freedom should visit every plantation and present this picture [of happiness and prosperity at the North] to each slave, but communicate it to a few in each neighbourhood, and it would spread from lip to lip, from plantation to plantation, like wild fire” (121). Redpath writes in this respect of a well-working “Underground Telegraph” (241).

21. Reading nature as “both obstacle and aid” for the slave, Dixon ascribes to wilderness the function of “an important test of man’s faith in himself and in God’s power to bring deliverance or free territory in reach” (26). In this way, his argument emphasizes both the centrality and metaphorical meanings of the wilderness, and stresses the religious dimension of reflections on nature, as “the wilderness, the lonesome valley, and the mountain” are taken primarily as “places of deliverance” (16).
22. Bibb is particularly explicit in stressing the importance of reading freedom through nature. Evidence may be found not only in his narrative but also in correspondence, e.g. in a letter to his former master Sibley, where he writes that the freedom to act as a self-conscious being is a right “highly appreciated by the wild beasts of the forest and fowls of the air. The terrific screech of the hooting owl is animating to himself and musical to his kind as he goes through the tall forest, from hill top to valley. Not so, with the miserable little screech owl, while he is tied by the leg, or boxed up, in a cage. Though well fed he is made the sport of children” (qtd. Blessingame, *Slave Testimony* 53). Further examples can be found in narratives by J.D. Green (954), Curry (28), or Henry Watson; the first African American novella, Douglass’s *The Heroic Slave* (1853), likewise starts out with an iconic moment of Madison Washington’s “human voice” addressing “a dark pine forest” (cf. 4–8).
23. The yell and howl of the bloodhound is iconic of the fugitive’s space; in fact, such non-human animals became almost as valuable a commodity as those they were hunting down. Virginian Zachary Taylor, twelfth president of the United States, for instance, had special hounds imported for slave-hunts. The commodification of trained dogs for this particular purpose may also be sensed from advertisements in Southern newspapers: the *New Orleans Picayune* of 1853, for example, displays an offer for sale of “some prime dogs” that can “snuff a nigger an eternal distance off, and nose him out anywhere” (qtd. J. Brown 213; cf. also Johnson 234–240).
24. In fact, Curry only enters what was commonly understood as an Underground Railroad network run by abolitionists long after this scene takes place. While he encounters spontaneous (human) assistance after crossing the Potomac in “a colored person’s house [...] where they gave me breakfast and treated me very kindly” (37), it is only in a third step “near Philadelphia, [where] I fell in with members of the Society of

- Friends” (38) that Curry engages a more conventionally understood Underground Railroad network. *Functionally*, however, Curry’s text conceptualizes his space of flight as Underground Railroad space as early as his encounter with the old horse.
25. Andrews notes that “[o]ne cannot read Bibb’s autobiography without wondering if he were not the more representative man than Douglass” (158). For recent readings of Bibb see e.g. Stepto 100–120; Heglar 33–77; a classic reading of Bibb’s *Narrative* is provided by Andrews 151–161.
 26. This quality has made Bibb’s *Narrative* somewhat of a favorite of ecocriticism on African American literature. While most ecocritics have stressed Bibb’s dichotomous representation of Northern landscapes of freedom as opposed to Southern landscapes of enslavement (cf. e.g. Smith 54–56; Outka 76–97; or Millner), other environmentally oriented readings have argued for the liberating potential of Bibb’s non-human natural spaces more generally (e.g. Myers 104–105; with a specific focus on wilderness also Dixon 23–27), or have focused on contexts such as the frontier myth (Gerhard) or the Free Soil movement (Finley). Cooper offers a resourceful interpretation of Bibb in the context of the Detroit River region.
 27. Both scenes show parallels with a well-known 1862 painting by Eastman Johnson entitled *Ride for Liberty* that portrays an African American family of three fleeing on horseback through a rugged prairie. The almost iconic presence of this image across representational forms lends even more weight to the idea of a vital importance of this mode of escape and, by extension, to the claim for a central involvement of non-human co-agents in Underground Railroad space and mid-nineteenth-century African American culture more generally.
 28. Scholars have predominantly discussed this moment in terms of the fugitive’s ethics, which is understandable considering Bibb’s own reflections. He assesses that the act of stealing a horse “committed by a white man under the same circumstances would not only be pronounced proper, but praiseworthy; and if he neglected to avail himself of such means of escape he would be pronounced a fool” (*Narrative* 163). Cf. for discussions that focus on this aspect e.g. Dixon 25–27; Andrews 151–152.

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Resisting (through) the Eye: Antebellum Visual Regimes, the Slave Narrative’s Rhetoric of Visibility, and African American Strategic Pastoral

Theocritus’s “Idyll 11,” one of the foundational texts of the pastoral tradition, presents us with the lovelorn figure of Polyphemus the Cyclops, mourning and starving in mad love for Galatea the sea-nymph. Framed by Theocritus’s lyrical I addressing the doctor-poet Nicias, Polyphemus’s monologue in Sicily, the setting of the *Idylls*, expresses his pain at being rejected by his beloved as well as the assumed reasons of this rejection:

I fell in love with you, my sweet, when first you came
With my mother to gather flowers of hyacinth
On the mountain, and I was your guide. From the day
I set eyes on you up to this moment, I’ve loved you
Without a break; but you care nothing, nothing at all.
I know, my beautiful girl, why you run from me:
A shaggy brow spreads right across my face
From ear to ear in one unbroken line. Below is a
Single eye, and above my lip is set a broad flat nose. (lines 25–33)

As a whole, “Idyll 11” carries the earmarks of prototypical pastoral. It deals in an idealizing manner with a one-eyed herdsman who “pasture[s] a thousand beasts” (line 37) and is driven by a nostalgic longing, as Theocritus is looking back onto his childhood in Sicily. Furthermore,

“Idyll 11” implies a retreat-and-return pattern through the poet’s and doctor-poet’s framing comments that serve to contrast an urban (Alexandrian) audience with Polyphemus, who epitomizes the rustic way of life of a Sicilian shepherd-bard who plays the “pipe better than any Cyclops here” (line 38).

More than that, however, the cited passage hints at yet another (often overlooked¹) aspect of the pastoral. Rather than merely emblemizing a somewhat comical form of pastoral involving the idea of a Cyclops who wishes “to learn to swim” in order to live with a sea-nymph (line 60),² Theocritus’s text paradigmatically expresses a link between the pastoral and the visual. The scene exposes such a connection on multiple levels. On the one hand, the figures of Theocritus and Nicias allow for an external gaze on the Cyclops-shepherd in his rustic setting, as they become mediators who enable an urban audience to access and visualize both the monologue-scene and its frame. On the other hand, “Idyll 11” problematizes seeing in Polyphemus himself; through the Cyclops, the scene paradigmatically shifts its focus to visuality as such, symbolized by the characteristic “single eye.” The visual, in this respect, becomes a complex theme in two ways. First, because Polyphemus’s literal one-sightedness epitomizes the subjectivities, idiosyncrasies, limits and potential deficiencies involved in pastoral looking; second, because the one eye in itself is not only looking but is also being looked at. The Cyclops himself and an implied audience consider the single eye as bodily distortion and as mark of a fundamental difference. The “shaggy brow spread[ing],” in conjunction with the “lip set [on] a broad flat nose,” are intimately connected not only with Polyphemus’s own way of looking, but also with his visually produced position (lines 31; 33). Thus, the idyll emphasizes the visual as an integral part of the “ancient cultural tool” of the pastoral from the outset (Gifford 46). The Cyclops’s one eye emblematically hints at the complexity of relationships that potentially arise out of the accumulation of observers and their positions within pastoral frameworks, it self-consciously draws attention to a visual dimension of the pastoral.

In this chapter, I suggest that this link between pastoral and visual hinted at in Theocritus’s Ur-text is vital to a strategic use of the pastoral through which antebellum African American slave narratives could articulate environmental knowledge. To this end, I first sketch more broadly how visual regimes of the period were tied to the emergence of the genre and what I call its “rhetoric of visibility,” by examining a variety of (historical) sources ranging from lectures by Frederick Douglass to abolitionist

writing and (pseudo-)scientific racism. Subsequently, I turn to two narratives by Henry Box Brown (1849) and Frederick Douglass (1845), which, read through the context of visual relations and pastoral theory by Susan Snyder (1998), exemplify where, how, and with what effects slave narratives strategized pastoral elements and expressed environmental knowledge. One particular reason for choosing Douglass's text is that his narrative has often been used as an example of African American antipastoral, which helps me highlight an alternative perspective that I believe the idea of an African American "strategic pastoral" affords. In this sense, my selection of texts for this chapter reflects not only my general aim in Part I to broadly illustrate facets of a foundational African American environmental knowledge, but also my intention to contribute, at this point, to debates over the antipastoral in African American literature more generally.

Chapter 2 employed the concept of heterotopia to show how antebellum slave narratives articulated environmental knowledge through space. By contrast, in Chap. 3, I turn to a mode, the pastoral, which is deeply connected with what could be seen as the opposite of heterotopic space, namely the normalizing, controlling space of the plantation, and to its (problematic) involvement in African American expressions of environmental knowledge. A spatial articulation of environmental knowledge in connection with the plantation was difficult for various reasons in fugitive slave narratives. To begin, positively portraying engagements with non-human nature on or through plantation settings potentially conflicted with an abolitionist purpose of depicting the most abominable facets of the dreaded system and with narrators' general need to represent themselves as human as opposed to nature. Even though there is much evidence that suggests that the enslaved developed diverse forms of environmental knowledge, whether, with more agency, in heterotopic spaces or through forcibly being the true cultivators of the land, communicating this knowledge in connection with iconic spaces of enslavement like the plantation was not politically viable. The aim, after all, was to point out the moral evil and injustice of the "peculiar institution," so that a discourse and depictions that cherished non-human nature became associated rather with spaces that could be set against its systemic, normalizing plantationscapes, i.e. with (heterotopic) spaces that lay beyond or on the edge of the plantation. *Spatially*, environmental knowledge primarily found expression where the plantation system (or the generic confines of the fugitive slave narrative) suffered cracks, as it temporarily relinquished control, e.g. in the provision ground, was overcome through flight, or

broke down altogether; it lay on the outskirts of the plantation (as well as abolitionist discourse), in heterotopic (literary) space.

Another reason why environmental knowledge was difficult to represent in connection with plantation space has to do with the aesthetic and ideological ties of the plantation with the pastoral. The pastoral was a prominent literary mode throughout the antebellum period, and played a central role in nineteenth-century U.S. American culture, as various scholars (Leo Marx, Lawrence Buell) have shown.³ More importantly, however, from an African American perspective, it has a long colonial history and “a highly problematic racial dimension” (Garrard 54), and is connected to the manner in which the natural world, very often through the image of the Southern plantation, has been used to subjugate blacks. Linked to the plantation, especially (but not exclusively) through the genre of the plantation pastoral,⁴ the pastoral turned enslaved blacks into passive parts of the plantation landscape, mystified their hardships (while refraining from ascribing blame), and produced powerful and long-lasting racial stereotypes.

Here, in the link between plantation and pastoral, lies one of the main reasons for the scholarly claims of an antipastoralism in African American literature (cf. Chap. 1, n. 25). If therefore, as Michael Bennett suggests, “[s]lavery changed the nature of nature in African American culture, necessitating a break with the pastoral tradition developed within European American literature” (205), this break is central to antebellum African American representations of plantation space, especially in fugitive slave narratives. Articulating environmental knowledge through this (as opposed to heterotopic) space was fraught with risk. Writers had to disconnect themselves from a (pastoral) nature discourse of the plantation that made them a docile part of this space in justification of their enslavement, had to avoid any ambivalence that could have a “pastoral echo,” thereby potentially giving value to the plantation and solidifying their racially produced social position. What Richard Wright notes much later in *12 Million Black Voices* (1941) concerning the problems of representing plantation space is (minus the movie and the radio) also true for an antebellum context:

To paint the picture of how we live on the tobacco, cane, rice, cotton plantations is to compete with mighty artists: the movies, the radio, the newspapers, the magazines, and even the Church. They have painted one picture: idyllic, romantic; but we live another; full of fear of the Lords of the land,

bowing and grinning when we meet white faces, toiling from sun to sun, living in unpainted wooden shacks that sit casually and insecurely upon the red clay. (35)

It was necessary for antebellum writers of fugitive slave narratives to stress the latter “picture” in order to overcome the former and argue against the peculiar institution. In any case, it was immensely difficult to express environmental knowledge by appreciatively presenting relations to non-human non-discursive materialities in connection with plantation space, as this always involved the risk of evoking the aesthetic, and thereby the emotional and ideological dimensions of a (plantation) pastoral framing.

This chapter traces some of the ways in which fugitive slave narratives nevertheless strategically employed pastoral elements to articulate environmental knowledge not so much *spatially*, but by playing with *visual* perspectives. While I understand ‘pastoral elements’ in what Lawrence Buell calls a broader “Americanist” sense as such writing that potentially “celebrates the ethos of nature/rurality over against the ethos of the town or city” (“American Pastoral Ideology” 23),⁵ my definition of ‘strategic pastoral’ for this chapter is therefore more specific. By African American strategic pastoral, I mean such moments in which pastoral elements become part of a doubled (visual) perspective that, at points, enables an articulation of environmental knowledge, social critique, and utopian hope. Strategic pastoral, understood in this sense, is one of those points where the convergence of the environmental and the political dimensions of African American literature becomes most clearly visible.

My argument is not thereby opposed to notions such as Lance Newman’s “radical pastoral” (i.e. a pastoral that radicalizes a traditional pastoral *topos* to “suit new circumstances” (10)), or to scholarly claims about an African American antipastoral, since such claims do not categorically deny the existence of pastoral elements (in the broader sense) but stress how they are disengaged. Nevertheless, my readings through the notion of a “strategic pastoral” suggest expanding the scope of antipastoral readings of African American literature in the sense of interrogating more concretely some of the strategic forms and implications of this disengagement. The aim is to flesh out what it means when Lawrence Buell, in his “scattergram of examples” in *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), proposes that black literature shows that African Americans “can gain control of the pastoral apparatus” (44, 43). To this end, I treat the primary texts of this chapter through the lens of the visual to trace a

characteristic perspectival doubling, and employ a basic distinction made by Susan Snyder between “temporal” and “spatial” aspects of the pastoral (cf. 3–11). In *Pastoral Process* (1998), her study of Renaissance pastoral, Snyder distinguishes what she calls two modes:

In the first mode, pastoral bliss is back then, but in the second it is over there. The pastoral scene as spatially conceived provides an alternative to the life of effort and competition, a vacation of sorts but also a set of contrary values. [...] [It provides] a short-term haven but not permanent residence. But as temporally conceived in the poems and sequences examined in this book, pastoral bliss is lost forever. It survives only as a frustrating memory, a marker of present alienation—or at best as a foreshadowing of life after death. The revivifying powers of pastoral-in-space are available in the here and now. (3)

Pastoral, understood in this sense, may, on the one hand, refer to an “alternative space,” imply a form of provisional refuge or temporary retreat (Arcadian); on the other hand, the pastoral opposition may be temporally connected to a “lost past” (Golden Age). While both of these modes, which are not “exclusive categories” (3), are significant in the texts by Douglass and H.B. Brown, my readings demonstrate that a temporal mode is more viable for expressing environmental knowledge in the context of plantation settings. Moreover, whereas the spatial dimension of African American strategic pastoral is often connected to antipastoral, its temporal dimension involves not only a form of Golden Age pastoral in Snyder’s sense, but is also potentially future-oriented, as it links a doubled vision enabled through the slave narrative’s rhetoric of visibility to a doubling of time. Besides serving at certain points as a means for articulating environmental knowledge, the slave narrative’s strategic pastoral is also a vehicle for criticizing the peculiar institution and expressing a utopian hope for a world without slavery.

ANTEBELLUM VISUAL REGIMES AND THE SLAVE NARRATIVE’S RHETORIC OF VISIBILITY

The early- to mid-nineteenth-century U.S. saw significant shifts in visual culture,⁶ which are an important context for the functioning of a strategic pastoral in the fugitive slave narrative and central to the discourses that formed around racial slavery and abolition more generally. In what Finseth

describes as a broadly waged “war of words and images” over the peculiar institution (1), some of those involved explicitly articulated their take on the central role of the visual. Douglass himself, for instance, drew attention to the significance of shifts in visual culture, especially with respect to the invention of the daguerreotype, as speeches such as his 1861 “Pictures and Progress” suggest, where he argues that

[a] very pleasing feature of our [new] pictorial relations is the very easy terms upon which all may enjoy them. The servant girl can now see a likeness of herself, such as noble ladies and even royalty itself could not purchase fifty years ago. Formerly, the luxury of a likeness was the exclusive privilege of the rich and great. But now, like education and a thousand other blessings brought to us by the advancing march of civilization, such pictures, are placed within easy reach of the humblest members of society. (455)

Being possibly the most photographed man (and certainly the most photographed African American) of the nineteenth century, Douglass not only confesses himself a fierce believer in the democratizing potential of Daguerre’s invention.⁷ Rather, he comes to the fore as one of the most acute theorists of the visual of his time, who thoroughly investigated “man [as] the only picture-making animal in the world” (“Lecture on Pictures,” unpaginated). Writing as one who had been enslaved, he hints at the ways in which fugitive slave narratives must be read in the context of dominant discourses that relied on certain ideas about vision. The “eye of the slave” (a phrase Douglass himself used in his *Narrative*) mobilized in these texts did not emerge in a vacuum but was circumscribed by a set of powerful discursive and visual practices that influenced the rapid development of the genre in the 1830s and 1840s. A reconsideration of these decades, which saw an explosion in publications of such texts as the abolitionist movement gained unprecedented strength and a more radical rhetoric, shows how antebellum African American writing became intertwined with black (eye-)witnessing through slave testimony⁸ and saw the emergence of what I want to call a “rhetoric of visibility” in the fugitive slave narrative.

Understanding how and in what contexts formerly enslaved African Americans came to *look* and employ a rhetoric of visibility requires considering more broadly the ways in which they were being *looked at*. In this respect, two kinds of “visual regimes”⁹ mark the ways in which vision fundamentally interlinks with an African American experience in the antebellum period. On the one hand, visual regimes occurred in terms of

Southern spatial settings that applied certain modes of seeing to the end of surveilling and exploiting slave labor. On the other, there existed a broader racialized visual regime that involved a gaze on the black as the observed and a set of premises underlying antebellum visual concepts and practices.

The effects of the first kind of visual regime in settings of enslavement that arranged vision strategically in such ways as to secure effective slave labor are frequently described in fugitive slave narratives. One of the most explicit depictions of such arrangements can be found in Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845). In one scene in particular, set on a small Maryland plantation where the young Douglass had been sent in order to be disciplined by the "negro-breaker" Edward Covey, the author-narrator vividly describes the workings of a visual regime under slavery:

There was no deceiving him [Covey]. His work went on in his absence almost as well as in his presence; and he had the faculty of making us feel that he was ever present with us. [...] He seldom approached the spot where we were at work openly, if he could do it secretly. He always aimed at taking us by surprise. [...] it was never safe to stop a single minute. His comings were like a thief in the night. He appeared to us as being ever at hand. He was under every tree, behind every stump, in every bush, and at every window, on the plantation. [...] he would turn short and crawl into a fence-corner, or behind some tree, and there watch us till the going down of the sun. (Douglass, *Narrative* 44)

Scholarly work on the Covey-episode has traditionally focused on the fierce physical battle that erupts between Douglass and the 'slave-breaker,' a fight in which, Douglass assures readers, the slaveholder "had drawn no blood from me, but I had from him," and that is depicted by the author-narrator as the pivotal turning point of his passage from slavery to freedom (50). Read along these lines, the above passage acts as a prequel to this climactic scene and is part of Douglass's engagement with notions of manhood that is captured in his famous chiasmic statement "You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man" (47).

By far fewer scholars, however, have considered the ways in which Douglass's experience at Covey's plantation attests to a particular setting and mode of surveillance reminiscent of a Foucauldian "infinitely

generalizable mechanism of panopticism” (216).¹⁰ This mechanism, famously described in *Discipline and Punish* on the basis of Jeremy Bentham’s late-eighteenth century prison design as a panoptic mode of power (cf. 195–209), is present throughout the scenery Douglass depicts. Although the gaze is not, as in Bentham’s model, “unverifiable” (cf. 201)—after all, the enslaved know all too well that it is Covey whom the punishing eye belongs to—there are at least three features of a quasi-panoptic technique in the spatial setup described by Douglass. First, space *itself* is inscribed by the gaze; the panoptic idea that “stones [...] can make people docile” (172) is, in Douglass’s case, expanded to include not only a consciously designed built environment but also the non-human natural world, since “every stump,” “every bush” and “every window” is being made complicit (*Narrative* 44). Second, visibility is employed in a panoptic way to “see constantly and to recognize immediately” (Foucault 200). For the enslaved, “it was never safe to stop a single minute” since Covey “appeared to us as being ever at hand” (*Narrative* 44). Third, the gaze is profoundly one-sided, asymmetrical. An enslaved individual becomes, in Foucault’s words, “the object of information, never a subject of communication” (200). Douglass and his fellow enslaved are bound up in a disciplinary world set up by the master that aims for both purest exploitation of the body and utmost docility of the soul, the latter being, after all, Covey’s primary goal and that on which his very livelihood as a well-known “negro-breaker and slave-driver” depends (*Narrative* 53).

Taken together, these features, which may be most explicit in Douglass but are present in a large number of antebellum slave narratives,¹¹ attest to the involvement and effects of panoptic mechanisms within practices of the peculiar institution. This is neither to suggest panopticism as homogeneously woven into the multiple forms of New World racial slavery, which included a wide range of regionally differing practices, nor to imply an unproblematic link between the autobiographical word and historical truth.¹² However, the recurrence of depictions attesting to the application of surveillance techniques and the resemblance such techniques show to panoptic supervision lend weight to the assumption that there was yet another dimension of atrocities involved and documented by formerly enslaved writers as part of an “anti-slavery gothic space of paralyzing terror” (Newman 57). In addition to the various “stock” abuses of the peculiar institution, ranging from the iconic physical punishments to psychological, sexual and moral cruelties, and in conjunction with the spatially confining practices and topographies I have delineated earlier, there was also an abuse

via the visual. A first kind of antebellum visual regime therefore lies in a particular form of “visual violence” of racial slavery that a considerable number of formerly enslaved individuals contemplated in their narratives and that, as Douglass’s example shows, increased the difficulty of expressing positive relations to a non-human natural world that was harnessed and could be perceived as part of a (panoptic) controlling apparatus.

At the same time, this visual violence experienced by the enslaved was intricately connected with broader modes of racialized vision that pervaded antebellum culture more extensively both in geographical terms and in terms of manifesting across various (and politically disparate) discourses ranging from (pseudo-)scientific racism to autobiography criticism or even Transcendentalism. This broader and more fundamental visual regime evolved primarily around two premises, namely an assumed immediacy between seeing and knowing, and the idea of a disembodiment of visual perception. On this basis, and in conjunction with antebellum notions about race, a dominant racialized vision emerged that posed the black body as “the observed,” and that is critical for the role of the visual as well as the pastoral in the slave narrative.

Consider, as a most drastic instance that exemplifies how the visual shaped and could racialize cultural practices at the time, polygenist (pseudo-)scientific racism, which gained prominence in the first half of the nineteenth century through the works of Samuel George Morton, George Robbins Gliddon, Josiah Nott and Louis Agassiz.¹³ This “American School of Polygenesis,” unified by a belief in the idea that human races or, in their terminology, “human types,” had separate origins, did not simply employ a prescriptive rhetoric. That is, its proponents did not merely impose a hierarchical structuring on the ‘human family’ that was “almost wholly devoted to the research paradigm of Anglo-Saxon, Teutonic superiority” (Graves 4)—this in itself makes it an obviously highly relevant context of the slave narrative—but they did so by creating forms of knowledge centrally based on underlying assumptions about vision. U.S. polygenism relied heavily on the incitement of a specific way of looking as it fundamentally connected the idea of seeing-as-knowing to its truth-claims.

A prominent example illustrating how this specific way of looking functioned may be found in Morton’s monumental *Crania Americana*, published in Philadelphia in 1839. This work of “craniometry,” highly popular at its time and much admired by Morton’s fellow polygenists Nott and Gliddon, is remarkable with respect to its involvement of the visual. *Crania Americana* consists primarily of two parts: roughly the first half of

Morton's book, preceded by a letter to John S. Phillips, a member of the "Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia," presents Morton's (pseudo-)scientific discourse on more than 100 human skulls he had collected in the 1830s. This section is the place where we find what might be expected, namely explicit claims about essentially differing human "types," seemingly well-grounded in Morton's simplifying and twisted logic that primarily relied on quantitative measurements of brain capacities of his objects of inquiry. By contrast, the second half of Morton's book exhibits—owing to the volume's gigantic dimension—almost life-size illustrations of the skulls he had assembled and painstakingly examined. It presents, page after page, and without additional commentary apart from brief labelings, images of each of the crania treated in the discussion of the first part.

The way in which *Crania Americana* thus seeks to assure its scientific objectivity on the basis of deliberately inciting acts of seeing is representative of (pseudo-)scientific racism's reliance on the visual in the creation of its racial knowledge. In the prefixed "Letter," Morton sets the stage for his theater to the eye, when he writes that "it appeared to me the wiser plan to present the facts unbiased by theory, and let the reader draw his own conclusions" by engaging the "evidence" of the second part (i). His book therefore, from the outset, plays on a dominant visual rationale; it reaches out to its readers themselves to visualize, to visually rationalize and "draw his [or her] own conclusions" on the basis of what they find presented in the latter pages of the volume (i). By bracketing his essentialist claims (first part) within the admonition and incitement of a link between eye and truth (Morton's "Letter"), and the actual images as evidence for the observing reader's eye (second part), Morton relies on the workings of a broader, underlying poetics of knowledge that poses the disembodied eye as the organ of truth par excellence.

In this respect, the volume may be read as part of a larger shift towards more "subjective" forms of vision in Western cultures that Jonathan Crary traces in *Techniques of the Observer* (1990). Morton's book, by seeking to withdraw itself from the observation process and by stating the recipient's eye itself as the key to (racial) truth, participates in a transformative process of a "reorganization of vision in the first half of the nineteenth century [...] that produced a new kind of observer" and that turned away from an older model of vision (2–3).¹⁴ According to Crary, the *camera obscura* had been the epitome of this older model which had conceptualized vision as "objective," and which was gradually replaced from the

beginning of the nineteenth century on by a new model that saw vision as a more “subjective” act that depended on the individual’s eye or new optical devices such as the stereoscope or the phenakistiscope. Morton’s work can be located within this broad shift: in order to regain a presumably objective truth that may have been lost at least in the sense of being accessible via an objective, completely disembodied eye, it is both a step towards a more *subjective* eye and one that is yet bound to arrive at an *objective* truth. Assuming that vision is indeed subjective (the text wants to leave *individual* readers see for themselves), Morton’s tract is nevertheless based on the assumption that there *exists* an inherent connection between what an eye perceives and a fixed, objective capital-T “Truth” about what it must eventually see. Truth may not be available through an objective eye, but it objectively exists and becomes available through “properly” directed subjective vision. In this sense, Morton’s and many of the American School’s productions exemplify a heavy (and broadly culturally significant) reliance on an unquestioned, “naturalized” connection between a disembodied observing eye and “Truth,” which, in this case, was explicitly deployed within processes of (pseudo-)scientific racialization.

The poetics of knowledge through which the fugitive slave narrative emerged was thus profoundly shaped by a set of general and transversally existing ideas on vision reflected in this example that further added to the manifold complexities faced by fugitives writing and publishing their texts in the context of a patronizing abolitionism. As they told or wrote down their stories, formerly enslaved narrators not only had to deal with portraying the panoptic facets that had often been part of their experience of the peculiar institution. Rather, the fugitive slave narrative must also be read as resisting (through) the eye of a fundamentally racialized socio-visual terrain that was marked by two premises about vision that interlinked with the racial views of the antebellum period. First, an overwhelmingly assumed immediacy between seeing and knowing, i.e. the notion of an automatic availability of true knowledge of the observed through the beholding eye. Second, and despite an ongoing subjectivization of observership in the sense Crary proposes, a pervasive residual idea of disembodiment within thereby often presumably “objective” acts of vision. These two premises converged in a fundamentally racializing asymmetry of looking that is most obvious in (but by no means restricted to) discourses of scientific racism, which equated the black with the observed and denied an observer-status.

In this context, the fugitive slave narrative employed what may be called a “rhetoric of visibility,” which emerged out of an abolitionism that politicized formerly enslaved (eye-) witnessing, but which could also provide a means of black resistance to antebellum visual regimes including the potential to play with pastoral perspectives. Abolitionism as such relied heavily on “the visible,” as one of its overarching goals was to expose to a (Northern) eye the various abuses and the moral evil of the peculiar institution. Theodore Dwight Weld’s 1839 *American Slavery As It Is*, for instance, a seminal abolitionist text that compiled various testimonies from the South, illustrates a preoccupation with visibility, when it stresses the central importance of moving eye-witnesses to “speak what they know, and testify to what they have seen” (9–10). Weld goes on to clarify that “[t]estimony respects matters of *fact*, not matters of opinion: it is the declaration of a witness as to *facts*, not the giving of an opinion as to the nature or qualities of actions” that was crucial to the antislavery project (110, emphasis in original). To act in this way as expositors of the truth by visualizing the peculiar institution became an earmark of abolitionist discourse from the 1830s on, even more so in the context of scandals over a number of fake narratives (cf. Starling 226–230).

At the same time, aiming to achieve their central goal of exposing the despised institution through a rhetoric of visibility meant abolitionists’ increasing employment of those who had actually eye-witnessed the accursed system from inside, the formerly enslaved. There was, in the words of a commentator in the *Liberator* (March 9, 1838), a strong necessity for such “profound eye-witnesses,” for “the few competent narrators of slavery as it exists in our country” (qtd. Blassingame/McKivigan xvii). Thereby shifting the rhetoric of visibility from (predominantly white) abolitionists to formerly enslaved eyewitnesses implied a profound change, namely the introduction of a formerly enslaved black observer. As abolitionists increasingly made use of the “eyes of the slaves,” the black body entered the scene as a legitimized observer, not merely—as the dominant racial logic of the delineated antebellum visual regimes implied—as an observed.

Consider, for example, the emphasis that the prospectus and preface to Charles Ball’s *Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball* (1837) place on the formerly enslaved’s own act of visual perception. Readers of this narrative, the prospectus proposes,

will see here portrayed in the language of truth, by an eye witness and a slave, the sufferings, the hardships, and the evils which are inflicted upon the millions of human beings, in the name of the law of the land and of the Constitution of the United States. (qtd. Starling 107)

The explicit aim of Ball's text is "to give a faithful portrait" and to "introduce the reader [...] to a view of the cotton fields, and exhibit, not to his imagination, but to his *very eyes*, the mode of life to which the slaves on the southern plantations must conform" (Ball xi, emphasis mine). Even though transmitted, in Ball's case, by an amanuensis envisioning himself as a faithful "recorder of the facts detailed to him by another," the 'eye of the slave' thus fuses into abolitionist discourse (xi). In fact, the "I saw," the "I have seen with my own eyes" or the "I have witnessed," earmarks of the fugitive's rhetoric of visibility, become just as common in the genre as the stock "I was born" with which the majority of the narratives started out. Through this "ocular permeation of language" (Jay, *Downcast Eyes* 2), the fugitive slave narrative not only gave the formerly enslaved a *voice*, as a host of scholars have emphasized. Rather, it also marked the moment of instating a formerly enslaved black *eye* as a new player in the field of documented visual perception and observation.

This is not to suggest that a black, formerly enslaved observer was not bound up in a patronizing and objectifying network pervaded by broader racialized visual regimes, even in the cases where fugitives' accounts were "written by themselves." Although some abolitionists may have embraced, as Stauffer points out, "an ethic of a black heart" that sought to overcome racism in addition to slavery, there was no general disengagement in abolitionism of the racializing visual regime that marked the antebellum period (1). As abolitionists' benevolent projects bore the marks of their racial ideologies, Douglass and other formerly enslaved agents of abolitionist societies such as William Wells Brown, Henry Box Brown or Henry Bibb were still primarily regarded as "living, speaking, startling proof" in and of themselves (*Salem Register*, qtd. Sekora 498). They were often degraded to being the mere props of what Ernest calls the "performances in the theater of antislavery culture" (*Liberation Historiography* 187), where the logic of the black as the observed was re-enacted through anti-slavery practices that fixated on the black body and its scars as signs of the despised system.¹⁵ Furthermore, the very moments in which the black observer's look manifested in discourse through written and published accounts were highly mediated, as they were circumscribed by what Olney

has referred to as formulaic “master outline” (“I Was Born” 152).¹⁶ As Sekora describes, fugitive slave narratives’ black voices were “sealed within a white envelope,” and there is no denying that this “white envelope” included also the ‘granted’ (because deemed necessary) acts of documenting visual perception (502). Metaphorically speaking, the formerly enslaved black observer’s eye may have been theirs, but the eyelids that determined when it had to have opened and what it had to have looked at were often held within patronizing constraints.

Nonetheless, and despite such restrictions, the “slave’s eye” was there.¹⁷ A formerly enslaved black observer emerged and bore a significant transformative potential with respect to the delineated visual regimes, as it not only unhinged a ubiquitous logic of the black as the object of vision, but also enabled a subversive critique of the premises underlying antebellum visual regimes. How the slave narrative, considered as the discursive event of the entry of a formerly enslaved black observer, presented a general critique of dominant antebellum assumptions about vision through its very existence as eye-witness-account may be surmised, for example, from considering a letter by a former slaveholder, A.C.C. Thompson. Written as a response to Douglass’s 1845 *Narrative*, and published in the *Delaware Republican* in the same year, Thompson’s letter accuses Douglass’s *Narrative* of exhibiting a “glaring impress of falsehood on every page,” and seeks to “give the public some information respecting the validity of this narrative” (88). Crucially, however, the author seeks to justify his claims on the grounds of his *own* status as an eye-witness, claiming to give a first-hand knowledge of the individuals depicted in Douglass’s book whom he has been “acquainted with” (88). Thus *itself* engaging in a rhetoric of visibility, Thompson’s response becomes immersed in the very “visual battleground” first opened up by the fugitive’s eye. He claims to “speak truth” and begins to catalogue his observations, e.g. that Douglass had been “an unlearned, and rather an ordinary negro,” Thomas Lamdin a “good-natured and harmless” fellow, and Thomas Auld of “irreproachable Christian character.” Ultimately, Thompson concludes, “I have given a true representation of the persons connected with the aforesaid Narrative, and I respectfully submit the fact to the judgment of an impartial public” (89–91).

Read in the context of the delineated visual regimes, the letter thus not only exemplifies the controversies that typically surrounded antebellum slave narratives, but also reveals a deeper subversive potential of the formerly enslaved observer’s eye. By relying on visibility, Thompson’s letter

hints at the ways in which seeing itself, or, more precisely, the fundamental assumption of seeing as knowing, was effectively subverted in the very act of attacking and thereby *not* denying the *unreliability* of the eye. If Douglass, backed up by Garrison and others' "white envelope," claimed to have seen and tell truth, and Thompson likewise claimed to have seen and tell truth, then the "impartial public"—significantly, those are the words on which Thompson's letter ends—becomes the ultimate end that is faced with the dilemma of a pure discourse that subverts the act of seeing as inherently connected to truth. The constellation itself, in which the formerly enslaved observer sees, in combination with the attacks on such acts of seeing that played out on the very same ground of a rhetoric of visibility, bears the potential to deconstruct the basic assumptions of this ground. The black observer, through the genre of the fugitive slave narrative, became part of a general challenge of the link between a subject's vision and truth. Hence, if, as Crary notes, "[t]hroughout the first half of the nineteenth century, an extensive amount of work [...] was coming to terms in various ways with the understanding that vision [...] could no longer claim an essential objectivity or certainty" ("Incapacities" 60), then the fugitive slave narrative's emergence played a vital role in this broader process in a U.S. context. As the formerly enslaved observer's eye entered into discourse and had to be negotiated, underlying premises concerning vision themselves became unsettled—attacking the "slave's eye" meant, at the same time, an attack on the truth-seeking eye itself.

AFRICAN AMERICAN STRATEGIC PASTORAL IN THE FUGITIVE SLAVE NARRATIVE

The emergence of a black observer through the rhetoric of visibility of the slave narrative not only had the potential to unsettle dominant antebellum visual regimes, but also intersected with a strategic use of the pastoral. Although the representation of plantation slavery was generically circumscribed, narrators signified through pastoral elements by playing with visual perspectives in creative and subversive ways to express environmental knowledge and utter social critique. As noted above, this is not to suggest that there is no antipastoral in the diegetic worlds of the fugitive slave narrative when reconsidered in the context of visual regimes and a rhetoric of visibility. To be sure, one finds a host of antipastoral elements ranging from the recurring images of violence and backbreaking labor in the "field of blood and blasphemy," pervaded by "heart-rending shrieks" (Douglass,

Narrative 17, 14), to landscapes of flight often replete with a threatening wilderness and slave-hunting posses, and frequently positive representations of cities in opposition to injurious rural environments.¹⁸ Thus, insofar as they contributed to the creation of “an anti-slavery gothic space of paralyzing terror” (Newman 57), the perspectives that slave narratives engaged often either ignored pastoral impulses altogether or portrayed potentially pastoral scenes and landscapes in antipastoral terms by focusing on and criticizing the atrocious aspects of slavery.

At the same time, however, and in addition to depictions of trauma-ridden Southern landscapes that deployed antipastoral imagery, a strategic use of the pastoral emerged in connection with the slave narrative’s rhetoric of visibility. Strategic pastoral occurs when pastoral elements come into play and converge with other “lenses.” There was the potential for a “pastoral vision” in the genre, i.e. for moments in which pastoral elements attain a significant function within the context of the slave narrative’s visual politics by becoming part of perspectival shifts. More specifically, I want to suggest, pastoral elements were involved in a characteristic “double vision” in the slave narrative. Vision often became twofold where pastoral elements were used, it came to oscillate between two perspectives, “two eyes,” so to speak, one being that of the pastoral, the other that of the enslaved. Understood in this way, strategic pastoral, beyond offering ways to express environmental knowledge, could be a vehicle for criticizing the peculiar institution and hint at a future when slavery might be overcome.

A first text that illustrates the functioning of African American strategic pastoral is Henry Box Brown’s 1849 *Narrative of Henry Box Brown*. Judged by the mere quantity of negatively connoted descriptions of non-human (plantation) nature, this narrative, which won fame due to Brown’s ingenious escape via mailing himself in a crate to Philadelphia, may well be read as an antipastoral text. The author-narrator frequently uses an antipastoral lens and recounts early on how his mother explains slavery by drawing a parallel between being ripped apart as a family and the way in which “leaves are stripped from off the trees of the forest,” thereby inhibiting the development of idealizing impulses with respect to both family relationships and rural environments (*Narrative* 15). In this vein, Brown repeatedly laments the “plains of Southern oppression,” describing how the captives’ cries “are wafted on every Southern gale to the ears of our Northern brethren, and the hot winds of the South reach our fastnesses amid the mountains and hills of our rugged land, loaded with stifled cries

and choking sobs of poor desolate women, as her babes are torn one by one from her embrace” (36). In such moments, Brown’s narrative deploys antipastoral to depict a gothic Southern ‘prison-house,’ a gruesome topography in which “the purple streams of the slave’s blood flow ceaselessly and rapidly o’er our land, gushing forth from every hill-side” (90).

Brown’s strategic pastoral, however, goes beyond such antipastoral imagery, as his depictions of plantationscapes at points include pastoral elements that are more complex in their interaction with his general objectives. This strategic use of pastoral elements can be deciphered along the spatial and temporal dimensions of the pastoral. One of the climactic scenes of Brown’s *Narrative* which describes the incident that motivates the author-narrator’s decision to take flight, is particularly revealing in this respect. The passage portrays the day Brown’s wife and children are suddenly sold away from him. Here is a pivotal event that according to Brown reveals the most devastating and dehumanizing aspect of Southern enslavement, as there is “no comparison with those internal pangs which are felt by the soul when the hand of the merciless tyrant plucks from one’s bosom the object of one’s ripened affections” (*Life* ii). On the outset, however, the text passage depicts a summer day in pastoral terms:

It was on a pleasant morning, in the month of August, 1848, that I left my wife and three children safely at our little home, and proceeded to my allotted labor. The sun shone brightly as he commenced his daily task, and as I gazed upon his early rays, emitting their golden light upon the rich fields adjacent to the city, and glancing across the abode of my wife and family, and as I beheld the numerous companies of slaves, hieing [sic!] their way to their daily labors, and reflected upon the difference between their lot and mine, I felt that, although I was a slave, there were many alleviations to my cup of sorrow. (Brown, *Narrative* 50)

Although somewhat compromised by “a cup of sorrow,” a pastoral eye is, at first, dominant in the narrator’s perception. A “gaze upon the early rays emitting their golden light” appears possible for Brown, and is complemented by the family idyll of “a parting kiss upon the lips of my faithful wife” and pressing “to my bosom the little darling cherubs” (51). Additional features that clearly mark this moment as an allusion to the pastoral tradition are the contrast between country and “adjacent” city and the way in which Brown figures as a leisurely observer of field hands (“I beheld the numerous companies of slaves”), *not* as a worker of the land.

Significantly, however, Brown's text does not suggest that the pastoral is spatially available. On the contrary, an Arcadian mode, the notion of a spatial pastoral retreat (Snyder), is speedily disengaged, as Brown rhetorically interrupts the scene by directly addressing the reader who might have been soothed by the pastoral image, to foreshadow the horrid news that "[y]our wife and smiling babes are gone" (cf. 50, 51). Both its general tendency to depict Southern landscapes through antipastoral and gothic imagery and the employment of pastoral elements only to disengage their potential as a refuge highlight how Brown's text works to decouple the pastoral in plantation contexts from what Snyder identifies as its spatial mode. Brown's text suggests that there is no such "alternative to the life of effort and competition," not even a "short-term haven" for the enslaved (Snyder 3). An enslaved individual may imagine the "alleviations to my cup of sorrow" and dream of a refuge in connection with plantationscapes, but this does not make them spatially available under the system (Brown, *Narrative* 50). This, of course, does not mean that either Brown's or other slave narratives suggest that this dream has no value or that there were no other-spaces beyond the plantation that could act in such ways (as Chap. 2 has suggested). Nevertheless, the spatial mode of the pastoral is clearly disengaged at such points and, in this text, becomes linked to the antipastoral, which enables Brown to highlight the inescapability of the Southern "prison house." Here, his strategic pastoral works as a means of criticizing the peculiar institution for its carceral character and for the inhumaneness of its quasi-panoptic visual and spatial control, and supports Brown's exposure of its hypocrisy in pretending its benevolent character, while ripping apart families.

Additionally, the cited passage reveals facets of Brown's strategic pastoral that pertain to its temporal dimension. There are in this respect two central components, the evocation of a Golden Age memory of a childhood before recognizing the meanings of enslavement, and a doubling of temporality that is closely linked to the doubled vision of this moment and that ultimately gives Brown's strategic pastoral a utopian potential. The former corresponds with Snyder's ideas about a temporal mode of pastoral: in this case, Snyder writes, "pastoral bliss is lost forever. It survives only as a frustrating memory, a marker of present alienation—or at best foreshadowing a life after death" (3). Brown's narrative does not directly portray, but implies such a moment of past "pastoral bliss." Recall his 'introduction' to slavery through his mother: "At an early age, my mother would take me on her knee, and pointing to the forest trees adjacent, now

being stripped of their thick foliage by autumnal winds, would say to me, ‘my son, as yonder leaves are stripped from off the trees of the forest, so are the children of slaves swept away from them by the hands of cruel tyrants’” (Brown, *Narrative* 15). Even though Brown at this point seems to represent the moment of its ending, he implies a Golden Age primal scene during childhood, before a realization of what it meant to be enslaved took place. In fact, Brown suggests that, even with this maternal initiation, a pastoral vision might still have seemed possible for some time, since his assertion that there were “many alleviations to my cup of sorrow” implies a potentially ongoing, still cherished childhood innocence and naivety; he does not, after all, expect his wife and children to be sold (50). Significantly, it is a fall from precisely this innocence and naivety in an encounter with the reality against which his mother’s words had cautioned him that stands out in the climactic scene. Brown employs a temporal dimension of Golden Age pastoral that is present early on in his narrative to represent his fall from a juvenile “pastoral bliss” more drastically and to emphasize the cause of this fall: slavery. At this point, his strategic pastoral helps to highlight both the unnaturalness of the peculiar institution and the humanness of the enslaved in two senses. First, by showing through his Golden Age memory that a pastoral appreciation of non-human (plantation) nature and the development of primal forms of environmental knowledge may be a marker of being human that is wrenched from him by the unnatural institution of slavery; second, by suggesting that emotional attachments among kin are likewise a sign of humanness, which an unnatural social system like the peculiar institution destroys.

Aside from this involvement of the idea of an innocent (pastoral) time before the realization of enslavement, the play with temporality that marks the pivotal scene itself is perhaps the most intriguing and creative aspect of Brown’s strategic pastoral. The passage cited above self-consciously draws attention to the centrality of time by giving a fairly specific date (“the month of August, 1848” (50)), which not only highlights the importance the narrator ascribes to this particular moment, but is all the more significant considering the scarcity of information concerning time (e.g. of birth) that is characteristic of the genre. What is even more striking, however, and illustrates the potential of the temporal dimension of Brown’s strategic pastoral is the way in which his use of a doubled visual perspective—the enslaved eye/the pastoral eye—is linked to a temporal simultaneity—of the enslaved’s time/pastoral time. Brown’s strategic pastoral not only engages a “back then” of Snyder’s temporal mode (3), but also performs

a simultaneity of a pastoral vision and the enslaved's vision. Evidence of this lies, first, in the fact that there is no smooth transition between the two perspectives (no retreat-return pattern, in classic pastoral terms), but a drastic interruption. The pastoral image, perceivable for a brief moment, is violently disrupted, pulled back into a reality and visual perspective of the enslaved (which has never really been left) that the plantation pastoral omits. Instead of remaining in his pastoral frame, Brown's horrid revelation to the reader of the news that his "wife and smiling babes are gone" (51) is followed by a phrase that sets the perspectival record straight by echoing the title of Weld's *American Slavery As It Is*: "And this is Slavery, its certain, necessary and constituent part. [...] This is Slavery" (52). The return of a dominant rhetoric of visibility at this point not only highlights that the pastoral cannot be accessed from the perspective of the enslaved (i.e. become spatial, a refuge), but also stresses the simultaneity of two visual frames as the one interferes with the other.

Brown's narrative technique underpins this doubling of temporality. He presents pastoral elements precisely at that moment in the diegetic time of the story when his "wife and smiling babes" are sold (even if he discovers this only later) (50). The moment of a pastoral vision/time, in other words, coincides with the moment of an enslaved individual's vision/time that leads to the former's collapse; Brown pastoralizes *as* his family is abducted. In classical narratological terms, discourse-time (pastoral portrayal) and story-time (life under slavery) fall together, as a discursive event (pastoral) and a plot event (selling) coincide, creating their simultaneity. One strategic effect of this technique is the creation of an immediacy between the reader and an enslaved individual's experience. As the text envisions the landscape for the former through a (probably well-known) plantation pastoral perspective, yet emphasizes the simultaneously existing perspective of the enslaved that is (spatially) denied this experience, Brown both emotionally engages his readership and stresses the pastoral's status as a white privilege. His use of a doubled vision and time strategically grants access to an established pastoral framework in order to captivate his readers, but does not let them walk away without the implied charge that while they are allowed to pastoralize, enslaved families are being abducted.

Another significant outcome and part of Brown's strategy of using a doubled timeframe is that it allows him to play with a utopian potential of the pastoral. He hints at this potential further down in his narrative, when he explains why he will continue to advocate on behalf of the enslaved. At this point, Brown implies that the pastoral lens he has employed cannot

correspond with pastoral space, “for as long as three millions of my countrymen pine in cruel bondage, on Virginia’s exhausted soil, and in Carolina’s pestilential rice swamps; in the cane-breaks of Georgia, and on the cotton fields of Louisiana and Mississippi, and in the insalubrious climate of Texas” (56). Even though Brown leaves no doubt that the pastoral could never become spatial under slavery, the fact that it can nevertheless be engaged as part of a doubled lens through the slave narrative’s rhetoric of visibility, and Brown’s “for as long as” in this quote hint at the ways in which his pastoral dream signifies hope. His (temporal) strategic pastoral does not merely engage in a “foreshadowing of life after death” or suggest a “back then” (Snyder 3), but also becomes future-oriented and more openly political as it hints at a time when the peculiar institution may be overcome. While a more profane strategy of Brown’s doubling of vision and time lies in temporarily providing his readers with a familiar pastoral gaze to open up their eyes all the more roughly to the lot of the enslaved, his text also engages a political potential and utopian dimension of the pastoral.

Taken as a whole, Brown’s text hints at a variety of ways in which writers of slave narratives employed strategic pastoral. One dominant element of Brown’s strategic use of pastoral is the way in which it links what Snyder calls a spatial mode of pastoral to the antipastoral. Antipastoral in slave narratives may therefore be subdivided into two types: there is antipastoral in the sense of antipastoral imagery, which becomes visible when rural Southern landscapes, in Gifford’s definition of antipastoral, “are not in any way idealized; in fact, they are often harsh and [sic!] unattractive” (54). At the same time, however, Brown (and others) use antipastoral in the sense of engaging and speedily disengaging pastoral elements. They mobilize “the pastoral apparatus” (L. Buell, *Environmental Imagination* 43) to provide evidence of the spatial unavailability or inaccessibility of an Arcadian refuge, a strategy that helps criticize slavery’s atrocious means of visual and social control. Additionally, Brown plays with the temporal dimension of pastoral elements in a twofold sense. On the one hand, his doubled vision evokes a Golden Age scene to hint at more positively connoted relations of enslaved African Americans to nature, to suggest the development of a primal environmental knowledge, and to represent slavery’s unnaturalness. On the other hand, Brown’s narrative links this doubled vision to a simultaneity of the pastoral and the enslaved’s perspectives to emotionally engage readers in his experience and hint at a future without slavery.

The doubled vision of African American strategic pastoral is also present in the second text I want to consider as an example, Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845). The fact that this work has often been read as "a fascinating anti-pastoral" (Bennett 198) invites a reading that highlights some of the ways in which the notion of a strategic pastoral goes beyond the antipastoral to expand our perspective on African American engagements of the "pastoral apparatus" (L. Buell, *Environmental Imagination* 43). To be sure, numerous incidents and descriptions within Douglass's *Narrative* support its assessment as anti-pastoral text. One finds, for instance, the celebration of the liberating potential of the city (especially Baltimore) as opposed to the country (an aspect that Bennett stresses), the repeated emphasis on the hardships experienced with respect to work-life in the fields, or a discourse portraying nature as complicit in enslavement, for instance, in the Covey-episode discussed earlier in this chapter. Two depictions in particular appear to be strikingly antipastoral yet can also be read, with additional implications, in terms of African American strategic pastoral and environmental knowledge.

First, there is the description of Colonel Lloyd's garden where tarred fences symbolize the inaccessibility of Southern pastoral to the enslaved:

Colonel Lloyd kept a large and finely cultivated garden, which afforded almost constant employment for four men, besides the chief gardener, (Mr. M'Durmond). This garden was probably the greatest attraction of the place. During the summer months, people came from far and near—from Baltimore, Easton, and Annapolis—to see it. It abounded in fruits of almost every description, from the hardy apple of the north to the delicate orange of the south. This garden was not the least source of trouble on the plantation. [...] Scarcely a day passed, during summer, but that some slave had to take the lash for stealing fruit. The colonel had to resort to all kinds of stratagems to keep his slaves out of the garden. The last and most successful one was that of tarring his fence all around, after which, if a slave was caught with any tar upon his person, it was deemed sufficient proof that he had either been into the garden or had tried to get in. In either case, he was severely whipped by the chief gardener. (Douglass, *Narrative* 20)

In terms of strategic pastoral, the scene deploys pastoral elements in describing the garden's fruit and rural beauty, which attracts visitors from "far and near," and is iconic of the link between a spatial mode (and unavailability) of pastoral and antipastoral. If we take the garden as a pastoral space, it does not, despite all its beauty, figure as a refuge but as white

privilege and a trigger of punishments. Pastoral space, Douglass's portrayal of the garden makes abundantly clear, is a reflection of the social system and spatial and visual regimes of the antebellum South. As in Brown's case, Douglass's strategic pastoral at this point figures in the form of an antipastoral that goes beyond mere antipastoral imagery, as it employs pastoral elements to highlight the unavailability and inaccessibility of Arcadian space under plantation rule, thereby criticizing slavery's inhumane carceral topographies.

Crucially, however, his strategic use of pastoral elements in describing Colonel Lloyd's garden also enables Douglass to express African American environmental knowledge. To begin, the text passage implies a form of environmental knowledge of the "four men" (enslaved, for all we know) who are employed to keep the garden. Although there is a "chief gardener," these "four men" no doubt need to have gained expertise in botany and gardening, as the place could otherwise not have become the "greatest attraction" of the plantation (20). Hence, in the midst of the atrocious regime that keeps "the hungry swarms of boys" out of the garden (i.e. makes the pastoral spatially inaccessible) (20), we also find this group of men who, in pastoral terms, are not only "sheep" but also "shepherds," and who are not only being forced but *able* to maintain the place. Moreover, it is significant how their knowledge bears a mark of resistance even if they are part of its devastating regime. Consider, in this respect, where the Colonel's visitors come from, namely not simply from "far and near" but from "Baltimore, Easton, and Annapolis," i.e. from urban areas (20). Such spaces are vital, as arguments concerning African American antipastoral suggest, to a black literary tradition that "has constructed the rural-natural as a realm to be feared for specific reasons and the urban-social as a domain of hope" (Bennett 198). While speaking for this assessment, Douglass's quote highlights that the garden—as atrocious as its rural regime is and as spatially unavailable as its pastoral remains—and the environmental knowledge necessary for its maintenance could become part of regional forms of resistance that extend beyond the plantation. Practically speaking: if (white) visitors came from the (nearby) cities, it is likely that they brought enslaved African American servants, who could contribute to forging larger, highly efficient and empowering communicative networks among the enslaved. In this sense, reading the scene as strategic pastoral that expresses environmental knowledge suggests that Douglass's use of pastoral elements not only points out the unavailability of a spatial refuge to highlight the atrocious character of slavery, but also

hints at a subversive potential of environmental knowledge involved in links between a rural “realm to be feared” and an urban “domain of hope” (Bennett 198).

A second revealing passage that illustrates facets of Douglass’s strategic pastoral that pertain to a spatial mode can be found in his account of his grandmother’s fate:

[M]y grandmother, who was now very old, having outlived my old master and all his children, having seen the beginning and end of all of them, and her present owners finding she was of but little value, her frame already racked with the pains of old age, and complete helplessness fast stealing over her once active limbs, they took her to the woods, built her a little hut, put up a little mud chimney, and then made her welcome to the privilege of supporting herself there in perfect loneliness; thus virtually turning her out to die! (*Narrative* 37)

The description is particularly striking when read as an antipastoral mirror image to Romantic conceptions of nature, for instance in Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854). Instead of seeking refuge and renewal in the close by nature of the woods, as in Thoreau’s case, the old woman is banned. If we interpret the “little hut” with its “little mud chimney” in the “woods” as part of a pastoral middle landscape, the scene highlights not only how the plantation zone related to what lay beyond its confines, but also stresses again that even with the material availability of a potential other-space, an Arcadian spatial refuge was not possible through the lens of the plantation. That is to say, Douglass demonstrates, on the one hand, how the plantation system was rooted in the notion of a material abundance ready for exploitation, which included both its de-humanized chattel and the non-human non-discursive material world. The uppermost criterion in this respect was the use-value of both, so that disposing of an old woman (deemed unfeasible materiality), who had lost this value, in the woods beyond the plantation (deemed unfeasible materiality) was just as stunningly logical under the system as it will be ethically inexplicable to us. On the other hand, Douglass’s portrayal at this point, as in the case of Colonel Lloyd’s garden, highlights once more that a spatial dimension of the pastoral cannot be established or represented in the context of the plantation. Significantly, the instance shows that this is true even for a space beyond the plantation, out of an immediate reach of masters and overseers, which could potentially lend itself to heterotopic interpretation.

Douglass's representation insists at this point that a heterotopic function is not representable through a perspective in which the pastoral is connected with the plantation: after all, the worn-out woman moves into the woods at the master's will, not her own. Her removal from plantation space comes as the master's curse, not as a revelation, which leaves her only with "the moans of the dove, and by night the screams of the hideous owl" in her lonely hut "before a few dim embers" (38).¹⁹ A kind of temporary "short-term haven" through the pastoral is impossible once more (Snyder 3); the spatial mode of the pastoral is tied to the antipastoral.

Apart from such forms of spatial (anti)pastoral, Douglass's narrative also presents instances of a strategic use of pastoral elements that involve a temporal dimension. To begin, like Brown's text, the 1845 *Narrative* employs a Golden Age mode of pastoral in Snyder's sense, which is even more pronounced in Douglass's later version, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855). At points, Douglass's strategic pastoral in the *Narrative* hints at an innocent childhood past, prior to entering "the blood-stained gate" to "the hell of slavery" that his witnessing of a whipping of an aunt represents (15). The author-narrator describes, for instance, that his first job as a child was to "drive up the cows at evening, keep the fowls out of the garden, keep the front yard clean," and that he spent "most of my leisure time [...] in helping Master Daniel Lloyd in finding his birds, after he had shot them" (25). In such moments, Douglass suggests an innocent engagement with his plantation surroundings, a form of Golden Age experience that also involved gaining environmental knowledge about flora and fauna, even if this happens within the exploitative logic of the plantation system, as the killing of the birds highlights. With the greater freedom he had in composing his second book, he becomes even more outspoken with respect to this kind of "back then" pastoral (Snyder 3), presenting the plantation itself as "a scene of almost Eden-like beauty" (Douglass, *My Bondage* 67). Consider the following description:

Outside this select inclosure, were parks, where [...] rabbits, deer, and other wild game, might be seen, peering and playing about, with none to molest them or make them afraid. The tops of the stately poplars were often covered with the red-winged black-birds, making all nature vocal with the joyous life and beauty of their wild, warbling notes. These all belonged to me, as well as to Col. Edward Lloyd, and for a time I greatly enjoyed them. (62-63)

The way in which Douglass claims that “these all belonged to me” (even as this turns out to be the temporary illusion of an enslaved child) suggests an empowering epistemological appropriation of his surroundings. Since it is unlikely that the ideas expressed in *My Bondage* came to Douglass without earlier foundation, and more likely that they could not easily be included in his first text, the shift towards more explicitness regarding depictions of non-human nature in itself reflects the generic confines of the antebellum slave narrative (cf. Newman 57–60). More importantly, however, Douglass’s appropriation of his environs highlights the significance ascribed to an environmental knowledge linked to a primal pastoral stage, which, though more implicitly, is also part of the *Narrative*. In this respect, his claim that flora and fauna “belonged to me” in *My Bondage* seems all the more relevant for one who does not ‘belong’ to himself by default, as one who is devastated by not being able to tell how old he is, like “the larger part of the slaves [who] know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs” (*Narrative* 12). While Douglass notes that being deprived of the “privilege” of telling one’s age “was a source of unhappiness to me even during childhood” (12), his Golden Age scenes at the same time highlight that a ‘belonging’ at this stage was constructed in part through environmental knowledge, not only by himself but by the enslaved more generally. Many of them, Douglass reveals, told their time of birth by referring to “planting-time, harvest-time, cherry-time, spring-time, or fall-time” (12), thereby using designations that are marked by the trauma of enslavement (since they also correspond with enforced work cycles), but at the same time hint at an intimate connection to non-human nature that could help create some form of identity. Even with this ambivalence, the “back then” pastoral Douglass employs hints at a deep involvement with the non-human natural world at an early age and at the presence of an environmental knowledge rooted in African American culture as a potentially empowering part of the identities of the enslaved. In this respect, the Golden Age images that are part of Douglass’s strategic pastoral are akin to, but at the same time, and especially in the 1855 text, much more explicit in their articulation of environmental knowledge than Brown’s.

Moreover, Douglass’s narrative, too, engages a utopian potential as part of its strategic pastoral. Consider in this context one of the most famous scenes of the text, which reveals the simultaneity of pastoral vision/time and enslaved vision/time. Standing on the banks of the Chesapeake Bay, Douglass contemplates:

Those beautiful vessels, robed in purest white, so delightful to the eye of freemen, were to me so many shrouded ghosts, to terrify and torment me with thoughts of my wretched condition. I have often, in the deep stillness of a summer's Sabbath, stood all alone upon the lofty banks of that noble bay, and traced, with saddened heart and tearful eye, the countless number of sails moving off to the mighty ocean. The sight of these always affected me powerfully. (*Narrative* 46)

While scholars have repeatedly and intensely focused on what follows, namely Douglass's famous apostrophe, this passage was rarely taken as representing an act of vision as such, an act of seeing and relating to the world in its very materiality. Doing this, the setting would at first glance qualify, as in the case of the pivotal scene of Brown's *Narrative*, as an appreciable rural site that involves pastoral elements ("lofty banks of that noble bay" (46)). The scenery potentially "celebrate[s] the ethos of nature/rurality" ("American Pastoral Ideology" 23), and the text to some extent expresses this potential in the apostrophe, where we catch glimpses of a harmonious pastoral imagery in the depiction of "the gentle gales" that "merrily" move the ships at a distance (Douglass, *Narrative* 46).

Douglass's text, again, employs a doubled visual perspective that coincides with a simultaneity of pastoral and the enslaved's time. In comparison with Brown, however, this simultaneity is suggested less by a sudden interruption (Brown's address to the reader) or an intersection of discourse-time and story-time, and more continuously, as Douglass's language smoothly shifts between what he explicitly describes as two kinds of visual perception. Standing on the "lofty banks" he does indeed see "those beautiful vessels, robed in purest white," and even explicitly alludes to the potential appeal of the bay scene for a pastoral depiction in imagining what this sight must be like for the "eye of the freemen" (46). Instead of taking this position, however, not only his mind but essentially his *vision* remains tied to the very materiality connected to the seeing eye; his capability of sight is inevitably bound to his moment, to his body, to his situation. The enslaved observer's eye in itself is, Douglass emphasizes, "*tearful*," becoming a materially altered visual organ, and it is the very materiality of this visual organ—the tear-water *within* his eyes—that ultimately denies the pastoral mode for an appreciation of the waters stretching out outside of his body and *before* his eyes. While Douglass's strategic pastoral thereby marks the pastoral as a white privilege and criticizes the (visual) chains of the peculiar institution, the scene also articulates environmental

knowledge and engages in a utopian hope. With respect to environmental knowledge, the portrayal highlights a capacity of more freely employing pastoral lenses on the edge of the plantation zone, especially where bodies of water are involved (something that also happens in Henry Bibb's narrative, with respect to the Ohio River (29–30)). Here is, in a sense, a link between a hermeneutics of freedom I have described in Chap. 2 and a strategic pastoral. Regarding a utopian (political) potential, on the other hand, Douglass's strategic pastoral is arguably even more pronounced than Brown's, if we read this moment as a prequel and inspiration for his fighting Covey in the pivotal scene that follows. While one may regard Douglass' strategic pastoral as expression of a general liberating potential of his (and other narrators') doubled vision in the sense that it implies the possibility of imagining an alternative world without slavery, the plot development of the *Narrative* itself suggests a more radical strategic involvement of the pastoral in his process of gaining freedom. If we take the Chesapeake apostrophe as a turning point within his character's development, this implies that the fight and victory over Covey that promptly follow in the text are also the result of embracing an empowering double vision that involved the pastoral. Moreover, Douglass's appreciation of the water and waterways that is perceivable through the Chesapeake apostrophe's pastoral elements hints at an (environmental) knowledge connected to his work by the waterside in Baltimore, a knowledge that eventually enabled his escape. In both senses, Douglass's strategic pastoral itself is involved in opening up the possibility of his chiasmus, of gaining manhood, and, ultimately, of freedom.

I wish to conclude by emphasizing that to consider how African American writers "gain[ed] control of the pastoral apparatus" (L. Buell, *Environmental Imagination* 43) involves more than turning to black literature's (indisputable) antipastoral impulse. This is not to deny in any sense that the relation of antebellum African American writers of slave narratives to the pastoral as well as to non-human nature more generally was marked by trauma. Due to what Outka has described as a "conflation of blackness with nature" (25), or what Marjorie Spiegel refers to as the "dreaded comparison," which marked justifications of the peculiar institution, one finds a general urge in the fugitive slave narrative to move *out of* nature and *into* 'civilization' in order to validate one's humanity. There is an "anti-nature writing tendency" in this sense (Outka 172), since the genre displays at its core a move towards what ecofeminist Val Plumwood

has termed a “hyper-separation” from non-human nature as part of its overall strategy of turning the racially de-humanized black body into a “civilized” human.²⁰

Nevertheless, this leaves the more general question how adequate descriptions of African American writers’ use of the “pastoral apparatus” as ‘antipastoral’ in fact are (Buell, *Environmental Imagination* 43). In this respect, two points of caution regarding the notion of an overwhelming antipastoral in the African American literary tradition come to mind. First, it seems problematic to describe African American literature as ‘antipastoral,’ if we use ‘pastoral’ in a broad sense to refer to all such forms of writing that potentially “celebrate the ethos of nature/rurality over against the ethos of the town or city” (Buell, “American Pastoral Ideology” 23). We may run the risk, through this terminology, of evoking the idea of an absence of literary engagements with nature more generally or, which would be worse, of reinforcing a (false) stereotype of a general African American disinterestedness in environmental issues. After all, “it has been easy,” as bell hooks reminds us in “Touching the Earth” “to forget that black people were first and foremost a people of the land” (30).

A second point of critique that is of more practical relevance is that the notion and term “antipastoral,” when taken in too narrow a sense, may foreclose more concrete analyses for (eco-)critics of African American literature. One may unduly de-emphasize those moments in which black authors *did* employ pastoral elements in complex ways, and overlook to what specific ends and with what effects this happened. My aim in this chapter was in this respect to provide a starting point that highlights that not all strategic pastoral (even in the context of the fugitive slave narrative) is an antipastoral use of pastoral elements, and thereby to contribute to providing alternatives that terminologically and conceptually reflect the complexity of African American relations to the pastoral. Adding to scholarship that turns to the adoption of classical pastoral texts by modern African American writers (e.g. M. Lewis),²¹ or notions of a “radical pastoral” (e.g. Newman, esp. 8–21), the idea of a strategic pastoral may enable more reflection on African Americans’ use of the “pastoral apparatus” (L. Buell). In this respect, my readings have shown not only how visual perspectives can be taken into account productively as a context for reconsidering the strategic use of pastoral elements in the antebellum fugitive slave narrative, but also how the pastoral interconnects with a tradition of environmental knowledge. On the one hand, Brown, Douglass and others strategically employ the pastoral through a rhetoric of visibility, creating a

doubled lens. If, therefore, as Garrard has suggested, “[n]o other trope is so deeply entrenched in Western culture” as the pastoral (33), this trope became “entrenched” in the African American literary tradition via the visual, by becoming an additional lens within the rhetoric of visibility of the fugitive slave narrative. On the other hand, the strategic pastoral is one way in which environmental knowledge could be articulated and thereby an important foundational means of claiming and changing relationships between the (black-identified) human and non-human nature. A strategic pastoral, as problematic as it is from an antebellum African American perspective as a mode intimately connected with the oppressive ideology that ensured the enslavement of black people, attained multiple functions, since it could lead to articulations of environmental knowledge, but was also an important means of criticizing slavery and the de-humanization of blacks. In this sense, the strategic pastoral highlights the convergence of the political and the environmental in African American literature.

NOTES

1. The vast critical literature on pastoralism offers various kinds of descriptive categories (e.g. Empson’s distinction between proletarian/covert pastoral, or Leo Marx’s between sentimental/complex pastoral), numerous modifying labels such as antipastoral, post-pastoral, meta-pastoral, or postmodern pastoral, discussions of pastoral politics, or debates over the future of the pastoral (see Marx, “Pastoralism”; Buell, “American Pastoral Ideology”; Gifford 55–61). Still, there appears to be somewhat of an omission from a literary critical perspective with respect to the link between the pastoral and the visual. Although critics often stress a general “perspectivism” in their interpretations of the pastoral, readings that focus on vision in a more literal sense let alone major studies of the correlation between the pastoral and the visual are hard to find. A recent exception is Finseth, who (briefly) remarks on “the highly visual nature of pastoral experience and pastoral literary strategy” and regards the visual as ensuring the possibility of transcendence in pastoral frames (219).
2. Most commentators and critics have stressed irony and humor as particular qualities of “Idyll 11” (cf. Fantuzzi/Hunter 170–190); others read the figure of Polyphemus on a more pitiful note.
3. Historically, the “loss of identity” of the pastoral in the sense of its traditional poetic forms has been located in the eighteenth century. Marx suggests that American romanticism subsequently “released pastoral motives from their bondage to the shepherd convention” and thus triggered the

- “veritable explosion of those same motives” in the first half of the nineteenth century (“Pastoralism” 52). See for a concise overview of the pastoral in a U.S. American context Garrard 48–56; major studies of the American pastoral include those by Marx (*Machine*) and Buell (*Environmental Imagination*).
4. See on plantation pastoral Outka 85–87; Finseth 210–228. For an important reading of Southern pastoral in plantation paintings of the antebellum and postwar period, cf. Vlach.
 5. Americanists have tended to employ exceedingly broad definitions to describe the conceptions, challenges, and contradictions of the pastoral in a U.S. context. Here, the pastoral is most often used to loosely “refer to any kind of rural content, rather than to a particular generic tradition, because this hybridization [e.g. Theocritan, Virgilian, Biblical etc.] is so completely naturalized in American literature” (M. Lewis 430). In this sense, the pastoral became one of the United States’ national fantasies.
 6. While there has been an enormous scholarly engagement with the visual and “the ubiquity of vision as the master sense of the modern era” (Jay, “Scopic Regimes” 3) over the past decades by prominent theorists and critics such as W.J.T. Mitchell, Martin Jay, or Nicholas Mirzoeff, I find that Crary’s influential *Techniques of the Observer* (1990) provides a particularly productive context for thinking about the antebellum period. Envisioned as a pre-history of Guy Debord’s spectacle, Crary’s study claims “the emergence of models of subjective vision in a wide range of disciplines during the period 1810–1840” and has triggered a variety of responses in the past decades (Crary, “Incapacities” 60). These include e.g. Etter’s study (2002), or Cale/Di Bello’s compilation (2010), an important corrective to Crary’s broader sweeps. Other recent studies of nineteenth-century U.S. visual culture are those by Folsom; Burrows; for treatments of the antebellum period and abolitionism with a focus on visual culture, see Finseth; Rogers; Wallace/Smith.
 7. In one of his speeches, Douglass praises Daguerre as the “great discoverer of modern times” (“Lecture on Pictures,” unpaginated; Frederick Douglass Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.), who inaugurated a more egalitarian form of representation deemed by Douglass morally even more important for a country than “the making of its laws” (“Pictures and Progress” 457). See on Douglass’s relation to the daguerreotype Faisst; Wells.
 8. Several scholars have read the fugitive slave narrative as “witness literature,” see Gates esp. 3–9; Foster; McBride. Lockard provides a more general critique of an antebellum cultural practice of “*watching slavery* instead of *witnessing slavery*” (xxiv, emphasis in original).

9. While somewhat inspired in coinage by Martin Jay's term "scopic regimes," my use of the term "visual regime" is primarily based on Foucauldian notions of vision and power. I use the term broadly to mean those socially produced (and most often tacitly agreed upon) sets of rules and norms which govern the ways in which humans visually perceive, approximate and assess the human and the non-human world. In this sense, visual regimes have to be understood as intricately intertwined with visually inscribed forms of power, such as, for instance, panopticism or disciplinary power, and need to be traced not only on the "macro-level" of discursive formations and practices, but also on the "micro-level" of singled out visual acts that always bear the potential of resistance.
10. Among those who note this dimension are Axelrod/Axelrod; DeLombard; and Nielsen. On the plantation as a space of surveillance, see Harkin; on surveillance techniques in the antebellum period more generally, see Parenti esp. 13–32; and Peterson 7–9. An important recent reading of the involvement of the visual in the workings of the peculiar institution is that by Johnson, who identifies modes of "visual mastery" (168, cf. 166–168, 221–227).
11. Even if rarely in such explicit and vivid form as in Douglass's case, we find a host of depictions of quasi-panoptic surveillance in fugitive slave narratives from the 1830s on. Such depictions, e.g. in narratives by Roper, Green, W. W. Brown, Bibb, or Jacobs, most often refer to a rigid supervision of slaves' work spaces, for instance, in the field or (esp. in Jacobs's case) in households. Moreover, there are portrayals of more or less strictly regulated spaces beyond the confines of the work-place (more extensively described in Chap. 2), which are often shown as visually controlled by the haunting presence of slave patrols.
12. One of the long-standing debates in African American studies concerns the question of the status of fugitive slave narratives as, on the one hand, historical sources and, on the other, literature/autobiography. For discussions cf. the contributions in Sekora/Turner; and Davis/Gates; more recently Kachun; Smith 9–12.
13. A (still) useful overview of antebellum polygenist racial science is Stanton's *The Leopard's Spots* (1960). For a corrective of Stanton's somewhat sterile historical account see Frederickson, esp. 71–96; for more recent accounts cf. Gould 62–104; Simon-Aaron 223–264; Jackson/Weidman 45–54. An insightful reading of the work of Louis Agassiz is given by Rogers, who focuses on a series of photographs of enslaved individuals taken in the 1850s; a classical study of phrenology is that by Davies.
14. According to Cary, the new kind of observer produced in the first half of the nineteenth century meant the emergence of "a new set of relations between the body on one hand and forms of institutional and discursive power on the

other,” which “redefined the status of an observing subject” (Crary, *Observer* 3). One should note here that Crary primarily makes his claims of a “passage from the geometrical optics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to physiological optics, which dominated both scientific and philosophical discussions of vision in the nineteenth century” in a European context (16). Nonetheless, his thesis of a general shift in Western ideas concerning vision seems equally productive for reflecting on an antebellum U.S. that was influenced no less than European cultures by the “photographic camera” and its new modes of perception and documentation (66).

15. In this sense, the process of becoming an acknowledged observing subject through an autobiographical act in the slave narrative was typically marked by first becoming an object of the racialized visual regime described above, in which the “black” was primarily the “observed.” Only by first being exposed as the most visible symbols of the abolitionist cause to the eyes of a Northern public was it possible for the formerly enslaved to move into the position of a documenting eyewitness. Douglass, for instance, retrospectively describes the first stage of this process in *My Bondage*, when he recalls how he “was generally introduced as a ‘*chattel*’—a ‘*thing*’—a piece of southern ‘*property*’—the chairman assuring the audience that *it* could speak” (360, emphasis in original). On the black body as a spectacle on abolitionist circuits, see Cutter.
16. Many scholars have stressed the mediatedness and the “various degrees of editorial distortion” that mark the over 6000 texts that make up the genre (Ring 119). Not only was a considerable number of narratives written down by (usually white) amanuenses such as, for instance, Isaac T. Hopper, who published what formerly enslaved individuals told him in a continuous column in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* under the heading “Tales of Oppression.” Moreover, the enslaved’s voices as such were typically enclosed by writings of white abolitionists that testified to the narrator’s accuracy and their character. See Ernest, “African American Literature”; Andrews.
17. Although my focus at this point lies predominantly on the slave narrative, it should be noted that the “entry of the formerly enslaved observer” was a much broader cultural phenomenon that played out throughout various forms of antebellum African American cultural production. One important example apart from the narratives I discuss are the moving panoramas (e.g. Henry Box Brown’s), which became particularly popular throughout the 1840s and 1850s, see Moody 149–150; Ruggles 69–109.
18. The celebration of the liberating potential of cities has for a long time been noted in African American studies, and ecocritics have often incorporated such claims into their readings, see e.g. Bennett 204; Myers 152, 155. On the city in African American literature and culture, cf. Hakutani/Butler; also Scruggs, who focuses on film.

19. An instance from another well-known narrative that parallels this scene's equation of life in the woods with threat and disaster rather than Romantic renewal and refuge can be found in Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). Although, in this text, the threat of leading a life in a cabin corresponds not with being left to die a lonely death, but with the potential rape of a female enslaved, Dr. Flint's proposal of building "a small house for me [Linda Brent], in a secluded place" similarly suggests that the non-human natural world often could not be framed in celebratory pastoral but only in horrifying terms (45).
20. By "hyper-separation," Plumwood means such separating and subordinating dualisms characteristic of Western culture that "create a sharp, ontological break or radical discontinuity" between "nature" and "reason" (101). She applies her concept in the context of particular groups such as women and colonized others, where one of the functions of hyper-separation was "to mark out the Other for separate and inferior treatment. Separate 'natures' explain, justify and naturalise widely different privileges and fates between men and women, coloniser and colonised, justify assigning the Other inferior access to cultural goods, and block identification, sympathy, and tendencies to question inequalities" (102).
21. In her discussion, M. Lewis primarily focuses on early twentieth century authors such as Hopkins, Chesnutt, Du Bois, Larsen, or Fauset. Although her article is brief and her readings somewhat cursory, the idea of the "meta-pastoral" was in some ways inspiring for my reading of an African American pastoral tradition. Lewis' suggestion, for instance, that black authors "adopted and adapted the genre of classical pastoral as a language uniquely suited to discussions of American social space," is conceptually related to my tracing of the concrete ways in which African American writers began to develop a tradition of adapting, transforming, and signifying on the pastoral in conjunction with the visual (431).

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Negotiating (through) the Skin: The Black Body, Pamphleteering, and African American Writing against Biological Exclusion

The journey of the term and concept of race into the nineteenth-century U.S. is in many ways the history of its increasing biologization. While, etymologically, “race” can be traced back to an aristocratic context, a notion of race that linked the “racial” with a discourse of the “natural/biological” took root at least as early as the European Enlightenment.¹ It travelled across the Atlantic as swiftly as the vessels of the colonial slave-trade it helped justify, and became engrained in the practices of a young United States, where a biologized concept of race was rooted in “nature” rather than aristocratic birth. What came to the fore on the other side of the Atlantic was not only what historian Robert Young describes as a by then well-established “cultural pecking order, with those who had most civilization at the top, and those who were considered to have none [...] at the bottom” (94), but also a set of increasingly elaborate strategies of “biological” justification for this “order.” Out of the broader “entry of life into history” in modernity that Michel Foucault, in *The Will to Knowledge* (1976), explains as an emergence of “biopower” (cf. 133–159), race came to mark a foundational paradox of the young United States as the “naturally” justified downside of the principle that “all men are created equal.”

Nowhere, perhaps, is this paradox more clearly recognizable than in Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785). Although the co-author of the “Declaration of Independence,” representing the revolutionary ideology of his era’s intellectual elite, generally condemns slavery

in the spirit of freedom, the 23 “Queries” of *Notes* are at the same time a manifestation of a discriminatory biologization of race around Jefferson’s notion of blackness. The tract, to use Frantz Fanon’s term, “epidermalizes” race (11), reading skin color as the single most important marker of physical racial difference and deducing supposedly correlating mental differences along categories such as “memory, reason, and imagination” (Jefferson 149). On the one hand, Jefferson observes “the real distinctions which nature has made” in skin color, arguing that “[w]hether the black of the negro resides in the reticular membrane between the skin and the scarf-skin [i.e. epidermis], or in the scarf-skin itself; whether it proceeds from the color of the blood, or the color of the bile [...], the difference is fixed in nature, and is as real as if its seat and cause were better known to us” (147).² On the other hand, he claims that by “[c]omparing them [Africans and Americans of African descent] by their faculties [...] it appears to me that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid; and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous” (149).

Thus, *Notes* not only encapsulates a foundational paradox of the United States, but also acts stylistically and thematically as a precursor of nineteenth-century racial thought in at least three ways. First, as it articulates and sets up, often in a hypothesizing tone (“appears”; “scarcely” (149)), the paradigms of body and “racial character” along which a biologizing racial science came to develop. Second, by participating in a general rhetoric of othering through its constant use of “they/them” with respect to Americans of African descent. And, third, as it employs quasi-scientific language—one scholar refers to Jefferson as a “natural cum social scientist” (Jarrett 33)—to the end of claiming that blacks are “inferior to whites in the endowments of both body and mind” (Jefferson 153). In such ways, Jefferson’s reading of blackness as absence and abnormality, as supposedly doomed by natural, scientifically verifiable deficiencies, prefigures the characteristics of racial discourses of the nineteenth century (and beyond). *Notes* plays a signal role in what Young traces as a gradual shift from an “enlightenment universalism” and its “doctrine of human equality” to a mid-nineteenth century “darker aphorism: ‘different—and also different, unequal’” (92); the tract is part of a fabric that biologized race around notions of “blackness,” and that undoubtedly reached their climax, for the time being, during the antebellum period. Here, in the

context of heightening sectional tensions and heated debate over slavery, it was not merely proslavery arguments but a wide variety of discourses including, for instance, craniometry, phrenology, or physiognomy that produced the “biological truths” of a broad racialization based on a supposedly essential, naturally given distinctiveness of the black body.

In what follows, I examine how this violently constructed distinctiveness of the black body affected the discursive position of the antebellum black writer, to demonstrate how African American strategies of writing against this “biological exclusion” could express environmental knowledge. To this end, Chap. 4 shifts the focus both in terms of tracing environmental knowledge through a (Foucauldian) biopolitical lens, and in terms of corpus, as I turn to antebellum (political) pamphlets, a type of texts that is generally underrepresented in comparison with the fugitive slave narrative. By moving away from the slave narrative, I do not mean to imply that the genre does not employ the rhetorical strategies and forms of environmental knowledge that are described in this chapter with respect to African American pamphlets. Nonetheless, the strategies I trace are more dominant in the latter. Pamphlets of the period are particularly striking examples of writing against a biological exclusion of the black body in ways that express an environmental knowledge that—even though they are explicitly political texts—goes beyond political rhetoric or a merely metaphorical use of nature. My readings aim to identify three particular strategies that involve an articulation of environmental knowledge: pamphleteers’ use of notions of “birth” and “blood” that stresses intimate connections to the land and its cultivation, their manner of “dissecting and environmentalizing” the black body that roots their egalitarianism in non-human nature, and their attempts at re-interpreting the master-signifier “nature” as such. To illustrate these strategies, I have included both well-known pamphlets by James Forten, David Walker, or David Ruggles, but also texts that are obscure even among well-informed readers, like those by Hosea Easton, John Lewis, or William Whipper, which were selected to draw attention to alternative lines within the tradition and to suggest their relevance for ecocriticism. Obviously, much more remains to be done in this respect and additional examples (also regarding the three strategies I describe) could have been chosen (e.g. pamphlets by figures like Henry Highland Garnet, Maria W. Stewart, or Frederick Douglass). Nonetheless, my choice of a range of diverse texts for this chapter serves well both the general aim of this study to broadly trace facets of foundational African American environmental knowledge, and

my purpose to provide another useful starting point that highlights the relevance of this part of the African American tradition for ecocritical readings.

THE BLACK BODY: BIOLOGICAL EXCLUSION AND ENVIRONMENTAL STATE OF EXCEPTION

At the heart of an antebellum biologization of race lay a set of including and excluding processes that constituted the epistemic basis of a variety of discourses, and that crucially shaped the discursive position from which African Americans formed and articulated environmental knowledge. A good starting point for outlining the racializing fabric of such processes is an 1841 lithograph by Edward Williams Clay, a Northern apologist of slavery.³ Clay's depiction is, in many ways, typical of antebellum plantation pastoral. It characteristically emphasizes fundamental racial as supposedly "natural" differences between humans; differences that resolve, however, into a seemingly idyllic, harmonious, and mutually beneficent order. To the right, a white family discernible in attire and posture as Southern aristocracy express their "benevolent" attitude, stating, according to an inscription above, that "nothing shall be spared to increase the comfort and happiness" of the "poor creatures" portrayed in the left-hand corner. These "poor creatures," on the other hand, appear to complement this attitude, as the text above the ensemble suggests: "God bless you massa! you feed and clothe us. When we are sick you nurse us, and when too old to work, you provide for us!" Black slaves are depicted as part of a supposedly benign social contract of the peculiar institution. They are the recipients of a colonial benevolence, whether as grateful, passive and docile elements in the left-hand corner, or as child-like, merrily dancing figures, apparently joyful and full of contentment, in the background.

The lithograph is, however, more than an instance of plantation pastoral, as it captures a particular positioning of the black body marked by processes of inclusion, exclusion and exception. The latter term, which has gained prominence especially in connection with Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer*-project and its concept of a "state of exception," denotes the paradoxical principle at the heart of a simultaneously excluding and including process. In a state of exception, an exclusion takes place that, at the same time and *thereby*, produces its own inclusion. Thus, the character of a "state of exception" is, according to Agamben, the creation of "a zone of indistinction between outside and inside, chaos and the normal situation" (19).

This paradoxical figure of the exception as an “including exclusion”—*not* Agamben’s specific argument as a whole⁴—is productive for rethinking a biologizing antebellum racial politics as the context in which African American environmental knowledge emerged. Clay’s lithograph is, in this respect, the symbolic expression of a fundamental constellation that involved processes of an inclusion, exclusion and exception of the black body. Consider the interplay between the black figures on the left, the white figures on the right, and the hound at the center of the ensemble: on a basic level, the latter simply represents biological non-human life in the non-human animal itself. Reading the constellation as a whole, however, the biologically racializing dimension of the ensemble becomes perceivable, to begin with, regarding the coloring of the hound and its touchability in relation to the portrayed members of the white aristocracy. The coloring itself marks the animal as positioned closer to the “superior” race, the white hound symbolizing a domesticated and “civilized” animality of white humanity. Moreover, the girl’s touch of the animal’s snout, the possibility of tactile contact with this symbol of a domesticated “whitened” animality, further emphasizes the inclusion of this animality into a pastoral harmony, a pastoral framework of the “white human.”

The black figures, by contrast, are biologically excluded through the lithograph’s symbolism in two ways. First, the image spatially and visually severs them from any kind of connection with the “whitened” non-human animality represented in the hound; the enslaved are located exclusively amongst themselves, on the left-hand side or in the background. Secondly, the black characters are racialized and excluded through a distorting portrayal of their physiognomy; their facial features and bodily postures echo a variety of biologically excluding stereotypes that became more dominant from the 1830s on. Such stereotypes manifested in a variety of discourses that simultaneously articulated racial and environmental knowledge and that ranged from the works of the “American School” to the pamphlets published by proslavery conventions or the “manuals” on the “proper” treatment of slaves that were part of antebellum Southern culture. While the racial scientists themselves, coming from various disciplines, made their claims through the authorizing veil of scientific objectivity, their ideas were often openly politicized across popular antebellum discourses, which worked more explicitly and graphically towards producing the biological exclusion of the black body visible in Clay’s lithograph.

A typical example of how the assumptions of racist pseudo-scientific knowledge came to permeate antebellum discourse is Richard Colfax’s

“Evidence against the views of the Abolitionists” (1833), a short text that aimed to demonstrate “to the public, that the physical and mental differences between negroes and white men, are sufficient to warrant us in affirming that they have descended from distinct origins” (8). To this end, Colfax “objectively” compared nerves and brains of both humans and animals to arrive at the biologically deduced racist belief that within “the great zoological chain,” “the negroes, whether physically or morally considered, are so inferior as to resemble the brute creation as nearly as they do the white species” (26, 30). Other proslavery arguments presented additional strategies for conflating enslaved body and black body into a single biologically excluded entity. Apart from producing stereotypes of a black “animality” or “beastliness,” which would have a longstanding and horrific legacy, some sought justification for slavery through the notion that “negro slaves alone are constitutionally adapted to labor in those climates where the great staples of cotton, rice and sugar can be produced” (Shannon 8). Others, such as the Georgian Robert Collins in his “Essay on the Treatment and Management of Slaves,” deployed the myth that “[n]egroes are by nature tyrannical in their dispositions [...] so that it becomes a prominent duty of owners and overseers, to keep peace, and prevent quarrelling and disputes among them” (11). The best result, according to such arguments, would be effected through strict discipline (cf. 12–14), and “[a]s long as owners are governed by their own interest,” since only then would “the slaves have good security for a comfortable support” (15).⁵

In such ways, processes of inclusion, exclusion, and exception that were part of antebellum biologizations of race came to mark not merely the enslaved black body, but the black body as such, and produced a discursive position that is significant in the context of African American environmental knowledge. This position was not only characterized by what Orlando Patterson, in his 1982 *Slavery and Social Death*, has called the “slave’s natal alienation,” i.e. “the slave’s forced alienation, the loss of ties of birth in both ascending and descending generations” (5, 7), but also involved, especially in an antebellum U.S. context, the “biological” marking of the black body. Not just the “natal alienation and genealogical isolation” of an enslaved body (338), but, I want to propose, a *biological exclusion* and an *environmental state of exception* of the black body produced the characteristic position from which African Americans raised voice during the age of American racial slavery. If an *exclusion* took place on the level of the *biological*, then the *inclusionary* side of this process becomes visible on the

level of the *environmental*. Through (pseudo-)scientific or popular discourses, but also through aesthetic modes such as the pastoral or the sublime, the black body was simultaneously biologically excluded and included, *re*-placed, and thus exceptionalized. In Clay's lithograph, for example, the pastoral, as an aesthetic mode that expresses a dominant environmental knowledge, becomes complicit in this positioning of the black body as it *environmentally* includes what the imagery as a whole *biologically* excludes. The contact between the white child and a "whitened" non-human nature in the hound marks a white privilege at the expense of the racializing biological exclusion of the black body, while this same exclusion is included via a representational mode, in this case the pastoral, that expresses a dominant racialized environmental knowledge.

Tracing fundamental links between racial and environmental knowledge in terms of processes of inclusion, exclusion, and exception complements and expands existing scholarly concepts that are central to reading African American literature and culture ecocritically, for instance those by Outka, Myers, or, more recently, Lindgren Johnson. Outka's important observation, for example, that "the conflation of blackness and nature served as the principle 'justification' for chattel slavery in antebellum America" (25), no doubt captures facets of what I have described here in terms of the "biological exclusion" of the black body. It could be expanded, however, through the notion of an "environmental state of exception," to see more accurately how African American environmental knowledge emerged apart from Outka's proposed divide between a (white) sublime as opposed to a (black) trauma response to non-human nature.⁶ Myers's analogy between racism and (white) environmental estrangement, on the other hand, his idea that "Euroamerican racism and alienation from nature derive from the same source and result in the joint and interlocking domination of people of color and the natural world" (15), can also be reconsidered through identifying processes of biological exclusion and environmental exception. Largely falling short in my view of recognizing the complexities involved in the production of racialized environmental knowledge, Myers's perspective ignores, speaking in the symbolism of the discussed lithograph, the ambivalence of the processes symbolized by the pastoralizing touch of the hound, which, in fact, produces the racist exclusion of the black figures through a Euro-American pastoral *identification* with nature rather than alienation from it. By contrast, fundamentally rethinking the dynamics of a racializing environmental knowledge in terms of processes of inclusion, exclusion, and exception, provides a basis for

tracing how African American environmental knowledge developed precisely out of this paradox-ridden constellation, i.e. in response to the black body's entanglements in a *biological* state of exclusion and an *environmental* state of exception. It helps identifying processes and developments in African American writing that potentially led to those moments Lindgren Johnson has recently described with the term "fugitive humanism," where "*moving into the human* is potentially simultaneous with a new way of *being human*" (17, emphasis in original).

THE ANTEBELLUM BLACK WRITER: AGITATING AGAINST BIOLOGICAL EXCLUSION

The biological exclusion and environmental state of exception of the black body marked the discursive position of the black writer, especially with respect to expressing environmental knowledge. To begin, the biologizing racialization of the black body fundamentally shaped the relation between the black writer's claims to humanity—to being a "human animal"—and writing as such. The black written word in itself came to function, after all, as an inevitable marker, a "proof," of humanity, since the central challenge from the very beginnings of the African American (written) literary tradition was, in a sense, that of refuting Jefferson's assessment that "[a]mong the blacks is misery enough, God knows, but no poetry" (150). Accordingly, as numerous scholars have pointed out, "the production of literature was taken to be the central arena in which persons of African descent could [...] establish and redefine their status within the human community" (Gates 129). African American letters were in this respect, from the start, and in and of themselves, political acts of resistance.

At the same time, the status of the black written word was characterized by its universalization along the biologically racialized black body. One of the central problems antebellum African American writers, whether free-born or formerly enslaved, had to come to terms with was their general perception as "a monolithic group, all slave-classed" (Blockett 116).⁷ Being a black writer inevitably meant writing not only *for* but to a certain extent *as* enslaved; it meant consciously agitating from a position of the racialized black body and articulating environmental knowledge out of a discursive position shaped by biological exclusion and environmental exception. Fugitive slave narratives responded in a variety of ways to this position, as my readings of the previous two chapters have shown. Even though the slave narrative displays a general impulse towards

hyper-separation as part of its strategies of “humanization” that sought to sever the devastating ties with the non-human under slavery, many texts also engaged in signifying revisions of established Euro-American forms of environmental knowledge or found alternative means for articulating environmental knowledge. This could happen, for instance, by creating and using a subversive literary space such as the Underground Railroad that enabled an expression of alliances and identifications with the non-human material world (Chap. 2), through a double-voiced pastoralism (Chap. 3), or via a self-reflexive employment of the sublime (Chap. 1).

For another group of antebellum African American writers, free blacks, the discursive position from which they raised their voice (not the general situation) was in some ways similar. They, too, had to find adequate responses to the delineated position of the black writer that was bound to a biologically othered black body. Therefore, the same constellation of the biologically excluded and environmentally exceptionalized black body must also be taken into account when considering the production of environmental knowledge in the political and literary discourses of free black communities, in particular in the body of texts this chapter turns to, African American pamphlets.

While scholars have traditionally paid great attention to the antebellum period as “the golden age of the slave narrative,” black pamphleteering, with the exception of David Walker’s “Appeal,” has generally remained somewhat underrepresented (Foster 61). Although recently complemented by important online resources,⁸ there exist so far only a handful of printed collections, namely those by Porter (1969), Newman et al. (2001), and Thompson (2004), focusing exclusively on such texts,⁹ which may broadly be defined as

something between a broadside and a book. Adaptable as an argumentative essay, a short narrative of events, or a bare-bones sketch of an organization’s proceedings, the pamphlet could be used by all manner of activists. At the same time the pamphlet offered a media form that promised to preserve words and deeds in a discrete, individual, and long-lived object. (Newman et al. 2)

It was especially this versatility of the medium and the longevity of the written word, along with the relative freedom pamphleteering offered in terms of the writer/publisher’s control over the production and distribution process, which made this way of raising voice so appealing to free black organizations and individuals from the 1790s on. Apart from its

general significance as a shaping force of antebellum culture, this set of texts is also of interest for readings of African American literature from an ecocritical perspective because black pamphleteering developed into intertextual webs marked by an impressive thematic diversity and “polyvocality” (Moody 139). Pamphlets became another primal place where African American writers devised forms of environmental knowledge; embedded within their more explicit concerns such as abolitionism, emancipation, education, women’s rights or (anti-)colonizationism, pamphleteers also addressed fundamental questions of the human in its non-human non-discursive material conditions.

In their struggle with the discursive position of a biologically excluded and environmentally exceptionalized black body, the component predominantly focused on in African American pamphlet literature of the antebellum period was the question and problem of biological exclusion. The idea of a biologically othered black body was, explicitly and implicitly, attacked by black pamphleteers, who were, if in different ways, by no means less affected by the ubiquitous racialization of the black body than those writers who had fled Southern enslavement. After all, as one of the most astute observers of antebellum culture, Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville, noted as early as 1835, “race prejudice seems stronger in those states that have abolished slavery than in those where it still exists” (402). Often painfully recognizing the truth of these words in their daily lives and realizing at the same time to be living in the “golden age of Literature” (Whipper, “Address 1828” 107), pamphleteers effectively launched their voices from the fast-developing African American communities in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York City. They employed the new opportunities of a transforming mass media in order to turn oral discourse into a more widely and increasingly nationally received written protest¹⁰ that, among other things, aimed to “negotiate (through) the skin” of a biologically excluded black body. Black pamphleteers sought to “see through” the skin, so to speak, and produced environmental knowledge that was meant to “re-position” the human body in order to lay bare a common humanity around and beneath the color of the skin. In this, they employed, I want to suggest, three particular strategies of producing environmental knowledge against biological exclusion. Firstly, pamphleteers articulated their claims through the notions of “birth and blood”; secondly, they “dissected and environmentalized” the black body; and, thirdly, they wrote strategically through the discourse of “nature.”

BIRTH AND BLOOD

“Birth” and “blood” are among the earliest and longest-standing themes in black pamphleteering. From the beginnings of the tradition, African American pamphleteers recognized both ideas as central to conceptualizing and articulating their humanity and their rights as citizens, and connected their claims of “birth” and “blood” with the founding documents of the United States. To pamphlet pioneers such as Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, Daniel Coker, Prince Saunders, or James Forten, revolutionary rhetoric offered a basic ideological framework, and it was their resourceful employment of this framework that in many ways laid the conceptual basis for antebellum African American pamphleteering and the abolitionism of the 1830s.¹¹

For black pamphleteers of the early nineteenth century, a period that was shaped by historical events such as the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), the Denmark Vesey insurrection (1822) or the Great Awakening in the 1820s, the ideology of the American Revolution of which many had first-hand recollections represented both a great paradox and the foundation of their ideas on the meanings of “birth.” On the one hand, there was the undeniable contradiction of slaveholding founding fathers and the fact that a revolution that had also been the largest slave uprising in American history paradoxically established a system that justified racial slavery. In this sense, fighting a war for independence had eventually brought even more dependence for many Americans of African descent. On the other hand, the “self-evident” principles articulated through the American Revolution, namely that “all men are created free and equal” or, as the constitution of Massachusetts had it, “*born* free and equal,” made the founding documents an appealing vantage point for making claims against the advancing biological exclusion of the black body that manifested itself as the downside of American Freedom. The “Declaration of Independence” in particular provided early black pamphleteers with a powerful “mirror” to hold up to white Americans in order to show them that their conduct was, as James Forten put it in his “Letters from a Man of Color” (1813), “in direct violation of the letter and spirit of [the] Constitution” (67).

Although often deferential in tone and moderate in their claims, early black pamphleteers thus met the challenge of their times as they criticized the double standards of American democracy. Most often out of a black church that began to act, in W.E.B. Du Bois’s words, as the “great engine

of moral uplift” (208), pamphleteers forged a rhetoric that centrally employed the notion of “birth” in order to make their more concrete political claims, for instance for racial equality, voting rights or uplift. A rhetoric of “birth” became particularly prominent in the wake of the American Colonization Society (ACS) in 1816 and its object of removing free blacks from American soil. James Forten, for example, joined by prominent Philadelphian churchmen Richard Allen and Absalom Jones articulated an elaborate “nativizing” connection between birth environment and national belonging in 1817. In a pamphlet that published the minutes of a protest meeting against colonization held at Philadelphia’s Bethel Church in January of that year, the participants, under Forten’s leadership, ascertained that, since

our ancestors (not of choice) were the first successful cultivators of the wilds of America, we, their descendants, feel ourselves entitled to participate in the blessings of her luxuriant soil, which their blood and sweat enriched; and that any measure or system of measures, having a tendency to banish us from her bosom, would not only be cruel, but in direct violation of those principles which have been the boast of this republic. (qtd. Billington 8–9)

Thus resolving, in opposition to the schemes of the ACS, that “we will never separate ourselves from the slave population of this country” (9), the pamphleteers make their political claims by articulating an environmental knowledge that centrally involves the notion of birth. They justify their rights to “the blessings of her luxuriant soil” with both the idea that their “blood and sweat” have enriched this soil, and with the argument that they were the “first successful cultivators of the wilds” (8). Not the mere fact of being born in the New World, but the notion of transforming and being transformed by a particular non-human environment (“wilds”) becomes their means of countering the colonization scheme of the ACS. In this sense, early forms of African American pamphleteering hint at an environmental knowledge gained early on that shows a remarkable resemblance to the American myth of an individual’s transformation through New World soil and that foreshadows what would become articulated much later in Frederick Jackson Turner’s “Frontier Thesis.”

The idea of birth as meaningful precisely because of its occurrence under particular environmental circumstances, and as guaranteeing human rights and American citizenship, ran into and through African American pamphleteering discourse of the antebellum period,¹² where it increasingly

intersected with a rhetoric of blood. While “birth” had primarily attained a uniting function, as it enabled meeting racial exclusion through claims of a common humanity and nationality that emerged from being bound to a common native environment, “blood” had a much more ambivalent rhetorical potential. To recognize this potential, one must only think of the multiple ways in which blood could be “spilled.” It made all the difference whether one claimed, like the Rev. Jeremiah Asher of the Shiloh Baptist Church and others, to have “bled and died for liberty” in a nationally unifying War of Independence or the War of 1812 (18), or whether blood was, as some separatist voices threatened, to be spilled in slave insurrections or all-out race war.

Accordingly, “blood” attained a variety of meanings for antebellum pamphleteers that may best be grasped along the general lines of a “separating” and a “unifying” function. The latter was, as Paul Goodman has demonstrated in *Of One Blood* (1998), an integral part of the interracial collaborative efforts of the 1830s and 1840s, since reaching their overall goal of “contradict[ing] the assumptions upon which prejudice rested [...] require[d] white abolitionists and free blacks to show the prejudiced by concrete acts that all were in fact ‘of one blood’” (247). The former, divisive function of a rhetoric of blood, on the other hand, is particularly strong in early black nationalist works, such as Robert A. Young’s enraged “Ethiopian Manifesto” (1829) or the most influential piece of African American pamphlet literature of the antebellum period, David Walker’s “Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World” (1829).

Often recognized as a milestone, Walker’s pamphlet stands at the center of a cluster of texts, as it both embraces its predecessors and their themes and at the same time inaugurates a more radical tradition that would mark the coming decades. Apart from the stylistic and thematic innovations of Walker’s text, such as its militant voice, its re-evaluation of racial history, or its radical “ethiopianism,”¹³ the “Appeal” also transforms notions of birth and blood. While echoing in this respect a by then established argument against colonization (Walker cites Richard Allen (64) and Samuel Cornish (76)), the “Appeal” also employs a separatist notion of “blood” that aims to unite the “Colored Citizens” of the United States and ultimately, “of the World,” under one black nationalist banner. In Article IV, Walker thus claims that

America is more our country, than it is the whites—we have enriched it with our blood and tears. The greatest riches in all America have arisen from our

blood and tears:—and will they drive us from our property and homes, which we have earned with our blood? They must look sharp or this very thing will bring swift destruction upon them. The Americans have got so fat on our blood and groans, that they have almost forgotten the God of armies. (73)

In keeping with the general impetus of the “Appeal,” which continuously addresses its audience as “my brethren” and engages in the notion of a common lineage that is visible on the surface of the body in a common skin color, (black) blood becomes, for Walker, a divisive nationalizing factor. At this point, the text significantly departs from an earlier rhetoric. In the “Appeal,” it is no more a U.S. American environment out of which a rhetoric of being American-born and “American-blooded” emerges, but the traumatic spilling of “black blood” *into* that soil, which becomes the source of inalienable birthrights. Walker’s nationalism thus also signifies on an earlier African American environmental knowledge as it revises the notion of “environmentally induced” birthrights and shifts the source of such human rights from Forten, Allen and Jones’s “blood and *sweat*” of transforming a New World environment (qtd. Billington 8, emphasis mine), to the “blood and *tears*” of being *forced* to do so through slavery (Walker 73, emphasis mine).

The line of tradition that emerges at this point in Walker is thus, as Ian Finseth puts it in his discussion of the “Appeal” as a Black Nationalist manifesto, that of “an epidermalized Africanist ethos uniting the people he [Walker] collectively calls ‘my color,’ but detached from the actual geographical and cultural realities of Africa” (356–7). The racial pride furnished through a bond construed among blacks primarily plays on *imagining* the spilling of the soil with a distinct black blood, and it is due to this imaginative nature of his common-blood-ideology that Walker ultimately remains an “Americanist” who does not end up promoting colonization—an argumentative move that can be found in a variety of black nationalists.

Despite the significant impact of the “Appeal” across the nation and Walker’s influence on figures like Maria W. Stewart or Henry Highland Garnet, it is important to note the diversity that marks the pamphlet tradition with respect to engaging notions of birth and blood. A crucial example attesting to this diversity and to another strand of thought in the tradition is a pamphlet by Hosea Easton that was published in 1838, nine

years after Walker's tract had first made its appearance. In his lengthy "Treatise" Easton rhetorically employs "blood" in a way that illustrates the continuing presence and the development of pre-Walker ideas by pamphleteers of the 1830s. Easton clearly echoes and advances earlier claims respecting birth and blood, when he proposes:

The blood of the parents in seasoning of this climate becomes changed—also, the food for the mother being the production of this country, and congenial to the climate—the atmosphere she breathes—the surrounding objects which strike her senses—all are principles which establish and give character to the constitutional principles of the child, among which the blood is an essential constituent; hence every child born in America, even if it be black as jet, is American by birth and blood. (47–48)

Easton's text thus exemplifies a line of tradition in African American antebellum pamphleteering that significantly diverged from Walker's ideas and rhetoric, not only because it does not promote Black Nationalism, but especially also through its distinct employment of notions of birth and blood. In Easton's case, it is not distinct, inheritable and "separate" black bloodlines and the traumatic spilling of such blood that built the foundation of African American birthingrights. Instead, he makes a radical environmentalism the basis of his racial egalitarianism. His point is precisely that "[i]f blood has any thing to do with it [U.S. citizenship], then we are able to prove that there is *not* a drop of African blood, according to the general acceptance of the term, flowing in the veins of an American born child, though black as jet" (47, emphasis mine).

In this respect, Easton's pamphlet stands as an example of those antebellum voices that embraced yet also significantly refined the rhetoric of birth and blood of a pre-Walker period into a more radical environmentalism. Part of the antebellum tradition's rhetoric of birth and blood was based less on Walker and more on voices like Forten's, who had claimed as early as 1813 that human bodies, whether clothed in a black or a white skin, are "sustained by the same power, supported by the same food, hurt by the same wounds, wounded by the same wrongs, pleased with the same delights, and propagated by the same means" (Letters, qtd. from Billington 14). Thus, a number of diverse arguments around the themes of birth and blood often aimed to merge a national with a natal and environmental belonging. Frequently involving articulations of fundamental relations

between the human and its non-human non-discursive material conditions, these arguments are not just instances of writing against a biological exclusion of the black body, but simultaneously a form of African American environmental knowledge.

DISSECTING AND ENVIRONMENTALIZING THE BLACK BODY

Among the many influential strategies of Walker's "multifaceted literary act" is the way in which the "Appeal" attacked the idea that "nature" or "biology" provided a justification for the oppression and enslavement of African Americans (Newman, *Prophet* 14). In that well-known part of his argument that launched an explicit assault on Jefferson, for instance, Walker energetically sets the stage for refuting arguments for a biological inferiority of the black body. Against Jefferson's view that the enslavement of blacks in the New World was more benign than ancient Egyptian and Roman slavery due to the fact that the former was justified by "nature which has produced the [master/slave] distinction" (Jefferson, qtd. Walker 18), Walker suggests that no evidence can be found

that the Egyptians heaped the insupportable insult upon the children of Israel, by telling them that they were not of the human family. Can the whites deny this charge? Have they not, after having reduced us to the deplorable condition of slaves under their feet, held us up as descending originally from the tribes of Monkeys or Orang-Outangs [sic!]? (12)

Walker not only claims that American slavery is worse. Rather, his charge is aimed at a host of racist comparisons of African Americans with non-human animals. He rages against those who see blacks marked as "brutes" (8, 15, 19, 28, 35), "talking apes" (68, 69) or "Orang-Outangs" (12), and thereby sets the stage for a more aggressive pamphleteering rhetoric against the developing, biologically othering racialism of the antebellum period.

At this point, Walker's attack hints at a second major strategy of black pamphleteers' writing against biological exclusion. Beyond reclaiming their rights as humans and citizens through notions of birth and blood, pamphleteers also began writing against biological exclusion by producing an environmental knowledge that employed a strategy of conceptually, politically, and sometimes almost literally dissecting and environmentalizing the black body. At least from the 1830s on, such strategies that focused

more explicitly on the body as such became a necessity in the context of a burgeoning racial science and its increasingly hostile “findings.” For while the 1830s saw the emergence of a “relatively high and rising black literacy” (Horton and Horton 130) as well as the advent of Garrisonian abolitionism and the black convention movement, the period also witnessed the most elaborate “scientific” arguments for inherent black inferiority to date. Although precursors of American polygenism such as Charles Caldwell, a Philadelphian physician and pioneering phrenologist, had launched attacks on the “environmental” idea that climate alone had produced racial distinctions during the 1820s,¹⁴ it was work by Morton, Nott, Gliddon, and, later, Agassiz, that became instrumental in verifying essentialist racial views on the basis of supposedly different origins of human “types.” Where Jefferson, some decades ago, had hypothesized on the idea of black inferiority, the “American School” provided seemingly solid evidence and scientific truths which became popular in a climate where, as one of its proponents put it in 1850, “[r]ace [was] everything: literature, science, art—in a word, civilization” (Knox v).

Two antebellum pamphlets, by Hosea Easton (1837) and John Lewis (1852), are particularly revealing African American responses to this public climate as they form an environmental knowledge that “dissected and environmentalized” the black body. The relative lack of scholarly attention to both texts so far is particularly surprising with respect to the former, Easton’s “Treatise on the Intellectual Character and Civil and Political Conditions of the Colored People of the U. States,” a rich and more than 50-page tract the author wrote one year before his premature death.¹⁵ Published in 1837, the “Treatise,” although, as noted above, often referring back to earlier pamphleteering themes, cannot be properly understood without Walker as a context. The relation between the two pamphlets is ambivalent, as Easton’s text shares thematic and stylistic similarities with Walker, but also follows a diverging argumentative trajectory. On the one hand, Easton’s pamphlet echoes Walker’s radical statement both formally and content-wise. The “Treatise” employs the quadripartite structure of the “Appeal” (and by extension signifies on Jefferson), and shares an alternative long-term historicization of racial history and a general emphasis on the constructedness of racial difference. On the other hand, there are significant differences between Walker’s and Easton’s arguments that make the latter particularly valuable for tracing the production of environmental knowledge against the biological exclusion of the black body. Apart from differences in rhetoric, style, and intended audience, and

Easton's disengagement of the idea of imaginatively essentialized "black blood,"¹⁶ the "Treatise" provides a contrast to Walker's Black Nationalist argument and represents one of the most elaborate attempts at refuting biological exclusion through a radically de-racializing "environmentalism" of the antebellum period.

Easton's strategy involves two fundamental conceptual "dissections" of the biologically racialized black body: first, a separation of body from mind, and, second, a separation of enslaved body from black body. Moreover and above all, however, Easton's argument is rooted in a basic notion of "natural variety." Writing against the epidermalization of race, the "Treatise" primarily aims to show that skin color is an arbitrary racial marker, since "the variety of color, in the human species, is the result of the same laws which variegate the whole creation" (5). To support this claim, Easton repeatedly employs descriptions of non-human material environments, for instance, when he writes that

[w]e need only visit the potato and corn patch, (not a costly school,) and we shall be perfectly satisfied, for there, in the same hill, on one stalk, sprung from one potato, you may find several of different colors; and upon the same corn-stalk you may find two ears, one white or yellow, and the other deep red; and sometimes you may find an astonishing variety of colors displayed on one ear among the kernels; and what makes the observation more delightful, they are never found quarrelling about their color, though some have shades of extreme beauty. [...] If you go to the field of grass, you will find that all grass is the same grass in variety; go to the herds and flocks, and among the feathered tribe, or view nature where you will, she tells us all that we can know, why it is that one man's head bears woolly, and another flaxen hair. (6)

Easton draws an analogy between the physical variety found in non-human non-discursive materialities and the physical variety in human bodies, thus conveying, through a discourse of "nature," the idea of a general law of variety. This law, by extension, is linked to a celebration of the divine, as it was ultimately "God [who] gave nature the gift of producing variety, and that gift, like uncontrolled power every where [sic!], was desirous to act like itself" (5). Physical variety becomes for Easton primarily a reason for celebration, *not* for separating and categorizing, or hierarchizing and subduing specific forms of (human or non-human) materialities.

From this perspective, natural variety cannot be "understood," as it is eventually rooted in god. After all, "it is impossible for man to

comprehend nature or her works. She has been supplied with an ability by her author to do wonders, insomuch that some have been foolish enough to think her to be God. All must confess she possesses a mysterious power to produce variety” (5–6). Exterior, physical distinctions in humans, among which, Easton stresses, the color of the skin is merely one, are to be accepted and revered as expressions of a God-given law of variety in the way humans would accept and revere the “innumerable colors” of “the same species of flowers” (5). This implies that such distinctions cannot be grasped in (pseudo-)scientific terms that produce supposedly true—yet ultimately false, since inevitably arbitrary—assumptions based on bodily markers that lead to the biological, *man*-made exclusion of one part of a (human) species. Easton therefore undoes, from the start, one of the fundamental assumptions underlying the production of the racializing and biologically excluding knowledge of the antebellum period, namely the idea “that the observed biological traits and social behaviors of various human populations held the key for understanding how those natural processes worked” (Finseth 340). It is exactly not possible, says Easton, to grasp such “natural processes” purely epistemologically; a more egalitarian acceptance and celebration of creation, not the urge to thoroughly understand it, are central facets of Easton’s environmental knowledge.

The first of the two central “dissections” of the biologically racialized black body that Easton’s text performs on this general basis is the conceptual separation of *physical* variety among the human species from variety in the realm of *mental* differences, i.e. a general separation between body and mind. The latter, i.e. mental, “intellectual differences,” are seen as belonging to an entirely “new field of investigation”:

I call it a new or another field, because I cannot believe that [physical] nature has any thing [sic!] to do in variegating intellect, any more than it has power over the soul. Mind can act on matter, but matter cannot act upon mind; hence it fills an entirely different sphere; therefore, we must look for a cause of difference of intellect elsewhere, for it cannot be found in nature. (6)

Thus denying the immediate correlation between body and mind that was central to the racial sciences, which more or less directly deduced mental inferiority from (supposed) physical inferiority, Easton nonetheless regards the availability and the living out of the potential of the mind as depending on environmental factors. This point of his argument is essential. Although

he ascribes “whatever imperfections there are in the mind” to “its own sphere” (6), Easton admits that black slaves are marked by “intellectual and physical disability and inferiority” (21), due to differing circumstances that have stunted their mental growth and compromised the *living out* of their originally given potential. Easton’s is therefore a constructivist argument that proposes a radical “environmentalism” with regard to mental faculties since, on the outset, he sees “no truth more palpable than this, that the mind *is* capable of high cultivation; and that the degree of culture depends entirely on the means or agents employed to that end” (7, emphasis mine). Although physical varieties, which are only an expression of nature’s “mysterious power to produce variety,” are treated as separate from mental varieties, both depend in their development, Easton argues, on concretely encountered conditions (6).

Easton primarily illustrates his “environmentalism” with respect to body and mind along the question of slavery. Regarding the slave body, his argument turns to the example of slave mothering and focuses on environmental factors as producing tangible differences in the slave population’s progeny. After giving a description of “a mother that is a slave” (24), Easton goes on to argue that it is not

a matter of surprise that those mothers who are slaves, should, on witnessing the distended muscles on the face of whipped slaves, produce the same or similar distensions on the face of their offspring, by her own mind being affected by the sight; and so with all other deformities. Like causes produce like effects. (24–25)

Often explicitly setting his notions against the fast-developing racial sciences (cf. 21, 23, 24–25, 42), Easton does not deny but is “perfectly willing to admit the truth of these remarks [on a physical and mental inferiority], as they apply to the character of a slave population” (23). Yet, the “Treatise” at the same time exclusively attributes the causes of a physical and mental deformity that Easton observes in the enslaved to the circumstances under which the “slave mother” can only bring “into the world beings whose limbs and minds were lineally fashioned for the yoke and fetter” (23). Radically prioritizing nurture over nature, he goes even further when he reads the “soul-and-body destroying influence” of slavery as affecting the body and mind of its victims up to the point that an enslaved individual is eventually “metamorphosed into a machine, adapted to a specific operation, and propelled by the despotic power of the slave system” (24, 51).

Apart from this idea of multiple influences on the enslaved body through the physical and mental conditions under which it was held, and through direct inheritance, Easton sees anti-black prejudice as originating exclusively in the realm of the mind. That is, although generally claiming, like most of his pamphleteering contemporaries, that “the true cause of this prejudice is slavery” since prejudice was ostensibly drawn from observation of the bodies of the enslaved (38), Easton identifies prejudice itself as wholly constructed out of that cultural climate in which “race is everything” (Knox v). Evidence for this constructedness he finds in the undifferentiating nature of prejudice, for

if color were the cause of prejudice, it follows, that just according to the variegation of the cause, (color) so would the effect variegate—i.e. the clear blooded black would be subject to a greater degree of prejudice, in the proportion he was black—and those of lighter caste subject to a less degree of prejudice, as they were light. (37)

Since this is not the case, Easton concludes that “[c]olor, therefore, cannot be an efficient cause of the malignant prejudice of the whites against the blacks; it is only an imaginary cause at the most” (38). Anti-*black* prejudice as such is produced in the realm of the (public) mind, even if the body and mind of the *enslaved* have indeed become altered and deformed through circumstance and inheritance.

Hence, Easton’s writing against the biological exclusion of the black body operates not only through the conceptual separation of body from mind that shows the environmental dependencies of both and ultimately suggests the social constructedness of race and prejudice. Moreover, his argument also involves a second major separation between *black* body and *enslaved* body, which, after all, had been conflated into one entity through a biologizing racism. In this respect, Easton’s response to the racialisms of his day extends further than Walker’s. Although, as Blockett suggests, the language of the latter is “indicative of a larger, social tension between ‘scientific’ theories of race largely internalized by blacks and whites and his more subversive argument that the degradation of his race was socially constructed by enslavement” (121), Walker never “dissect” the black body “through the skin.” His Black Nationalism does not deconstruct race at its core. Easton, by contrast, moves precisely in this direction by radically environmentalizing black body and mind, as well as by literally proposing to

anatomize him [the black man], and the result of research is the same as analyzing or anatomizing a white man. Before the dissecting knife passes half through the outer layer of the skin, it meets with the same solids and fluids, and from thence all the way through the body. (49)

By dissecting and environmentalizing the black body both on a conceptual, and, here, on an imagined literal level to counter proslavery arguments, Easton wages war on the biological exclusion of the black body through a form of environmental knowledge. His argument demonstrates how such knowledge itself became involved in multi-layered strategies of resistance that included, in Easton's case, three primary elements: first, conceptually separating body from mind and black from enslaved body; secondly, thoroughly environmentalizing racial difference along these anatomized categories; and, thirdly, ultimately rooting his argument in an authoritative discourse of "nature" as the general source of a God-given variety in the human species that is to be celebrated. If thus, goes Easton's somewhat naïve conclusion, prejudice and slavery were to end, "nature" would reverse the atrocities committed on African Americans. On the one hand, the environmentally produced features of the enslaved body would gradually vanish, as "[t]heir foreheads [...] would begin to broaden. Their eye balls [...] would fall back under a thick foliage of curly eyebrows [...] [and] [t]hose muscles, which have hitherto been distended by grief and weeping, would become contracted to an acuteness, corresponding to that acuteness of perception with which business men are blessed" (53). On the other hand, Easton believes the same to be true for the realm of the mind, as "[t]hat interior region, the dwelling place of the soul, would be lighted up with the fires of love and gratitude to their benefactors on earth, and to their great Benefactor above" (53). Eventually, Easton's optimistic idea is that, in this way, "their whole man would be redeemed" (53).

Another pamphlet that demonstrates how "dissecting and environmentalizing" the black body was used as a strategy of writing against biological exclusion is John Lewis's "Essay on the Character and Condition of the African Race" (1852). Published as an addendum to the "Reminiscences" of the life of a founder of the "Second Freewill Baptist Church" in Providence, Rhode Island, Lewis's pamphlet is a typical example of pamphleteers' explicit challenges to the assumptions of antebellum racial science. While Lewis, like Easton a man of the church, grounds his argument in the first part of the "Essay" primarily in religious discourse, referring to

“the cardinal virtues and excellences of bible Christianity” as providing an “unquestionable” power by which to overcome “corrupt public opinions” (194; 192), he devotes the second chapter of his essay, entitled “Physical Condition of the African Race, as compared with the other Races of the Human Family,” to refuting the racial sciences through an environmental knowledge that dissects and environmentalizes the black body.

Lewis’s is essentially an argument for the biological similarities of all human bodies and, in this respect, stands in the legacy of Easton rather than Walker. The pamphlet attempts to (re-)unite what had been constructed, on the grounds of the biologisms of the “American School,” as distinct species, i.e. to ground humanity in a “shared biology” beyond, or literally “under” varying shades of skin color. At the heart of Lewis’s “biologically” arguing egalitarianism that explicitly talks back to (pseudo-)scientific claims lie two strategies: first, the demonstration of analogies among human bodies that negotiates through the skin, i.e. that reaches beyond the surface of the human body; secondly, the delineation of a resulting analogy with respect to diseases, as they may afflict both white and (often pathologized) black bodies.

With regard to the first strategy, note how Lewis virtually “zooms” into the human body and what he calls its “mechanical construction”:

The frame of bones skilfully put together is a master-piece of Infinite wisdom; this frame covered with muscles, forming a part of his existence, is supplied by a beautiful chemical process in himself, in operating the aliment carried into the stomach as the arrangement of the nerves throughout the whole system [...]; the blood vessels to convey the vital stream which contains animal life to all parts of the system [...]; all fitly and wisely arranged, and this whole system covered with a skin to guard it. (195)

The human body, thus imaginatively “radiographed,” reveals what Lewis conceives as the physical essence of humanity. By moving beneath the outer layers of the human body, claims of supposedly fixed racial distinctions that purported to rely on a verifiable, physical make-up of the body are exposed as groundless, since, Lewis goes on,

in viewing this wonderful material construction of the human body, where is there any difference but simply in the covering of the body, an effect that classes and distinguishes the human race nationally; but which cannot add or detract from the perfection of their physical construction. (195)

Distinctive features visible in external physical makeup are mere superficialities, the skin and its color are a mere “covering” and neither a racial essence in themselves nor hinting at a racially differentiable essence lying inside or beyond the body. Thus, Lewis’s rhetorical radiation of the body attacks “epidermalization” (Fanon) as such, since phenotype is unveiled as defining neither the human body physically nor the (worth of) “character” acted out through any particular body. As the “covering consists of three parts, viz: 1st, ‘The cuticle or scarf-skin; 2^d, the *retro mucoscum* and 3^d [sic!], the *cutis*,” and as, to Lewis’s knowledge, “[t]he 2^d lies between the 1st and 3^d [sic!], and contains the color,” the supposedly physically distinguishing factor between groups of humans is revealed as a false indicator by anatomizing the body. “Color” is exactly not residing in the significant—and significantly *analogically* built—substances of “the flesh, blood bones, or the muscles, of which the human body is composed” (195).

Explicitly quoting passages from the (pseudo-)sciences against which his text revolts,¹⁷ Lewis is, on the one hand, able to turn those sciences that proposed a racial essentialism directly against themselves. He explicitly confronts the disciplines involved, for instance when claiming that “the coloring is in the covering of the body, [that] it [therefore] cannot affect those laws peculiar to human beings, for the great principles of physical law, supported by Anatomy, Physiology, and Phrenology, are alike in all human beings,” and ultimately proposes that it was “God, [who] has wisely arranged all this” (195). Thus, he claims, echoing a prominent idea of divine vengeance that had been present in African American letters since Phyllis Wheatley, that “an attack on his [God’s] Infinite prerogative [...] will fix a guilt on [the offenders’] characters which must be answered to at the Judgement” (195).

On the other hand, Lewis suggests, out of his anatomy of the human body, a second analogy with respect to human diseases, which follows his logic of an overall biological similarity of all human bodies. He proposes that “[a]ll human bodies are subject alike to the same disease, and the color of the body does not require any variation in medical treatment, that is, in the same locality” (195). At this point, Lewis not only refutes what Etter describes as the “‘medical,’ pathological perspective so salient in pro-slavery discourse” (87) and its “environmental” arguments for a specific “natural” immunity of the black body to particular diseases and climates.¹⁸ Rather, the way in which Lewis refers to “the same locality” shows how he links his imaginative “snapshot through the skin” with a broader environmentalization of the racialized body. Although not as elaborate and radical

as Easton's "Treatise" in this respect, Lewis emphasizes that the diseases of the human body are the results of

national or local habits affecting the treatment of the body in its physical condition, [which] will have a controlling influence in the development of the physical man. This united with the geographical locations, subjecting the body to different atmospheric temperatures, gives different character and appearance to the human system. (195)

Hence, Lewis, like Easton, stresses the role of environmental factors in shaping human bodies. Although bodies cannot be distinguished in any sense on the mere basis of their "covering," since there is no essential difference between a "black," "brown," "beige," or "white" human body in terms of its biological essence, Lewis nonetheless engages in an "environmental" idea as one possible explanation of occurring physical differences within the human species.

Significantly, however, and in this respect the "Essay" seems to be more farsighted than Easton's earlier radical "environmentalism," Lewis self-consciously recognizes the dangers that lie in too radical an emphasis on environmental factors as explicating human differences, as they might in turn be interpreted as racial differences that could lead to justifications of racist practices. He admits, knowing that racial scientists have argued that "the African is wholly inferior to the European, as his color subjects him to a hot climate, where a natural imbecility incapacitates him to rank with intelligent beings," that he does "not" want to be understood as proposing this to be the "whole and sale case of the difference in the complexion of the human race" (195). Thus, instead of diverting into a radical environmentalism as Easton did, and clearly opposed, on the other hand, to a Black Nationalist essentialism based on imagining a bond of black blood of the Walker-kind, Lewis chooses a moderate yet effective strategy of exemplification through an autobiographical move. He inserts a first-hand experience through a self-assertive African American "I":

I declare this ["environmental" determinism in proslavery arguments] false. I know by experience as a colored man, my physical habits having been formed in a cold and Northern climate, the ability to endure depends on an acclimated life, and if the physical habits of a white and colored man be formed alike in early life, in a tropical climate, they will be equally affected in a frigid climate, and so vice versa. (195)

Lewis's achievement is thus not only that of undoing a biologically deduced racial essentialism by argumentatively "peeling off" the covering of the body to show a common human essence, but also of alerting his readers to the potential effects of particular circumstances and conditions, since only "where man is alike circumstanced irrespective of color, there are the same physical characteristics" (196). That Lewis remains somewhat indeterminate on these points appears to be a strength rather than a disadvantage in his case.¹⁹ Not being as radical in his ascription of human differences to environmental circumstances as Easton gives his argument the edge of a more mediating non-absolutism that hints at the contradictions and risks that had to be taken into account from an African American perspective when producing environmental knowledge as a means of resistance.

The environmental knowledge articulated by pamphleteers such as Easton and Lewis therefore involved more than a rhetoric of "birth and blood" as part of their strategy of writing against the biological exclusion of the black body. Their pamphlets are exemplars of a second major strategy of antebellum African American pamphleteering that emerged in response to the immediate discursive context of the racial sciences—the strategy of conceptually "dissecting and environmentalizing" the black body. Writing in this way against biological exclusion was vital to free black communities, as it directly related to one of their central concerns, namely that of education, or, more precisely, the idea of improvability. In this context, it was essential, as William Hamilton noted in an 1834 pamphlet, to demonstrate that the black "[m]an is capable of high advances in his reasoning and moral faculties" (113), and texts such as Easton's or Lewis's did just that by creating a de-racialized knowledge of the human in its non-human non-discursive material conditions. Only through the fundamental support of such a broader environmental knowledge that gave weight to the idea of improvability did the many institutions formed during the antebellum period in free black communities, such as literary or reading societies, make sense. Only through this kind of knowledge that fundamentally refuted the ideas of scientific racism would it become possible to effectively 'uplift the race,' since only then, as an 1828 pamphlet by William Whipper inaugurating the "Colored Reading Society of Philadelphia" claims, could one reasonably harbor the hope that such institutions "may be destined to produce a Wilberforce, a Jay, or a Clarkson, or give the world a Franklin, a Rush, or a Wistar" ("Address" 119).

WRITING THROUGH “NATURE”

Nine years later, on August 16, 1837, the same William Whipper delivered another speech turned into a pamphlet, at the first African Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. Just as the city itself, being the home of both William Still’s famous Underground Railroad hub and the world’s largest collection of “crania,”²⁰ represents the struggle of a nation increasingly polarized over questions of slavery and race, Whipper’s “Speech,” too, partakes in this fundamental struggle through its employment of a discourse of “nature” that was central to antebellum pamphlet literature. In Whipper’s case, this struggle was acted out through nature in the sense of “*human* nature,” which he conceives along an enlightenment tradition, in terms of a natural human capacity of reason. Basing his definition of man in the divine and citing an unnamed authority, Whipper puts forward that

[a] very distinguished man asserts ‘that reason is that distinguishing characteristic that separates man from the brute creation,’ and that this power was bestowed upon him by his Maker, that he might be capable of subduing all subordinate intelligences to his will. It is this power when exerted in its full force, that enables him to conquer the animals of the forest, and which makes him lord of creation. (Whipper “Speech” 239)

Thus rooting its general ethos of “non-resistance” and moral suasion in enlightenment thought and a biblical anthropocentrism (238), Whipper’s address represents antebellum African American pamphlets’ tendency to focus on “nature” as “human nature,” and furthermore exposes a general rhetorical principle of antebellum discourses of “nature.” It hints at the way, in which the term became a discursive nodal point where arguments over the interpretation of “divisive” and “unifying” characteristics of certain phenomena or objects clashed. As Whipper delineates the “ruder passions of our nature” (irrationality) as well as the “noblest gifts of our nature” (reason) in the “object” human (“Speech” 240), his text exemplifies a third, fundamental strategy in which antebellum pamphleteers’ wrote against the biological exclusion of the black body: the strategy of writing through “nature” as a contested master-signifier. In addition to writing against biological exclusion through a rhetoric of birth and blood or by dissecting and environmentalizing the black body, “nature” itself figured as a central discourse around which pamphleteers aimed to write themselves into humanity. This third facet of African American pamphleteers’

environmental knowledge pertains not so much to the particular Romantic or scientific meanings of nature or “the natural,” but to a specific *discursive function* that “nature” attained conceptually and rhetorically in antebellum discourse.

One may trace two basic aspects of this function of “nature” with respect to African American pamphleteers’ strategies of writing against biological exclusion. The first and primary one pertains to the way in which nature became a “discursive axis” through which pamphleteers articulated their claims; the second concerns the role of descriptions of non-human non-discursive material environments. The basic function of “nature” as “discursive axis” becomes visible in the ways in which arguments ascribe generalized meanings to “natural” objects—those “natural objects,” in most cases, being human bodies—out of observable similarities and differences. “Nature” became, in this sense, the conceptual and discursive pole around which similarities or differences in phenomena could supposedly be settled into coherent, absolute, “true” general principles. Supposedly, that is, since any seemingly solid grounding of a principle in “nature” most often meant its clash with other, opposing principles articulated through the same master-signifier. If some argument about an object or phenomenon was *rooted* in “nature,” it was simultaneously *unrooted*, as it became part of a contested discursive axis, which cut through various discursive formations, and which materialized through this six-letter word.

Take, for instance, some of the arguments discussed with respect to strategies of “dissecting and environmentalizing” the black body. One observation was that of an analogy, a similarity in an “object,” the human body; pamphlets such as Lewis’s or Easton’s proposed that “the flesh, blood bones, or the muscles” were the same in all “natural” human bodies (Lewis 195). Claims of this kind conceptually collided with dominant positions arguing for a supposedly racially defining dissimilarity, for instance in skin color, that was observable in the same “object.” Crucially, this collision occurred rhetorically *on the same plane*, that of nature. The same authoritative discourse, i.e. nature/the natural, referred to within various discursive formations became a means of settling a “truth,” from the point of view of each perspective. A clash occurred, then, in the ascription of meaning to difference *or* equivalence through the master-signifier “nature.” It was not essential or even disputed that an object such as the human body, as a graspable, material phenomenon was indeed composed of perceivable differences as well as equivalences. What became crucial,

however, was attributing distinct, ultimately absolute meanings to *either* a difference *or* an equivalence *through* “nature” in a process that produced this signifier as a discursive axis that fundamentally shaped the position from which African American environmental knowledge could be expressed. The struggle that becomes visible in the term and function “nature” thus marks the general struggle of a racially infused environmental knowledge.

Accordingly, arguments that revolved around “nature” in this way not only played out on the level of what I have called the “dissection” of the racialized black body. As “nature” turned into a contested discursive axis that became a nodal point for a variety of antebellum discursive formations ranging from proslavery, scientific or political, to anti-slavery or Black Nationalist thought, black pamphleteers employed the discursive function of “nature” in a variety of ways. Beyond using nature as a discourse pertaining to a general *human* nature that arose out of the reasoning faculties of man (Whipper), other pamphleteers, for example William Watkins or Nathaniel Paul, used *moral* nature as a sign “of the inherent dignity of manhood” in order to claim that “we are entitled to ALL the rights and immunities of CITIZENS” (Watkins 4, 5), or referred to *divine* nature, a “God of Nature” (Paul 5; 20; 22), according to whose principles “it is the duty of all rational creatures to consult the interest of their species” (20).

Yet others, and this concerns the second aspect with respect to writing through “nature” against biological exclusion, appropriated the discourse of nature through depictions of the non-human non-discursive material world in order to give further strength to the meanings and principles they sought to root in the master-signifier. Revealing examples of this kind are Whipper’s Philadelphia-“Speech” (1837) and David Ruggles’s “‘Extinguisher’ Extinguished!” (1834). Based on his wishful idea that “peace and quietude” for mankind may be achieved by abandoning “the rude passions that animate them” in favor of “exerting their reasoning powers” (Whipper, “Speech” 242), the former criticizes the current state of humanity by taking recourse to non-human nature, stating that

[t]here are many species of animals that are so amiable in their disposition to each other, that they might well be considered an eminent pattern for mankind in their present rude condition. The sheep, the ox, the horse, and many other animals exist in a state of comparative quietude, both among themselves, and the other races of animals when compared with man. And if it were possible for them to know [sic!] the will of their author [...] they

might justly be entitled to a distinction above all other species of creation, that had made greater departures from the will of the divine government. (242)

Out of his conviction that “[t]he rich bequest of Heaven to man was a natural body, a reasonable soul and an immortal mind,” Whipper exposes the unnaturalness of biologically excluding and racially divisive human practices, and roots his ideas in a master-signifier “nature” that, for him, was organized along principles of similarity (242). He turns to the non-human non-discursive material as a mirror exemplary of universal values and a divine will from which parts of humanity have departed, and suggests transferring the principle of overwhelming analogies among non-human nature that lead to a god-intended harmony, to human nature. Although non-human animals do not know they are acting in accordance with God’s plan, they represent this plan in Whipper’s depiction, and thereby set an example for humanity.

Ruggles’s “‘Extinguisher’ Extinguished!,” a pamphlet of considerable length and rhetorical prowess published three years earlier in New York City, which primarily aims to refute a racial tract by one Reverend Dr. Reese,²¹ is equally explicit in employing a depiction of non-human non-discursive material environs as a reference point for an argument through the discourse of nature. When defending abolitionists against the charge of promoting “amalgamation” and attacking whites’ repugnance “to marry your sons and daughters to colored persons” (13), Ruggles reminisces about his childhood to demonstrate that it was essentially a misled “public opinion” that had thoroughly corrupted a “true” human nature:

In *by-gone* days in New England, the land of steady habits, where my happiest hours were spent with my play mates [sic!], in her schools—in her churches—treading my little pathway over her broad hills and through her deep valleys. When we waded and swam her beautiful silver streams—when we climbed her tall pines and elms and oaks—when we rambled thro’ her fine orchards, and partook of sweet fruits—when we followed our hoops and our balls—when we wended our way from the top of the snowy white hills to the valley. When on the icy pond we skated till [sic!] the school-bell would bid us ‘retire!’ Then—then, her morals were rich—she taught us sweet virtue! Then Connecticut, indeed, was the queen of our land!—then *nature*, never, *never*, taught us such sinful ‘repugnance!’ She was *strong* to the contrary. It took the most powerful efforts of a sophisticated education to weaken her hold (14, emphasis in original)

Nature becomes more for Ruggles than merely a rhetorical device in which to root an ultimate truth or general principle, in his case that of racial egalitarianism. In fact, the passage as such strikes as being somewhat out of place, since explicit nature writing may not be expected in a pamphlet primarily engaged in refuting a racist tract. The quote is, however, well embedded in Ruggles's overall strategy, as it represents his attempt to meet what he recognizes as one of his adversary's central argumentative concepts, namely nature: Reese had identified intermarriage as "incongruous and unnatural" (16). By producing environmental knowledge through a form of politically motivated nature writing, Ruggles engages nature as discursive axis, as he shapes his own meanings of the term. His description of New England's non-human natural environs not only creates empathy in his readership through the portrayal of an innocent encounter with the natural world, but also works to strengthen the meanings he himself ascribes to "nature" as a master-signifier, as that to which to return from an misguided public opinion dominated by an unfounded and *unnatural* prejudice. For both Whipper and Ruggles depicting non-human materialities thus attains the function of underpinning the universal truths that they root in the contested discourse "nature," whether those truths are articulated in terms of a divine harmony of creation or through the primal scene of an uncorrupted childhood experience.

Hence, the overall function of "nature" as discursive axis becomes visible especially when juxtaposing African American pamphleteers' enunciations and those of antebellum racial thought. In contrast to mobilizing "nature" as part of a strategy of exposing *similarities and equivalences* in creation that is characteristic of black pamphleteering, antebellum racialisms primarily aim to identify *dissimilarities and differences* as general organizing principles of their objects of inquiry. A remark from New York phrenologist John H. van Evrie is, perhaps unconsciously, most revealing in this respect. In 1853, van Evrie claimed that his science's goal was to find the "simple, though mighty truth" that "[t]he human creation like the animal creation, like all the families or forms of being, is composed of a certain number of races, all *generally resembling* each other yet each *specifically different* from all others" (105, emphasis mine). As this phrase implies, those who wrote through "nature" from whatever perspective did *not* disagree about the *existence* of both equivalences and differences in the objects or phenomena they observed. What they disagreed about was the ascription of meanings and general truths deduced on the basis of *either* difference *or* equivalence that were then turned into absolutes through a

discourse of nature. While racialisms focused on the “specifically different” as marks of a biologically verifiable, distinct essence, in order to biologically exclude, this perspective was countered powerfully on the same discursive plane by black pamphleteers’ notions of equivalence in creation, as they stressed what van Evrie calls the “generally resembling” (105). Thus, writing around the master-signifier “nature” ultimately depended not so much on observation and more on diverging modes of interpretation within discourse; less on material essence or a clear referent and more on emphasis, position and selectivity. While “the dissimilar” was selected, endowed with meaning, and essentialized through biological racialism, the true meaning of nature for black pamphleteers most often lay in equivalences and analogies, in “the similar,” and thus in the potential to unify. Nature, in this way, figured as a continuously contested discursive battleground, a discourse on which black writers continued to signify not only during the antebellum period but throughout a tradition of African American environmental knowledge.

In conclusion, the ways in which antebellum black pamphleteers dealt with the pressing task of attacking the stereotypes and racialisms that sought to “biologically” ban them from the realm of the human show additional facets of a foundational African American environmental knowledge. In their attempts at writing against the biological exclusion of the black body, and embedded within their more explicit themes, such as abolitionism, emancipation, education, women’s rights or anti-colonizationism, pamphlets became (and should be reconsidered more widely as) another place where antebellum African Americans sought redefinitions of the human in relation to its non-human non-discursive material conditions. My readings have spotlighted three ways in which such redefinitions occurred. First, by engaging with ideas of “birth” and “blood,” which often emphasized close material connections to the land, to being its original cultivators endowed with a primal environmental knowledge. Second, (and to some extent against a Walker-tradition) by environmentalizing the black body, in the sense of celebrating and de-hierarchizing human variety paralleled by a variety seen in non-human nature as God’s creation (Easton), as well as by arguing for biological similarities among the human species (Lewis). And, third, by attempting to redefine “nature” as a master-signifier, sometimes through depictions of the non-human non-discursive material world (Ruggles). Even if “nature,” in the last sense, figures primarily as a discursive battleground, and although the strategies and texts considered in this chapter are explicitly striving for racial justice,

the pamphlet tradition attests to the ways in which black writers, from the start, produced texts that are simultaneously “political” and “environmental,” which makes them highly relevant for ecocriticism. Antebellum African American writing, whether in pamphlets or in the fugitive slave narrative (or, potentially, in a variety of other texts and genres such as travel narratives or spiritual narratives, which are not treated in this study), involved diverse forms of environmental knowledge. In this sense, African American writing developed its own, distinct forms of “nature writing.”

NOTES

1. On the long-term history of constructing concepts of race out of dehumanizing stereotypes and images of black Africans, which were already present in some form in medieval Muslim and Iberian cultures of the fifteenth- and sixteenth century, see, for example, Davis, “Culmination” esp. 761–767; *Bondage* 48–76; Simon-Aaron 171–190. The idea that modern concepts of race are articulated in terms of “biology” is also central in the work of scholars like Appiah, Cornel West, or Fanon; the general assessment is, as Cavalli-Sforza et al. suggest, that “[r]acism has existed from time immemorial but only in the nineteenth century were there attempts to justify it on the basis of scientific arguments” (19).
2. Although skin color figures as the primary “racial marker” in Jefferson’s tract, *Notes* also refers to bodily differences in terms of the “flowing hair” and supposedly “more elegant symmetry of form” in white bodies, thus aestheticizing the idea of racial superiority in the white body, and asking why, if “[t]he circumstance of superior beauty, is thought worthy attention in the propagation of our horses, dogs, and other domestic animals; why not in that of man?” (148). Yet another physical distinction is suggested in Jefferson’s idea that blacks “seem to require less sleep” (148)—an assessment that, however, seems to be contradicted by the author himself, when he describes a few lines later, “their disposition to sleep when abstracted from their diversions and unemployed in labour” (149).
3. The hand-colored lithograph was published by A. Donnelly in New York in 1841. The copy referred to, part of the holdings of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., is a fragment titled “America/E.W.C.” that can be viewed online (www.loc.gov/item/2003690759/). It represents the left panel of a print item called “Black and White Slavery” that, as the information on the collection suggests, “contrasts the plight of Britain’s abused ‘white slaves’ (actually factory workers, portrayed in the right panel) and America’s ‘contented’ black slaves.”

4. Envisioning his work as a continuation as well as a “correction” and “completion” of Foucault’s ideas of the 1970s, Agamben’s argument in *Homo Sacer* (1998) focuses on what he calls the “sovereign exception” and seeks to explain, primarily for a juridico-political context, fundamental relations between life and politics (cf. 9). While borrowing the term and general idea of a “state of exception” as described in Agamben, I am neither suggesting an application of the specific figure of the *homo sacer* to the figure of the (African American) slave, nor am I interested in generally following Agamben’s (bio-)political argumentative line, which is problematic as a highly Eurocentric concept (cf. Jarvis). In this sense, my argument in this chapter, while loosely inspired by Agamben’s idea of exception, is not Agambian in nature.
5. The material by Colfax and Shannon is part of the holdings of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., and can be accessed online (www.loc.gov/item/11006103 (Colfax); www.loc.gov/item/11015401 (Shannon)). Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division.
6. This is not to disclaim Outka’s thesis in *Race and Nature* of a general alignment of the sublime with whiteness and trauma with blackness in the nineteenth century. However, my distinction between “biological exclusion” and “environmental exception” shifts the emphasis in accordance with my focus on African American literature. It enables addressing more concretely the processes and strategies involved in African American literary representations of relations to the non-human material world, and especially, the always paradox-ridden production of environmental knowledge through modes like the sublime, the pastoral, or the picturesque.
7. I do not mean to suggest thereby that this process was one-sided in the sense of an attribution of “slave-classed” by an active white majority to a passive group of black writers. After all, free (or freed) antebellum African Americans in numerous cases explicitly embraced the opportunity and celebrated the duty and privilege of becoming spokespersons for their brethren in chains. Many displayed the ethos Frances E.W. Harper expresses when claiming “I belong to this race, and when it is down, I belong to a down race; when it is up, I belong to a risen race” (128).
8. An important step toward bringing African American pamphlets more prominently into scholarly focus can be seen in the impressive online resources that exist by now. There are, for example, two online collections (Daniel A.P. Murray Collection; African American Pamphlet Collection) available through the websites of the Library of Congress. Moreover, the extensive database “Documenting the American South” (University of South Carolina) has digitized not only an impressive number of fugitive slave narratives and historical texts, but also a considerable number of African American pamphlets.

9. Other recent compilations organized along specific themes that include African American pamphlets are those by Ferguson (2008), which focuses on nineteenth-century black women's literary achievements; and Simmons/Thomas (2010), which anthologizes African American sermons.
10. In most cases, pamphlets were the written versions of previously held speeches, proceedings of conventions, or church sermons; at the same time, these pamphlets were often (re)turned into oral discourse as they were read or performed for (often illiterate) audiences. In this way, the medium "offered more immediacy than books and more depth than the popular broadsides" (Blockett 119). See for discussions of the status of the black pamphlet between the oral and written tradition Blockett 119–121; Newman, *Prophet* 21; Ernest 107–110.
11. Some scholars have emphasized the strong influence of this early generation of black pamphleteers on abolitionism of the antebellum era. William Lloyd Garrison, for instance, was drawing from the themes, principles and strategies of figures like James Forten when he inaugurated his lifelong struggle with the publication of the *Liberator* in 1831 (cf. Billington 5–12). On the debate over where to pinpoint the beginnings of abolitionism, which is usually seen as originating in the 1830s, see Newman, "Liberation Technology"; Bay 27–35.
12. One sign of the importance of (American) "birth" to African American claims is the way in which organizations that had once labelled themselves "African" increasingly refrained from this term and renamed themselves in the wake of the ACS's efforts, a trend that continued into the antebellum period.
13. Apart from Black Nationalism (cf. Hinks; Levine, *Dislocating* 67–117; Finseth), scholars have identified a variety of other major themes in Walker's "Appeal." Among those are Walker's anti-colonialism, his engagement with (the hypocrisy of) religion, his relation to Jefferson (cf. Hinks 196–236; M'Baye 122–129; V. Mitchell), or the "Appeal's" revisionist historiography (cf. Jarrett 41–42; Newman, *Prophet* 25). For readings of Walker's pamphlet in the context of a rising black press, see Levine, "Circulating"; on the "Appeal" as part of the American jeremiad tradition, see Hubbard.
14. On what has sometimes been called the "environmental" theory of race that had prevailed in the eighteenth century and that was driven by the idea of "race itself as the product of environmental influences" (Harris 83), see Harris 80–107; Haller 70–77; on "environmental" arguments in anti-slavery rhetoric, see Walters 62–69; Fredrickson 35–42. This discourse is crucial insofar as it is perhaps the most explicit point of intersection between the production of environmental knowledge and conceptions of racial difference. Often, the proposals or refutations of "environmental" or

“climate” causes for racial difference were intertwined with the general claims that both pro- and anti-slavery arguments aimed to validate. Some would, for instance, argue radically “environmentally” to the end of claiming that circumstances alone produced an “inferiority” of blacks (and that these circumstances only had to be ended to end “black inferiority”), while their opponents would propose a “natural” adaptability of black bodies to certain climates to justify their enslavement. My use of “environmental” in “environmental knowledge” is obviously distinct from the “environmental” as used in this specific discursive formation, even though “environmental” pro/anti-slavery thought is an important part of racialized forms of environmental knowledge. To avoid confusion, I use quotation marks when referring to the “environmental” or “climate” theory of racial difference and none with respect to environmental knowledge as it has been introduced for *Environmental Knowledge, Race, and African American Literature*.

15. Both texts have rarely been discussed. With respect to Lewis, this is hardly surprising considering that his short pamphlet is a typical example of strategies of refuting scientific racism (it is, however, exactly this representativeness that makes the text an appealing object of inquiry for my purposes). Regarding Easton’s tract, which has been republished in its entirety in a collection by Porter (1969) and, more recently, in an edition by Price and Stewart (1999), we find only two in-depth readings (Dain 170–196; Price and Stewart). According to Price and Stewart, reasons for the lack of scholarly engagement with the “Treatise” are its author’s death soon after publication as well as its divergence from a more radical pamphlet tradition inspired by Walker (cf. 37–39). In the following, I cite from Porter’s reprint, which gives the page numbers of Easton’s original publication.
16. In contrast to Walker, who addresses his “beloved brethren,” Easton primarily aims to appeal to a white audience and in this respect diverges from an 1828 “Address” he had delivered in Providence, Rhode Island. Thus having changed his overall strategy significantly by 1837, the “Treatise” employs carefully crafted rhetoric that speaks in the more moderate tone of an established member of a Northern black elite but does not shy away from pointing out the faults and errors of its white addressees with respect to their treatment of African Americans.
17. At times, Lewis employs quotation marks—even though he does not refer to particular authors—when he contextualizes his argument within (pseudo-)scientific claims of black inferiority and polygenism. The anonymity of such “quotes” and the way in which the text at times refers broadly to a harmful “spirit [...] aiming to drive the colored man from within the pale of human society” indicate how well-known and deeply enmeshed polygenist thought and its more popular racialisms had become by the time Lewis composed his “Essay” in 1852 (191).

18. The biological exclusion of the black body often entailed its pathologization. Such pathologizations can be traced from Jefferson's musings that blacks' "inferiority is not the effect merely of their condition of life" (151), or incidents such as the yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia in 1793 during which (supposedly immune) African Americans were accused of stealing beds (cf. e.g. Allen and Jones, "A Narrative of the Proceedings" (1794); R. Newman, *Prophet* 78–104), to the antebellum "medical" explanations of certain medical phenomena supposedly observable in the black body. Perhaps the most telling example of the latter can be found in the "medical" advice given in "slave manuals" (e.g. Collins 15–16), or in Samuel Cartwright's ideas, which included "drapetomania" and a sickness called "dysaesthesia aethiopica, or hebetude of mind and obtuse sensibility of body" that supposedly caused "rascality" and an urge to run away. On the links between antebellum medicine and the construction of race, see Simon-Aaron 235–248.
19. One should nonetheless also note some of the deficits of Lewis's "Essay." Apart from the fuzziness that sometimes marks his argument with respect to "environmental" and "essential" factors as determining differences among humans, another flaw in Lewis's argumentation regards his unreflecting celebration of an inevitable "progress of civilization." Especially in the end, the "Essay" is rather uncritical in this respect, when it ascribes exclusively positive connotations to these terms, arguing that "in the entire history of the human race, [...] the superiority of one class over an inferior one, [is] only the result of improved opportunity in becoming intelligent, in the progress of civilization" (196).
20. The "Academy of the Natural Sciences" held and displayed in the 1840s and 1850s what its librarian J. Aitken Meigs calls a "magnificent Collection of Human Crania" that had for the most part been acquired by Samuel George Morton (3). For information on the collection of 1035 skulls, see Morton's own catalogues as well as Meigs's *Catalogue of Human Crania* (1857).
21. Ruggles thoroughly examines the *Extinguisher*, a book published shortly before the pamphlet, and attacks Reese's "production of doubtful fame—in showing his absurdities and exposing his sophistry" (iii). He draws attention to Reese's faulty logic, exposes the doctor's religious hypocrisy, and counters Reese's charges of abolitionists' promotion of "amalgamation" (cf. 12–17). In terms of writing against biological exclusion, Ruggles stands in the tradition of Easton and Lewis, for instance, when arguing that "we are as a people degraded and ignorant [...], but that there is any thing [sic!] in our anatomical or physical organization to warrant the charge, incapable of refinement, literary attainment, or acquisition of knowledge of any kind, is an insult so glaring against the God who made of *one blood* all nations" (41, emphasis in original).

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PART II

Transformations: African American
Environmental Knowledge from
Reconstruction to Modernity



Transforming Space: Nature, Education, and Home in Charlotte Forten and William Wells Brown

The slave narrative was not only formative for a postwar African American writing tradition in general but also decisively shaped the development of the environmental dimensions of this tradition. With respect to African American environmental knowledge, the genre established an enabling yet at the same time limiting point of departure, as it influenced where, when, and how such knowledge was expressed. The ways in which the slave narrative both opened up and simultaneously circumscribed the articulation of African American environmental knowledge for postwar writers becomes visible, for instance, with respect to literary space. On the one hand, the slave narrative had created the literary heterotopia of the Underground Railroad, which often functioned as a “loophole” for articulating environmental knowledge, establishing the roots of potentially empowering interpretations of wild environments. On the other hand, this literary other-space was embedded within a host of established literary topoi of a genre driven by an urge to hyper-separate the black body from the non-human. The antebellum slave narrative left its postwar literary heirs with a relatively fixed spatial matrix that included, for instance, the surveilled plantation, carceral landscapes of flight riddled with slave patrols, or the Southern household with its domesticated but inaccessible gardens—spaces that did not readily enable a direct articulation of environmental knowledge. In this sense, the genre left the tradition that emerged with a predestined “map” that largely determined where (not) to express environmental knowledge.

This simultaneously empowering and haunting literary “map” generated through slave testimony did not suddenly disappear with Emancipation, but persisted as a general spatial matrix characteristic of African American writing. One reason of this lies in the slave narrative’s general formative force on the African American literary tradition. As a genre that has often been identified as “the very foundation upon which most subsequent Afro-American fictional and nonfictional forms are based,” the slave narrative provided the starting point from which African American fiction, poetry, and drama developed (Gates, “Introduction” 5). It is no coincidence that texts considered pioneering African American fiction such as William Wells Brown’s novel *Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter* (1853) or Frederick Douglass’s novella “The Heroic Slave” (1853) not only show a close formal and thematic affinity to the slave narrative, but were in fact written by formerly enslaved writers who had influentially contributed to the antebellum genre. Other parts of the literary tradition, too, such as African American poetry or drama, were rooted in anti-slavery rhetoric and imagery as they drew from a host of themes, tropes and styles first developed in the slave narrative.¹ Consequently, the genre remained a fundamental shaping force in the postwar decades in a variety of ways, as it fueled a tradition of African American writing that, as Reid-Pharr has pointed out, had always been marked by an “impressive amount of cross-fertilization between different genres” (140).

A second reason why the discourse of the slave narrative remained vital to postwar African American literature and environmental knowledge is the continued presence of the genre itself throughout Reconstruction, Post-Reconstruction, and into the twentieth century. As William Andrews has demonstrated, we find a postwar “proliferation of slave narratives not only across the country but across class and gender lines that had restricted slave narratives before the war largely to male fugitives who fled the eastern and upper South to settle in New England” (*Slave Narratives* xi).² Even though what Andrews terms the “slave narrative after slavery” transformed into a more autonomous form of life writing that became the vehicle of a more nuanced social critique driven by the conviction that “something positive, something sustaining, could be gleaned from the past,” it was still largely replicating the old topographies of the antebellum slave narrative (“Reunion” 14). Postwar narratives of slavery ranging from those by Goings (1869), Frederick (1869), Williams (1873), Henry (1894), and Bruce (1895), to the most famous ones by William W. Brown (1880) and Frederick Douglass (1892), often retold their stories under

the influence of established topoi, thereby tending to reproduce the literary “map”—and environmental knowledge—of their antebellum predecessors.

Yet, while it is important to note such continuities, there are at the same time profound changes in the ways in which the African American literary tradition came to articulate environmental knowledge in the decades following the Civil War. Black writers of this period engaged not only in “repetition” but also in “revision” of antebellum forms of African American environmental knowledge, and, in many cases, mobilized such knowledge to articulate their broader visions for a post-Emancipation America and African American literature. The remaining chapters of this book trace instances of such “repetition and revision” with a main focus on signifying revisions *within* the African American literary tradition, that is, on the ways in which, as Gates once suggested, “black writers read, repeated, imitated, and revised each other’s texts” (*Monkey* xxii). This is not to propose that African American literature stopped being marked by a fundamental double-voicedness in the postwar decades—signifying involved both African American and Euro-American traditions. As will be seen, writers increasingly (re)turned to (classical) Western literary models and modes, for instance by using the pastoral in new ways, or by appropriating the picturesque or the georgic to articulate environmental knowledge. In conjunction with such tendencies, however, what becomes particularly important for this period in terms of a history of African American environmental knowledge are internal signifying revisions, i.e. intertextual webs that developed within the African American tradition. Whereas writers of the antebellum period established the *foundations* of an African American environmental knowledge largely by signifying on dominant Euro-American traditions, writers of the postwar period increasingly engaged in *transformations* of foundational forms of African American environmental knowledge, even if this often involved simultaneously signifying on Western literary models and developing Euro-American discourses on race such as evolutionary thought or Spencerism. Thus, while continuing to use Euro-American traditions, postwar black writing further developed a distinct tradition of African American environmental knowledge by repeating its literary predecessors “with a signal difference” (Gates, *Monkey* 51), thereby seeking to formulate ideas for a post-Emancipation African America out of new (literary) relations to nature.

In terms of the three dimensions of African American environmental knowledge identified with respect to antebellum writing, a first major

signifying revision pertains to the spatial. As I shall argue in this chapter, post-Emancipation African American environmental knowledge was often articulated, despite the lasting influence of the slave narrative's "map," in literary spaces that reflect two general themes of postwar African America: "home" and "education." Both themes have been identified as central to African American literature and culture of the post-Civil War decades. With respect to the former, Tate, for instance, in her 1992 study *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire* on the role of the domestic novel for nineteenth-century black women writers, notes that such writers increasingly expressed notions of home by embracing "the tenets of the Victorian American society [...], initially to demonstrate that they too were U.S. citizens and ultimately to counter persistent allegations of their inferiority" (67). In a similar vein, Byerman/Wallinger suggest that 'home' and "a strong black family was a theme that many male writers shared with women writers of the time" (183), and Carla Peterson stresses the various meanings home-building attained in postwar African American culture, claiming that

[f]or African Americans, emancipation meant the opportunity to create a local place that might truly become home. To do so they continued to rely on many of the same social institutions that had ensured their survival in the antebellum period in both the slave South and the free North: familial and domestic networks, the church, schools, community benevolent societies. But they also stepped onto new terrain opened up by Reconstruction legislation, hoping that the nation itself might become home. (*Doers* 197)

Thus, the idea of home arose as a central point of debate among African Americans after the Civil War, especially with respect to those who had been formerly enslaved and who were building on the (unfulfilled) promise of "Forty Acres and a Mule." In writing of this period, the importance of home-building is reflected in the autobiographical part of the tradition as well as in magazines and novels, where a domestic sentimentalism became prevalent especially toward the close of the century, in what has been referred to as "the Black Women's Era" (Byerman/Wallinger 193).³ In this way, home became more than just a general theme, as it led to the creation of new literary space that also offered new means and was employed to express environmental knowledge.

The second theme, education, is perhaps even more central to the postwar decades. Postwar concerns for black education must be understood in

the larger context of the pivotal status the written word attained from the very inception of African American letters in the New World. Long before Douglass famously emphasized the importance of gaining literacy as a means of gaining freedom and humanity in his 1845 *Narrative*, education had been of vital importance to African American communities. One sign of what Stepto calls the “dual quest” for “freedom *and* literacy” (“Distrust” 301), and of African Americans’ longstanding high regard for education can be seen in the ways in which various formerly enslaved as well as Northern African Americans had begun opening schools in antebellum times. In fact, many of the writers of slave narratives discussed so far, such as Douglass and Bibb, or pamphleteers like Whipper and Easton, had initiated (or at least planned) their own education projects in the decades before the war.⁴ During and in the decade following emancipation, such individual ventures were complemented on a much larger scale by the founding of schools and colleges for African Americans,⁵ and by the rise of the “Freedmen’s School Movement” that sent Northern “schoolmarm” to the South, first under the supervision of the Union Army and, later, the Freedmen’s Bureau.

Such efforts fueled postwar African American literature’s ideology of “race uplift,” as education became a primary means of embracing what was usually referred to as the ‘progress of the race’ and was recognized as a potent tool of liberation. As Du Bois observed retrospectively in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), the decades following the war saw how

a new vision began gradually to replace the dream of political power. [...] It was the ideal of ‘book-learning’; the curiosity, born of compulsory ignorance, to know and test the power of the cabalistic letters of the white man, the longing to know. Here at last seemed to have been discovered the mountain-path to Canaan; longer than the highway of Emancipation and law, steep and rugged, but straight, leading to heights high enough to overlook life. (13)

Thus, in the postwar “Black World,” the figure of the black “[t]eacher embodied the ideals of this people,—the strife for another and juster world, the vague dream of righteousness, the mystery of knowing” (57). At the same time, the figure of the black writer took up the themes of education and home and employed them in creating literary spaces that significantly shaped African American literary discourse in the postwar decades, whether in slave narratives, in the tutelary fiction by Harper,

Hopkins, and writers of the “Black Women’s Era,” or in the didactic articles found in a growing number of African American periodicals.⁶

Turning to two authors of this period is particularly revealing with respect to how such new literary spaces of home and education affected the articulation of African American environmental knowledge. Bracketing almost two decades, Charlotte Forten’s Civil War writings (*Journals*; “Life on the Sea Islands” (1864)) and William Wells Brown’s last and traditionally least-studied book *My Southern Home: Or, the South and its People* (1880) are not just representative of some of the general developments in postwar African American literature. More importantly, they can improve our understanding of how the emergence of literary spaces of education and home entailed a spatial reconfiguration of African American environmental knowledge and how post-Emancipation African American literature began to articulate new self-conceptions through this knowledge.

CHARLOTTE FORTEN: EDUCATION AND HOME THROUGH THE “REFUGE OF NATURE”

Charlotte Forten’s journals, the best-known part of her work, are in some ways exceptional texts. Apart from the fact that Forten’s is one of only a handful of nineteenth-century African American women’s diaries recovered so far, her writing is noteworthy, to begin with, for its intermediate position. The most important and most detailed part of Forten’s journals lies at the interstice between the antebellum and Reconstruction period, covering the years 1862 to 1864. Although her private records as a whole span almost forty years,⁷ I will primarily focus on this period, which details Forten’s participation in the Port Royal-Experiment on the North Carolina Sea Islands, and which is particularly illuminating with respect to transformations of African American environmental knowledge.

Beyond their intermediate position, the journals are also noteworthy because of Forten’s privileged social position. The granddaughter of James Forten, the wealthy Philadelphian sailmaker, and of mixed racial heritage, Charlotte Forten was a member of the group historian Joel Williamson has called “the mulatto elite” (cf. *New People* 77–88). Born in 1837 and growing up in her grandfather’s home on Lombard Street, a “mecca for abolitionists,” Forten came into contact with antislavery and feminist sentiments from the moment she could think; she was “[r]eared in an atmosphere of crusading zeal” in her birthplace and her second

home, the Purvis family's Byberry Farm outside Philadelphia (Billington 19, 12).⁸ Thus literally growing into the (Garrisonian) antislavery movement of the day, Forten enjoyed the rare privilege of a classical education. She learned French and German, well enough to work as a translator in the 1860s and 1870s, and gained a profound knowledge of the arts and the literary culture of her age—a fact that has prompted some scholars to wonder why “Forten [...] did not become a more forceful racial activist” (Long 38).⁹ No matter in how far the critique that is sometimes voiced in this regard is justified or not, it is certainly true that Forten's childhood was not one of severe material or educational want in a family that “no doubt took some of its cues from ‘mainstream’ middle-class society [...]. Music, classical literature, gracious but tastefully modest entertaining, and liberal travel extended the horizons of all the Fortens” (Jones Lapsansky 12). In this respect, Forten's experience was strikingly different from that of the majority of African Americans of her time, whether enslaved or not, on behalf of whom she came to agitate.

Her privileged position did not mean, however, that her life was unaffected by deep-seated troubles. Forten had never known her mother, who had died of tuberculosis when she was but three years old, and was sent to Salem, Massachusetts, at the age of sixteen by a father from whom she became more and more estranged. The most aggravating and disheartening influence over her young life, however, seems to have been the cruel race prejudice she repeatedly laments in her journals from 1854 on, the year she moved in with the Remond family in Salem, Massachusetts, to avoid the segregated Philadelphian school system and attend Salem Normal School. In her first journal, Forten describes her social experience as an adolescent as follows:

I wonder that every colored person is not a misanthrope. Surely we have something to make us hate mankind. I have met girls in the schoolroom—they have been thoroughly kind and cordial to me,—perhaps the next day met them on the street—they feared to recognize me; these I can but regard now with scorn and contempt,—once I liked them, believing them incapable of such meanness. Others give the most distant recognition possible.—I, of course, acknowledge no such recognitions and they soon cease entirely. These are but trifles, certainly, to the great, public wrongs which we as a people are obliged to endure. But to those who experience them, these apparent trifles are most wearing and discouraging; even to the child's mind they reveal volumes of deceit and heartlessness, and early teach a lesson of suspicion and distrust. (*Journals* 140)

Perhaps it was such constant “lessons of suspicion and distrust” that turned Forten into the introspective, overly self-critical character readers discover in the pages of her journal and as which she has often been perceived by scholars. Although some contemporaries such as the poet John Greenleaf Whittier describe her as a “young lady of exquisite refinement, quiet culture and ladylike and engaging manners and personal appearance,” her private voice most often bespeaks quite another disposition (qtd. Stevenson 32). She admits, for example, to have “mingled feelings of sorrow, shame and self-contempt,” or bemoans her insecurity in fulfilling the role of a sociable middle-class woman: “I do not know how to talk. Words always fail me when I want them most. The more I feel the more impossible it is for me to speak” (*Journals* 315, 433).

Such passages hint at one of the major functions of Forten’s journals, namely that of acting as a refuge from a harsh reality marked by soul-crushing racism. Forten at times explicitly emphasizes this function, for instance, when she burst out “To thee, alone, my journal, can I say with tears how *very* hard it is,” or addresses the leather-bound booklets in which she was writing as “ami inconnu” or “faithful friend, my comfotee!” (*Journals* 252, 362, 214, emphasis in original). At points, she seems to engage in ‘dialogues’ with her diary, e.g. when admitting, “[m]y conscience reproaches me for neglecting thee so long,” or naming her journal “dear A” (153, 362). Thus, several scholars have identified the creation of a refuge as the primary aim of Forten’s diary keeping. Braxton, for instance, reads the text as “a retreat from potentially shattering encounters with racism and a vehicle for the development of a black and female poetic identity, a place of restoration and self-healing” (85), Logan sees the journal as “a safe space” (33), and Peterson suggests that Forten “sought to construct a social space for herself in which she could work out definitions of self and the relationship of self to the larger community” (*Doers* 184).

Despite such observations, readings have tended to overlook the central role that depictions of non-human nature play in Forten’s *creation* of this refuge. A partial reason of this and of the general omission of an environmental dimension of Forten’s texts may be seen in the editorial history of the journals. Kept safe after Forten’s death in 1914 by her friend Anna Julia Cooper, who made typescripts of Forten’s handwritten records, the journals first made their way into the general public through the hands of historian Ray Allen Billington, who published *The Journal of Charlotte L. Forten* in 1953.¹⁰ Billington’s abridged edition of the journals spawned

a rather one-sided scholarly discourse, as he had identified race as the single most important subject matter of Forten's writing, and had made extensive editorial changes in accordance with this idea. In the introduction to the 1953 edition, Billington thus stated that "no other influence was so strong in shaping Charlotte Forten's thoughts" as that of race prejudice, and that "her race was always uppermost to Charlotte Forten's thoughts" (7, 8).

As true as this may be and as valuable as Billington's book has been in first bringing attention to Forten, a variety of scholars have by now assessed this edition as a "mutilated text" (Braxton 84); Long goes as far as to suggest that it "hindered efforts to study Forten" (37). Accordingly, more recent scholarship has sought to overcome a one-sided perspective focused solely on race on the basis of an unabridged edition published by Brenda Stevenson in the *Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Women Writers* series (1988).¹¹ Even as this edition has become available, however, and although critics have by now dealt with various aspects of the text,¹² there is still a general omission of the environmental dimensions of Forten's writings. One obvious reason of this lies in the decade-long unavailability of the complete text and in Billington's far-reaching editorial changes in the first edition, which obscured the qualities that make Forten's an environmentally oriented text. That the editor had chosen to delete precisely those passages that are significant from an ecocritical point of view, but which, according to Billington's assessment, merely "describe the weather, family affairs, the landscape, and other matters of purely local interest," is in itself telling, as it reveals how environmental issues were largely ignored during the recoveries of African American texts in the 1960s and 1970s (40). Other reasons for a general disregard of the environmental dimensions of Forten's journals even after the appearance of Stevenson's edition could be the fact that Forten has never been an overly studied author, and that she belongs to an intermediate period in African American literary history that has not attracted as much attention as, for instance, the antebellum period. Thus, even though more recent readings routinely refer to Forten's appreciation of non-human nature, there is so far no in-depth environmentally oriented treatment of Forten's journals from an African American studies or an ecocritical perspective.¹³

Depictions of non-human nature are, however, central to Forten's journals, which, on the one hand, repeat certain antebellum forms of environmental knowledge, and, on the other hand, foreshadow postwar African American environmental knowledge. Reading the texts as part of

a signifying tradition, as “repetition with a difference” (Gates), it is crucial to recognize, first, how Forten’s discourse constructs “Nature” as a multilayered refuge. If previous scholarship has generally read the journals as a “safe place” (Logan) or as a “retreat” (Braxton), depicting and relating to non-human non-discursive materialities can be identified as Forten’s primary means of acting out this retreat. Through her journals, she devised a *spiritual*, *aesthetic*, and *ethical* “refuge of nature.”

A *spiritual* “refuge of nature” is almost omnipresent, as descriptions of non-human environments populate virtually every page of the text. Admittedly, some of these appear to be what Billington once deemed trivial and negligible descriptions of “landscapes and the weather.” Others, however, express a deeper, more meaningful involvement of the non-human non-discursive material world, especially when Forten inscribes herself into environs presented as holding the power to restore her downcast spirit. Through a discourse of nature, the text envisions the non-human non-discursive material as a space of renewal, a space where Forten’s diary-self finds a spiritual connection to both this materiality and to itself. The following passage (left out in the Billington-edition) is exemplary of this pattern in Forten’s writing, as it recalls taking a

pleasant walk in the pastures with S.[arah Remond] and Mr. P.[utnam]—
Looked in vain for the delicate yet brave Hepatica, but enjoyed perfectly the
beauty of the hill, the moss-grown rocks,—the sky—the waters,—and the
delicious songs of numberless little brooks, whose sparkling waters and
picturesque windings gladden the eye, even as their music does the ear. Our
walk was, indeed, a *delightful* one. Returned home, from the holy peace and
beauty of Nature [...]. (*Journals* 208, emphasis in original)

Forten celebrates this “holy peace and beauty of Nature,” experienced via the visual and auditory senses (“eye” and “ear”), throughout her journals. Capitalizing the word “Nature” in the above quote and in many other cases highlights the centrality of the concept to her creation of a refuge. From the first to the very last entry, Forten gives countless descriptions of “delightful walk[s]” (*Journals* 94), “rides” that were “perfectly beautiful,” or days “to be marked with a white stone” (245)—instances that let her feel touched by the “warmer love of dear Mother Nature” and “its soothing, and delightful power” (260, 72). In this respect, Forten’s writings read like the rambles of a romantic nature-lover who “could *live* out of doors,” and who was not just superficially viewing non-human environs as

mere picturesque background but cultivated an amateur scientific interest in nature (210, emphasis in original). She apparently acquired considerable knowledge on flora and fauna, was interested in phenomena such as solar eclipses (cf. 61), and visited scientific institutions such as the Essex Institute (cf. 78). Thus, “Nature” becomes the conceptual thread that binds together the journals as retreat. It acts as a trigger of “peaceful, happy thoughts, sweet remembrances” that “gave me a feeling of perfect peace” (103, 114).

At the same time, Forten’s “refuge of Nature” has a strong *aesthetic* dimension, as the spiritual relief she finds in the non-human non-discursive material world is communicated through the artistic frameworks and values of her day. She was no doubt familiar with the aesthetics of the pastoral, the picturesque, and the sublime, since she was not only an excessive reader in search of literary role models, but also literally grew into the Philadelphia and New England literary elites, which led to many first-hand encounters with a variety of the great (nature) writers and poets of her time. The influences of this impressive literary education and Forten’s creation of explicit links between an experience of nature and an endorsement of the arts become visible in the journals’ descriptions in two ways. Firstly, various moments depict the enjoyment of the arts while being immersed in the non-human natural world. Forten recalls, for instance, how, on a “pleasant walk” through “harmony grove,” Miss Shephard, a teacher she befriended in Salem, begins to “read several exquisite poems written by the sister of Mrs. Hemans,” or how she glories in listening to an orchestra while seated “among the trees” (*Journals* 83, 240). In such moments, experiencing what she describes as non-human nature and art literally merge.

Secondly, the aesthetic dimension of her “refuge of Nature” pertains to the ways in which Forten stylistically inscribes her literary preferences and artistic ideals into her depictions of the non-human material world. At times, she explicitly claims an essential connection between art and nature, for example, when commenting on the New England “pastures”: “I enjoyed the novelty of wandering over the hills, and ascending some of the highest of them had a fine view of the town and harbor. It seemed like a beautiful landscape; and I wished for the artist’s power or the poet’s still richer gift to immortalize it” (*Journals* 70). For Forten, encountering, grasping, and describing non-human non-discursive materialities *as* “Nature” is inextricably connected with aesthetic stances that she adopts from a handful of literary heroes whom she regarded as possessing that

“poet’s still richer gift to immortalize” such materialities (70). Accordingly, she frequently employs her considerable literary expertise when offering her depictions. Upon seeing a “rocky island” on one of her carriage rides, for instance, Forten notes that “[i]t was just such an island as I imagined ‘Monte Christo’ must have been” (88); she praises literary characters such as the hero of Dinah Craik’s novel *John Halifax* as “‘Nature’s nobleman’ in every sense of the word” (211), and ponders admiringly over poetic descriptions of European nature by Clarke and Coleridge (cf. 188). Above such writers and literary figures stood, however, the poetic voices of Emerson and Whittier, both of whom Forten met face-to-face and deeply revered. While she admired Emerson from a distance as “one of the truest of Nature’s interpreters” and fantasized about taking a walk with him that “would be intensely yet silently delightful,” Whittier became a much closer, life-long acquaintance and patron with whom Forten *did* take long walks (279, emphasis in original). Apparently, she regarded Whittier as the epitome of a Romantic connection between art and natural environs. He was, to Forten, “the poet [who] was also a farmer,” and Whittier’s as well as Emerson’s celebrations of farming, country life, and nature, fuse into an aesthetic framework in Forten that is marked by a brand of descriptive language that merges the picturesque with the pastoral and, sometimes, the sublime (247). In this respect, Forten clearly endorsed dominant Euro-American environmental literary modes and models of her day.

That Forten’s writing moreover employs and repeats an African American environmental knowledge becomes visible when turning to her writing as creating an *ethical* “refuge of Nature.” For Forten, as for many black pamphleteers, depicting non-human nature also became a vehicle for articulating an abolitionist ethics and a means of criticizing race prejudice. An instance of this can be found in the early pages of the journals that describe the infamous court case of Anthony Burns, a fugitive from slavery who had run away from Virginia to Boston, was taken in by the authorities in 1854, and sent back into bondage under the Fugitive Slave Law. In her portrayal of the incident, Forten repeatedly employs a strategy of contrasting the freedom visible in non-human nature with the fugitive’s fate. In the entry of June 3, 1854, she writes:

A beautiful day. The sky is cloudless, the sun shines warm and bright, and a delicious breeze fans my cheek as I sit by the window writing. How strange it is that in a world so beautiful, there can be so much wickedness, on this delightful day, while many are enjoying themselves in their happy homes, not poor Burns, but millions beside are suffering in chains. (66)

Less than two weeks later, on June 16, 1854, Forten reiterates such sentiments in allegorical terms:

Another delightful morning; the sky is cloudless, the sun is shining brightly; and, as I sit by the window, studying, a robin redbreast perched on the large apple tree in the garden, warbles his morning salutation in my ear;—music far sweeter than the clearer tones of the Canary birds in their cages, for they are captives, while he is free! I would not keep even a bird in bondage. (71)

Non-human nature becomes an allegory of freedom. The robin redbreast representing a natural state of being is contrasted with an emblematic caged-in “bird in bondage” representing an unnatural one. Hence, at such points, writing “Nature” becomes a means of expressing and underwriting Forten’s conviction that slavery is not only morally false but also *unnatural*.

This strategy of employing “Nature” as the source of an ideal of freedom from which the corrupt morals of the nation’s slaveholding and racist practices have departed is repeatedly utilized in the journals, and perceivable in particular in Forten’s descriptions of the sea. When considering her portrayals of the Atlantic, presented as uniquely sublime in its grandeur, as “most strange and beautiful” yet giving “constant enjoyment,” one regularly encounters the idea of an ethos of freedom innate to non-human non-discursive materialities (*Journals* 386): “[M]any mingled feelings rose to my mind. But above all others was that of perfect happiness. For liberty, glorious, boundless liberty reigned there supreme!” (88). Here, “Nature” as a *spiritual* refuge that triggers a “perfect happiness” becomes at the same time an *ethical* refuge where the concept of a “glorious, boundless” liberty is rooted, and which fuels Forten’s arguments for abolition and against prejudice (88).

In this respect, Forten’s rhetorical strategy is much closer to the strategies of antebellum African American pamphleteers such as Whipper or Ruggles than to those of the fugitive slave narrative. This becomes apparent when contrasting her employment of the pastoral with the slave narrative’s strategic pastoralism. Due to her privileged social position, Forten was able to experience and portray “a delightful ride on the sea shore” in pastoral terms unmarked by the doubled (visual) perspective of the enslaved. She could pastoralize and describe “a steamboat [...] gliding rapidly over the calm, and deep blue water of the bay, [which] seemed like a single white cloud in the azure sky” in ways that were denied formerly enslaved narrators like Douglass or Bibb in fugitive slave narratives (Forten,

Journals 82–83). Moreover, the pastoral contrast between city and country runs, in Forten, decidedly in favor of the latter. For her, the city, Philadelphia in particular, is not a safe haven on the way to freedom that it was to Henry Box Brown or William and Ellen Craft, but the place where she and her kin were refused service in ice-cream parlors (cf. *Journals* 230). The countryside, by contrast, emerges as a place where pastoral renewal from the corrupt forces of the city might be found and picturesque communions with “Nature” be imagined. Thus, although constantly arguing on behalf of the fugitives from slavery, Forten’s journal writing does not engage the forms of environmental knowledge of the fugitive slave narrative. Rather, her spiritual, aesthetic, and ethical “refuge of nature” relies on strategies found in the pamphleteering tradition and on literary modes and models of mainstream American Romanticism. In this respect, her journals also attest to the diversity of African American social and environmental experiences in the mid-nineteenth century, and of a corresponding African American environmental literary tradition.

While Forten’s writings therefore in some respects echo antebellum traditions, they also prefigure emerging facets of postwar African American environmental knowledge, as they begin to articulate such knowledge through literary spaces of home and education. Forten does not simply repeat, but “repeats with a difference,” as her intermediate texts indicate a broader development. Rather than merely creating a spiritual, aesthetic, and ethical “refuge of Nature” that expresses a personal appreciation of non-human nature, which is important in its own right, the journals also foreshadow new forms of expressing African American environmental knowledge through the themes and literary spaces of education and home.

Both home and education are central themes of Forten’s journals. The idea of home is particularly pronounced in passages that articulate Forten’s personal longing for a family and in her negotiation of a gendered mid-nineteenth-century culture of home. The journals express, on the one hand, a sense of homelessness of an individual deprived of a mother’s love and a father’s care, which becomes visible, for instance, when Forten, watching her school peers “going home,” laments that this “made me feel rather home-sick [...] as I cannot go to either of my homes” (144). On the other hand, Forten’s text often critically reflects on the values of what Barbara Welter has described as the “Cult of True Womanhood.” In this respect, her idea of what was supposedly a “good” home converges with her fondness of literature and her high regard for certain authors and literary role models. She takes carriage rides to gaze admiringly at the homes

of New England authors or becomes absorbed in watching the engravings in *The Homes of American Authors*, a popular volume of the time that shows “the beautiful homes of Irving, Longfellow, Bryant, Hawthorne, Lowell, and many other distinguished writers and orators,” finding that “[t]he ‘Homes’ are all very beautiful, fit residence for their gifted inmates” (72). Thus participating in a mid-nineteenth-century discourse on domesticity, Forten often articulates a sense of duty and adherence to the “cardinal virtues” of womanhood—expressed here by her use of the term “inmates” instead of “inhabitants”—with respect to creating proper homes for African Americans.

Significantly, Forten’s idea of home-building involves not only the creation of appropriate interior spaces for the “angel in the house,” but also the exterior surroundings of such houses as parts of home. Accordingly, the journals give more than just an “insight into the expectations of the proper uses of time in [...] [a middle class] antebellum Afro-American household,” as Jones Lapsansky suggests (3), as they often expand the idea of home *beyond* the household, thereby articulating environmental knowledge. The text presents Forten’s changing homes within the broader landscapes she encounters, for example, by extensively describing the long walks and rides as part of her experience of each new home, or by literally “opening up” the space of the domestic household to its surroundings—a move that is frequently symbolized by (self-)portrayals of the diarist writing next to opened windows. Moreover, the journals depict out-of-doors-work as an integral part of home-building. Forten relates, for instance, how she “adopted ‘Bloomer’ costume and ascended the highest cherry tree” to “[o]btain some fine fruit” (86), and embraces a gendered mid-nineteenth-century cult of flowers. To “beautify our homes” (68), flowers are gathered, taken care of, and given as presents (cf. e.g. 215–218, 221, 256–257), and act, thereby, as another facet of the general link between the house itself and its environs that is at the heart of Forten’s place-based idea of home. To her, home essentially means dwelling in a larger habitat and a specific locale.

The second theme, “education,” is equally important to Forten’s text. On the one hand, the diarist presents her own education as a process that is marked by strong ambitions as well as soul-crushing self-doubts. She reassesses her achievements from birthday to birthday and from New Year’s Day to New Year’s Day, expressing the hope that her “knowledge of my *want* of knowledge be to me a fresh incentive to more earnest, thoughtful action, more persevering study” (96, emphasis in original),”

yet at the same time frequently laments her “unworthy self” (153). On the other hand, Forten expresses a strong will to educate others. After all best remembered today for her work as a teacher, we find educational ideas throughout her writings, especially in her poetry. In a poem composed for the 1856 graduation ceremony of Salem Normal School, for example, Forten demands of herself and her classmates to “toil unwearied./ With true hearts and purpose high” (Forten, “Poem” 23). Later, she repeats the same sentiments in her speech “The Two Voices” (1858), proposing her life’s “higher destiny” to be to educate and “live for others.” With this in mind, it was only logical that Forten began her education mission as the first black teacher in Epes Grammar School and Salem Normal School in the late 1850s, and went on to become the first Northern black woman to teach freedmen in the South (44).

The journals’ account of the latter teaching engagement, i.e. of Forten’s participation in the “Port Royal Experiment,” is the most famous part of her writing as well as the most revealing section of the journals regarding Forten’s environmental knowledge. The major aim of the “Port Royal Experiment,” initiated after the Union Army had seized the North Carolina Sea Islands in 1861 to cut off Confederate supply lines, was to “prove to a sceptical public that Negroes were worthy of freedom” (Jacoway xiii). In accordance with an order from Abraham Lincoln “to establish such schools, and to direct the tuition of such branches of learning as you in your judgment shall deem most eligible” (qtd. Royster 145), Edward L. Pierce, the superintending government agent of the project, began to call for educators, whose “teaching will by no means be confined to intellectual instruction. It will include all the more important and fundamental lessons of civilization—voluntary industry, self-reliance, frugality, forethought, honesty and truthfulness, cleanliness and order. With these will be combined intellectual, moral and religious instruction” (qtd. Goldstein 48). Charlotte Forten responded to this call in the late summer of 1862, sensing an opportunity to work towards her life-long mission of “changing the condition of my oppressed and suffering people” (*Journals* 67), and, with Whittier’s help, eventually made it to the islands on October 28, 1862, as the first black agent of the Port Royal Relief Association of Philadelphia. Her engagement in teaching the North Carolina contraband, which lasted for almost nineteen months interrupted only by a short absence for health reasons, has overwhelmingly been evaluated as a success story. The period that Forten herself referred to as “a strange wild dream” has been read as a moment when she “successfully fulfils her goal of

becoming a visible activist” (Long 42), or as the story of a heroic “soldier in Canaan” and “Daughter of the Regiment” of Robert Gould Shaw’s black “Fifty-fourth Massachusetts Volunteers” (Cobb-Moore 143, 152).

Moreover, Forten’s account of her “strange wild dream” is revealing with respect to an articulation of environmental knowledge through spaces of education and home (390). Her educational work on the Sea Islands took place in a school founded by Laura Towne and Ellen Murray and based in a one-room Baptist Church.¹⁴ The official aim of this institution was, in accordance with Pierce’s scheme, to provide a broad education that sought to instill ‘civilization’ and that included such basic issues as “teach[ing] modern habits of sanitation and personal hygiene” (Goldstein 50). Beyond this official task, however, Forten pursued a more personal mission of giving “lessons meant to supplant memories of slavery with those of racial pride” that also included an idea of education as extending beyond the narrow confines of a classroom (51). This impulse becomes apparent from the very first portrayal of the schoolhouse, when she notes upon her arrival:

It [the freedmen’s school] is kept by Miss Murray and Miss Towne in the little Baptist Church, which is beautifully situated in a grove of live oaks. Never saw anything more beautiful than these trees. It is strange that we do not hear of them at the North. They are the first objects that attract one’s attention here. They are large, noble trees with small glossy green leaves. Their beauty consists in the long bearded moss with which every branch is heavily draped. This moss is singularly beautiful, and gives a solemn almost funeral aspect to the trees. (*Journals* 391)

In this passage, it is the surroundings, the situatedness of the schoolhouse in a specific non-human environment, which takes up most of the space. Not the church or its interiority lie at the center of attention, but the “oaks” first “attract attention.”

The convergence of representations of her educational efforts with depictions of non-human non-discursive materialities highlighted in this scene is characteristic of the journals’ account of the Port Royal experiment. Forten continuously describes her educational work as extending beyond the confines of a regular classroom, as she visits families living in the vicinity in the afternoons, takes walks with “the larger children [...] into the woods in search of evergreens to decorate the church” and to have “a delightful ramble and get a quantity of greens,” or holds her

lessons “out-of-doors—in the bright sunlight” (*Journals* 423, 436). In an entry dated January 12, 1863, she writes that working in this way “was delightful. Imagine our school room, dear A.—the soft brown earth for a carpet; blue sky for a ceiling, and for walls, the grand old oaks with their exquisite moss drapery. I enjoyed it very much. Even the children seemed to appreciate it, and were unusually quiet” (436–437). Thus, the text broadly inscribes Forten’s teaching activities into the Southern landscapes she encounters and which she often compares with those more familiar ones of New England. As she takes walks and carriage rides to schools or churches, and performs a considerable portion of her teaching outside, Forten’s educational mission spatially moves away from the Baptist church and a narrow curriculum, and becomes intertwined with the non-human natural environs of the Sea Islands.

This transformation of her “classroom” into a broader educational space that allows for the expression of environmental knowledge intersects with the notion of home. Generally, Forten’s efforts of building homes for the freedmen correspond with the idea of instilling “civilization” that is characteristic of the Port Royal experiment at large. They are in many ways expressions of mid-nineteenth century middle class values, whether we consider Forten’s embroidering of the freedmen’s quarters with flowers as symbols of domesticity (cf. e.g. 459–460), or the furnishing of her own “new home” in an abandoned plantation house by using “prints” and “roses” to make “home [...] look homelike” (394). Additionally, however, the journals also convey a more fundamental sense of home, as Forten’s experience on the islands turns into an act of spiritual home-building. On the one hand, she finally gains an opportunity of finding “my highest happiness in doing my duty” in teaching; on the other hand, this tutelary activity enables an identification with non-human natural environs, which are thereby turned into a home (376). Both her home-building and education activities merge with expressing environmental knowledge in a process that helps turn the Sea Islands into a personal space and that becomes especially visible in those moments in which Forten reads herself into Southern non-human surroundings that act as sheltering sanctuaries. She depicts herself, for example, in bosky places where “the branches of the live oak formed a perfect ceiling overhead” (401), or envisions non-human materialities as her sacral refuge where “[t]he whole swamp looks wonderfully like some old cathedral, with monks cloaked and hooded, kneeling around it” (457). Literary space,

created along the themes of home and education, becomes the locus where environmental knowledge, in Forten's case most often in the sense of a "refuge of nature," can be expressed.

Through this articulation of environmental knowledge, the journals also hint at a liberating transformative potential of such knowledge with respect to mid-nineteenth century gender roles and spheres. The Port Royal account in particular involves ideas of home and education that, by merging with an expression of environmental knowledge, emphasize the need for middle-class women to overcome the boundary between the "inside" and the "outside" of the house. In an inscription on the inside cover of the fourth diary, Forten becomes most explicit in this respect, when she notes that "[t]his is what the women of this country need—healthful and not too fatiguing outdoor work in which are blended the usefulness and beauty I have never seen in women" (qtd. Braxton 91). Expanding the private sphere of the house promoted through the cult of true womanhood via experiencing, relating to, and expressing a knowledge of non-human non-discursive material environments is seen as an appropriate liberating step to take for middle-class women. Thus, although Forten's embrace of a cult of flowers may also be read as suggesting an incorporation of women *into* a confining space of a narrowly conceptualized home and as adhering to dominant ideas about "woman's sphere," her environmental knowledge also suggests a move *out of* the confined domestic space of the household that could lead to a more empowered position of an "angel beyond the house."

Despite this potentially liberating effect of environmental knowledge with respect to mid-nineteenth century gender norms, it is also crucial to see how the public/private dichotomy central to such norms acted as a force that significantly shaped the articulation of environmental knowledge for an African American woman writer like Forten. In this regard, a comparison of the journals with the published accounts of Forten's Civil War experience in the South, which consist of two letters from December 12 and 19, 1862, published in Garrison's *Liberator*, and the 1864 article "Life on the Sea Islands," published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, is revealing.¹⁵

The major difference between the private and the published accounts of her experience on the Sea Islands is that the latter are marked by the creation of a specific outsider position and voice that also significantly affects Forten's expression of environmental knowledge. This is not to suggest that Forten's position in her journals is not also marked by an

in-between-ness due to her liminal status as highly educated, middle-class black woman. She was, after all, as Laura Towne, the headmistress of the school, describes in her own diary, “dat brown gal” to whom the freedmen only gradually opened up after hearing her play the piano, and apparently encountered racist sentiments from her white colleagues (qtd. Rose 161).¹⁶ Yet, her published texts, especially “Life on the Sea Islands,” display something more than the general racial in-between-ness of Forten’s diary-self, as they involve the creation of a public literary voice that celebrates and draws strength from consciously creating an outsider-position. Catering to her readership’s taste by celebrating abolitionist sentiments and her commitment to the Union, Forten, in her published accounts, strongly emphasizes her position as a philanthropic Northerner, who, as Peterson has pointed out, embraces “a cultivation of the ethnocentrically familiar” (*Doers* 193). Going public, Forten evidently realizes the importance of broadcasting the Port Royal experiment as a success. She emphasizes, for instance, that the freedmen are “certainly not the stupid, degraded people that many at the North believe them to be,” and concludes her *Atlantic*-essay by optimistically claiming that “[d]aily the long-oppressed people of these islands are demonstrating their capacity for improvement in learning and labor. What they have accomplished in one short year exceeds our utmost expectations” (“Interesting Letter” 295; “Life” 189).

Furthermore, Forten’s creation of an outsider-position through speaking with a “Union-voice” entails the adaptation of a particular gaze. By claiming that her Port Royal experience gives “an excellent opportunity here for observing the negroes,” she adopts a perspective that roots its truth-value in an in-between witnessing position and that is structurally reminiscent of the slave narrative’s rhetoric of visibility (“Interesting Letter” 295). Instead of speaking from an actual “insider”-position as was the case in the slave narrative, however, Forten exerts an intermediate gaze on the freedmen that shares similarities with a tourist gaze and that becomes formally visible through her changed use of pronouns in the published texts. Here, Forten endorses a communal “we/us” to signal her belonging to the middle-class schoolmarm and to distance herself from the contraband by referring to this group exclusively in the third person (“they/their”). Moreover, and this gives her public writing an ethnographic quality, she extensively describes the freedmen’s culture, especially their songs, from a detached perspective that simultaneously observes and exoticizes.¹⁷ Forten’s public literary persona therefore emerges as a

distancing one with respect to the formerly enslaved population, a Northern, de-personalized ethnographic voice that meant, first and foremost, to be a part of the “educational missionaries,” to belong to that group of schoolmarm referred to as “*us*—strangers in that strange Southern land” (“Life” 181, my emphasis).

The dominant lens employed in her published texts to familiarize her Northern readership with this “strange Southern land” is the picturesque, an aesthetic mode that had developed by the time Forten was writing into what Hussey, in his classic study on the picturesque, identifies as a prevalent “nineteenth century’s mode of vision” (2).¹⁸ Although the picturesque is also involved in Forten’s articulation of environmental knowledge in her journals, which are ripe with picturesque imagery as they conceptualize her “refuge of Nature,” it takes a different shape in the published pieces. Especially in “Life on the Sea Islands,” which was introduced by Whittier to the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* as “graceful and picturesque description” (“Life” 163), Forten’s use of the mode, due to her adoption of an outsider’s perspective, becomes both more formulaic and explicitly connected to a political stance. This shift in the picturesque significantly affects the articulation of environmental knowledge.

To clarify this difference between the published and private accounts, consider first the following passage, which exemplifies the kind of picturesque typically encountered in the journals:

The sweet songs of the birds awoke me. Nature is looking her loveliest on this ‘sweet and dewy morn.’ Went to the woods with the girls, in search of wild flowers. Found the sweetest violets and anemones, and a delicate little white, bell-shaped flower whose name I do not know. After a while, tired of looking for flowers, seated myself on a picturesque old stump, while my little cousins continued their search. Thoroughly enjoyed the sweet, pure air, the glorious clouds, the blossoming trees, the dewy grass, and the perfect *stillness* that reigned around me. (*Journals* 308, emphasis in original)

Here, the voice is a personal, private one of an individual’s contemplation and communion with non-human nature. The picturesque is primarily employed to the end of communicating a concept of “nature” as an intimately private space, that is, the mode becomes a means of creating an authentic confession of a nature-lover who conceptualizes and values the non-human non-discursive material highly as a spiritual, aesthetic, and ethical refuge. Similar descriptions, sometimes involving typical

picturesque symbols like the elm-tree, are part and parcel of Forten's journal writing, and are central to the text's account of the Sea Islands experience as well, especially in those passages that describe Forten's romantic walks with Seth Rogers, a physician and close friend she had already known prior to her time at Port Royal.

The depictions of non-human materialities in Forten's published texts differ significantly from those in the journals, although they employ the same aesthetic mode of the picturesque. Consider, for instance, the following two passages, one from "Life on the Sea Islands," the other from one of the letters sent to Garrison:

Then we entered a by-way leading to the plantation, where we found Cherokee rose in all its glory. The hedges were white with it; it canopied the trees, and hung from their branches its long sprays of snowy blossoms and dark, shiny leaves, forming perfect arches, and bowers which seemed fitting places for fairies to dwell in. How it gladdened our eyes and hearts! It was as if all the dark shadows that have so long hung over this Southern land had flitted away, and, in this garment of purest white, it shone forth transfigured, beautiful, forevermore. ("Life" 183)

Perhaps it may interest you to know how we have spent this day—Thanksgiving Day—here, in the sunny South. It has been truly a 'rare' day—a day worthy of October. Cool, delicious air, golden, gladdening sunlight, deep-blue sky, with soft white clouds floating over it. ("Interesting Letter" 291)

In both quotes, Forten represents her experience of non-human non-discursive materialities through the mode of the picturesque. "Cherokee roses," "snowy blossoms and dark, shiny leaves, forming perfect arches," a "deep-blue sky" and "soft white clouds" are typical elements of what Bryan Wolf calls a picturesque "middle ground" between the Burkean categories of the "terror and limitlessness" of the sublime and the "closed perfection" of the beautiful (Wolf qtd. Pohl 147). Formally, however, a major difference to the journals becomes visible in Forten's changed use of pronouns. The individualizing "I" of the journals is replaced by a communal "we" explicitly addressing a readership—"you" in the published accounts, which signals not only the general shift to the schoolmarm's position, but also a move away from conveying an individual experience of non-human nature to a more generally representative, formulaic one. As Forten, shifting from private to public, depersonalizes her Port Royal

experience to validate herself in the position of a quasi-ethnographic observer, that position in turn affects her articulation of environmental knowledge. Her use of the picturesque becomes both more formulaic and more political. The published texts employ the picturesque not to articulate an individual's idea of nature as refuge but to inscribe a Northern perspective and ethos of freedom into a Southern landscape, where "all the dark shadows that have so long hung over this Southern land" have "flitted away" ("Life" 183). Forten becomes even more pronounced in turning the picturesque into a means for articulating a Northern political stance in the letter, when she claims that "the sunlight is warm and bright, and over all shines gloriously the blessed light of freedom, freedom forevermore" ("Interesting Letter" 295). The act of morally redeeming the South from the atrocities of human bondage that becomes a decisive factor in the published accounts is therefore also realized through an altered use of the picturesque. Read against each other, Forten's texts demonstrate how the racialized and gendered social norms of mid-nineteenth century America interacted with the articulation of African American environmental knowledge. The act of expressing the relation of the human to its non-human material conditions is transformed as the private turns into the public voice of this black woman writer.

What appears problematic in this strategy, however, is the way in which Forten's changed use of the picturesque becomes at the same time complicit in racially othering the freedmen. In "Life on the Sea Islands," for example, Forten reports being

awakened by the cheerful voices of men and women, children and chickens, in the yard below. [...] On every face there was a look of serenity and cheerfulness. My heart gave a great throb of happiness as I looked at them, and thought 'They are free! so long down-trodden, so long crushed to the earth, but now in their old homes, forever free!' And I thanked God that I had lived to see this day. (165)

What may seem at first glance to be another positively connoted, innocent moment that inscribes freedom into a now slavery-free Southern landscape through a picturesque frame is racially charged. Although in this passage, too, the picturesqueness of the scene is connected to an ethos of freedom given to the formerly enslaved, the freedmen at this point become objectified as parts of that scene. Even if this apparently happens in benevolent terms—and not in racist language as, for instance, in Laura Towne's

diaries—the portrayal is more problematic when read in the context of Forten’s general convergence of the picturesque with an exoticization of the freedmen in their “semi-barbaric splendor” that is characteristic of her published texts (179). The above quote, for example, not only enumerates black “men and women” and “children,” but simultaneously aligns them with “chickens,” thereby to some extent perpetuating a racist conflation of the black body with the non-human that also lay at the core of justifications of the peculiar institution. In a sense, the distance thus created between her and the freedmen is, of course, a necessary side effect of Forten’s urge to write herself into a valid observer position that had to involve a detached gaze on the observed human and non-human elements of a Southern landscape she encountered and sought to portray. Yet, it is crucial that the chasm thus opened up between Forten and the freedmen is also played out through a shift in her environmental knowledge that occurs when her voice moves from the private to the public. What becomes visible, then, is how the public/private dichotomy itself was involved in producing racialized positions that affected the articulation of environmental knowledge in the African American writing tradition. Reading Forten in this sense demonstrates how writing publically inevitably entailed normative pressures of a thoroughly racialized episteme, which could significantly shape the production of environmental knowledge.

Forten, even though a minor literary figure in many respects, is thus a particularly revealing case for an environmentally oriented reading of the African American writing tradition for at least two reasons. First, comparing her published and private texts draws attention to the ways in which raising voice in the private and/or the public sphere could affect articulations of environmental knowledge in the black literary tradition. In this sense, the texts hint at the ways in which the expression of environmental knowledge cannot be thought apart from other social norms, models, and categories. Forten’s texts are revealing some of the broader cultural interactions of African American environmental knowledge; they show that white privilege also included the privilege of a (seemingly) unmarked position for articulating environmental knowledge and that publically expressing environmental knowledge was by no means a neutral, but always also a politically charged act for African American writers.

Moreover, Forten’s writings, especially her journals, are important as a signifying revision of antebellum African American environmental knowledge. They attest to the presence of a range of diverse forms of environmental knowledge in nineteenth-century African America and draw

attention to the ways in which writers began to “repeat” each other’s environmental knowledge “with a difference”—in Forten’s case in the sense of building on the pamphlet tradition, yet developing new literary space for expressing environmental knowledge. The journals hint at the manner in which literary space for expressing environmental knowledge began to transform in postwar African American writing through themes of education and home. Therefore, even if Forten’s writings are not representative in the way in which slave narratives by figures such as Douglass or Bibb might be, they are valuable for indicating some of the processes that began to shape a tradition of African American environmental knowledge in the decades following the Civil War.

WILLIAM WELLS BROWN: ENVIRONMENTAL KNOWLEDGE BETWEEN NOSTALGIA AND CRITIQUE

Another text that participates in such processes is William Wells Brown’s *My Southern Home: Or, the South and its People* (1880). Brown is, in many ways, an antipode to Forten. As a well-known antislavery orator and prolific professional writer, he was what Forten wished to be but never became. More significantly, Brown had been enslaved, had fled from bondage in 1834, and was in this respect a much more representative public figure than Forten in her more secluded, privileged position. In terms of their treatment in scholarship, too, Brown and Forten are on opposite ends. While Forten has attracted comparatively little attention until today, Brown has been recognized since the 1960s as a central figure of the nineteenth century and as a pioneer of African American literature and historiography.¹⁹ While the bulk of Brown scholarship today continues to focus on his novel *Clotel* (1853), more recent studies have considered a variety of aspects of Brown’s life such as temperance (Stewart (2011)), plagiarism (Sanborn (2012)), or his moving panorama (Costola (2012)), and other parts of Brown’s work including—finally more extensively—*My Southern Home* (Ernest (2008), Hooper (2009), Sinche (2012)).

Despite such differences between Forten and Brown, who met on several occasions in the 1850s, *My Southern Home* can be read as a negotiation of the same major themes found in Forten’s writings. While Brown’s last book is another instance that demonstrates how these themes of home and education came to shape the construction of literary space in ways that opened up new ways for postwar black writers to articulate environmental knowledge, *My Southern Home* is at the same time a political manifesto

that lays out Brown's vision for a post-Emancipation literary engagement with the slavery-past. Published by subscription from 1880 on,²⁰ *My Southern Home* emerged, as William Andrews notes, at

a transitional point in southern literary history—the early 1880s—when ‘the southern quest for literary authority’ (to use Lewis P. Simpson’s phrase) confronted major black and white writers with a common problem: how to authorize a brand of first-person narration largely alien to the southern literary tradition at a time when the South’s own authority, indeed, its very identity, lay very much in doubt. (“Problem of Authority” 3)

Responding to this moment of crisis, which saw the failure of Reconstruction and a strident resurgence in racism and racist violence, Brown forged a text that drew from both his personal experience of slavery, escape, and his work for a slave trader on the Missouri River, and from book-knowledge and trips he had taken into the South in the 1870s.²¹ Merging all of this into what his biographer Ezra Greenspan has called a “Janus-faced memoir that looked back to the antebellum plantation society and forward to the emergent postbellum, postplantation South” (*Reader* 384), Brown faced a challenging situation. With *My Southern Home*, he was not only writing against the vision of white new Southern writers such as George Washington Cable, Joel Chandler Harris, or Mary Boykin Chesnut, but also had to cope with an “audience of black and white readers [...] [that] had changed dramatically since the 1850s, when he had put slavery on trial in *Clotel* and *The Escape*” (Greenspan, *Life* 497).

It is crucial to note the generic hybridity and complexity through which Brown's last book responds to these challenges. On the one hand, *My Southern Home* is part of what J. Saunders Redding once praised as Brown's “more reasonable and most ambitious works” (25), namely the historiographic part of his *oeuvre*.²² In this respect, it stands in the immediate context of Brown's historical studies *The Black Man* (1863), *The Negro in the American Rebellion* (1867), and *The Rising Son* (1873), and has frequently been read as high point of his historiographic writing and as his ‘best’ work, “a fitting capstone to the literary monument he built for himself” (Andrews, “Introduction” 5). On the other hand, *My Southern Home* is also a “slave narrative after slavery”; it was, in fact, included as a typical example of the genre in Andrews's compilation (2011). Brown's text certainly falls into this category, as it extensively deals with the subject matter of slavery—roughly the first half of the book is set in the antebellum

South—and “recycles” many scenes and plot elements from Brown’s own *Narrative* (1847) and other antebellum works.²³ Moreover, facets of the antebellum slave narrative’s rhetoric are highly visible at points, for instance in the “Preface” to *My Southern Home*, where Brown clarifies that “incidents were jotted down [...] as they fell from the lips of the narrators, and in their own unadorned dialect,” thereby echoing the voice and role of an authenticating amanuensis.

Recognizing the palimpsestic nature of Brown’s text is important for deciphering the basic structure of his argument and, by extension, for tracing how *My Southern Home* expresses and employs an agrarian form of environmental knowledge through education and home. Brown’s use of environmental knowledge becomes visible not so much in concrete literary topoi and more in the book’s broader argumentative structure. That is, rather than on a diegetic level, through the construction of concrete, recurring literary spaces that function as spiritual refuge or expanded classrooms (as in Forten’s case), Brown’s environmental knowledge can be traced by considering his overall narrative strategy. To illustrate this strategy and Brown’s strategic representation of environmental knowledge, one has to consider the twofold structure of the text. While the first part of *My Southern Home* (chapters I.–XV.), set in the antebellum South has most often been taken by Brown’s contemporaries as well as subsequent generations of critics as nostalgic reminiscences, the second part (XVI.–XXIV.) contains Brown’s more explicit arguments as a political activist.

In the second part of the text, one finds Brown’s concrete suggestions concerning education and home, his explicit post-Emancipation vision for African Americans that lays out some of his ideas for changing the socio-economic conditions of African Americans. Regarding the idea of home, for example, Brown becomes particularly outspoken in Chapter XX., when he argues that “[t]he moral and social degradation of the colored population of the Southern States, is attributable to two main causes, their mode of living, and their religion” (*My Southern Home* 188). With respect to “their mode of living” Brown identifies deficiencies in creating proper homes as one of the major flaws standing in the way of post-Reconstruction race progress. He diagnoses an “entire absence of a knowledge of the laws of physiology, amongst the colored inhabitants of the South [that] is proverbial. Their small unventilated houses, in poor streets and dark alleys, in cities and towns, and the poorly-built log huts in the country, are often not fit for horses” (189). Furthermore, Brown criticizes the hygienic situation and malnutrition, when he notes that “[n]o bathing conveniences

whatever, and often not a wash dish about the house, is the rule,” and claims that “these people have no idea of cooking outside of hog, hominy, corn bread, and coffee” (189). Brown’s conclusion is therefore that “[l]ecturers of their own race, male and female, upon the laws of health, is the first move needed” (190), since, for him, an adequate home is not only the space where healthy black bodies must be produced, but also the source of industriousness and an upright morality.²⁴

Moreover, Brown’s suggestion of “lecturers of their own race” and his critique of “religion” hint at the ways in which education becomes an equally central concern in the second part of *My Southern Home*. Brown criticizes the preposterousness of many black clergymen, among whom he sees “the prevailing idea that outward demonstrations, such as shouting, the loud ‘amen,’ and the most boisterous noise in prayer” are more important than true piety, and claims that “[t]he only remedy for this great evil lies in an educated ministry” (193, 197). Additionally, he puts forward more general ideas about education, realizing that “[t]he education of the negro in the South is the most important matter that we have to deal with at present, and one that will claim precedence of all other questions for many years to come” (213). In chapter XXIV., for instance, Brown therefore proposes to install African American teachers across various educational institutions, since “all the white teachers in our colored public schools [and other institutions] feel themselves above their work” (215–216). Moreover, his aim is to establish “institutions [...] in every large city” to save and protect “the colored young women of the cities and towns at the mercy of bad colored men, or worse white men” (218). Eventually, Brown thus arrives at a radical advice to the black population of the South, in case such measures of education and home-building fail. He suggests that “[t]he South is the black man’s home; yet if he cannot be protected in his rights he should leave,” and explicitly urges “Black men [to] emigrate” at the close of *My Southern Home* (245, 248).

At first glance, this concluding imperative seems to be a glaring contradiction of the book’s very title. Turning to the first part of *My Southern Home* to reconsider Brown’s take on home and education, however, helps to unravel this potential conflict. Note, first, that assessments of the text’s first part as nostalgic reminiscences are not without foundation. In fact, a nostalgic impulse of *My Southern Home* becomes visible from the very start. The book’s title and the first paragraphs set the stage in this respect, as a detached narrative voice—Sinche suggests a “racially indeterminate narrator” (83)—begins describing a Missouri plantation called “Poplar

Farm.” The home of the Gaines family, this setting of the first, antebellum part of the book, is portrayed in soothingly picturesque terms:

Ten miles north of the city of St. Louis, in the State of Missouri, forty years ago, on a pleasant plain, sloping off toward a murmuring stream, stood a large frame-house, two stories high; in front was a beautiful lake, and, in the rear, an old orchard filled with apple, peach, pear, and plum trees, with boughs untrimmed, all bearing indifferent fruit. The mansion was surrounded with piazzas, covered with grape-vines, clematis, and passion flowers; the Pride of China mixed its oriental-looking foliage with the majestic magnolia, and the air was redolent with the fragrance of buds peeping out of every nook, and nodding upon you with a most unexpected welcome. (Brown, *My Southern Home* 1)

Complemented by an engraving on the left-hand side subtitled “Great House at Poplar Farm” that fittingly adds to the suaveness of the passage, there is not much that would hint at the traumatic experience that such a “welcoming” place would have meant for the enslaved who kept it running. This is a striking contrast, to be sure, to Brown’s antebellum work, for instance his *Narrative* (1847), where the main features of the Big House are “a bell, hung on the post near the house of the overseer” and where Brown “often laid and heard the crack of the whip, and the screams of the slave” (14, 15). *My Southern Home*, by contrast, creates a comforting historical distance from the Gaines plantation and the peculiar institution for its readership and for Brown himself (“forty years ago”) that enables him to emphasize “the lavish beauty and harmonious disorder of nature” that marked this place “in the sunny South” (1).

It is therefore not surprising that most of Brown’s contemporaries perceived his book as a nostalgic memoir by a former slave turned famous author. A review in the *New York Times*, for instance, described *My Southern Home* as the work of a “colored physician, who began life on a farm near St. Louis as a slave, [and] gossips very acceptably about the old days of coon hunts, negro jollifications, whippings, and trackings with blood-hounds, which form a staple of slave reminiscences” (qtd. Greenspan, *Life* 495). Other contemporary reviewers, too, read the book superficially as carrying an obvious idealizing message about the past, and as “the most graphic and racy work yet written on the South and its people” or as “a racy book, brim full of instruction, wit, and humor, which will be read with delight” (qtd. Andrews, “Introduction” 5). That the nostalgia of *My Southern Home* was so readily recognized and emphasized

is understandable considering the cultural climate of the 1880s and the fact that Brown's text provides ample ammunition for such interpretations. On the one hand, it was in vogue to reminisce about the olden times in general and the South in particular at a time that saw a "shift in the national mood toward a politics of reconciliation" and a corresponding "wave of popular nostalgia for romanticized images of life on the plantation before the Civil War" (Greenspan 494; Andrews, "Introduction" 7). On the other hand, Brown's text lends itself well to such readings due to its humorous tone and its use of a cast of characters that must have seemed familiar to a broad audience. As Andrews summarizes, the figures populating *My Southern Home* include "a number of southern types—the indulgent master, the pompous preacher, the witty slave, the beautiful quadroon, the hypocritical slave trader, and others—along with some of the more picturesque elements of traditional southern local color, such as slave songs, corn-shucking verbal games, and hoodoo practices" ("Introduction" 8). Combine this with Brown's at times overly reconciliatory gestures towards an old Southern aristocracy, and it is not difficult to see why contemporaries assessed *My Southern Home* the way they did. A former slave claiming in the 1880s that "there was considerable truth in the oft-repeated saying that the slave 'was happy'" could hardly expect to be taken as anything other than compromisingly nostalgic (Brown, *Home* 91).

Readings that stop here nevertheless gravely misread Brown. The nostalgic, picturesque descriptions, often accompanied by equally nostalgic visual illustrations that seem to be striving for a mere simplifying harmony are only one side of Brown's twofold strategy. The other side, a critique that undermines and ironizes the nostalgic impulse can be found in Brown's enslaved characters' trickster skills and their environmental knowledge.

In this respect, note, first, how the antebellum part of Brown's work introduces the notion of slavery as a "school" through its seemingly nostalgic renditions of the old South. For Brown, this notion, first introduced into African American writing by Elizabeth Keckley and later prominently put forward by Booker T. Washington, primarily meant that enslaved African Americans gained an ability to engage effectively in tricksterism and power plays with whites. According to *My Southern Home*, "[s]lavery has had the effect of brightening the mental powers of the negro to a certain extent" and has produced in the enslaved a "[w]it with which to please his master, or to soften his anger when displeased" (28, 52). The enslaved became, in Brown's view, a witty trickster who often used their

skills to “get rid of punishment” and to mask their true intentions in power plays with the white master—a hypothesis that *My Southern Brown* seeks to substantiate through a variety of characters such as Cato, Pompey, Nancy, or the conjurer Dinkie (91).²⁵

While the centrality of such power plays has often been noted, for instance, by Andrews, who suggests that “the slaves profanely redefine the very language of authority” (“Problem of Authority” 12), it is important to see that Brown’s notion of a “school of slavery” not only involves trickster skills but also an articulation of the formerly enslaved population’s relation to Southern non-human natural environments. Brown’s tricksters express not only black verbal skills but also a place-based, agrarian form of environmental knowledge, the expression (but not acquiring) of which, a look at Brown’s earlier writings suggests, had been largely unavailable to himself in an antebellum context. This changes significantly with his hybrid trickster narrative, if we consider, for instance, the anecdote of a “Coon Hunt” (*Home* 8–11). This story of a city man’s mishap relates how one of the Gaines’ visitors, a Mr. Sarpee from St. Louis, who “had never seen anything of country life,” eagerly participates in a “coon hunt” with “Ike, Cato, and Sam; three of the most expert coon-hunters on the farm” (9). As the dogs pick up a scent, Sarpee, ignoring the enslaved’s warning (“polecat, polecat; get out de way” (9)), moves forward in an attempt to shoot his prey, which attacks him “in a manner that caused the young man to wish that he, too, had retreated with the boys” (9). Covered in “an odor he had never before inhaled” that forces him to sleep in the barn, the incident triggers “a hearty laugh” among the enslaved on the Gaines plantation (10). In fact, Brown’s narrator claims that “[n]o description of mine [...] can give anything like a correct idea of the great merriment of the entire slave population on ‘Poplar Farm,’ caused by the ‘coon hunt’” (11).

Thus, the episode, as humorous and nostalgic as it may seem, also writes the enslaved into the position of skilled countrymen. Ike, Cato, and Sam are revealed as “experts” who work the Southern soils, thereby entering into their own relationships with the land, as the use of their vernacular suggests. If one reads the name of the “city man” Mr. Sarpee not as “sharp” but in the sense of “sapientia” (knowledge), the scene becomes recognizable as Brown’s juxtaposition of two forms of knowledge. A supposedly ‘civilized’ white man, who “did talk French to hissef when de ole coon peppered him,” is contrasted to and ridiculed by the knowledgeable black farmers and their vernacular. Sarpee’s ‘civilized’ knowledge is defeated by the agrarian environmental knowledge of the enslaved of the

land; he escapes neither the attack nor the subsequent laughter that expresses a temporary unsettling of power relations and that “fitted the young man for a return home to the city” (11). Thus, even though formally disempowered, the enslaved depicted in Brown’s text gain a degree of agency through their environmental knowledge.

Another instance that demonstrates the ways in which such knowledge became involved in the enslaved’s tricksterism may be found in Chapter V. This chapter describes a series of events that unfolds after the Gaines return home from a trip to the North, “filled with new ideas which they were anxious to put into immediate execution” (46). One of their new acquisitions is a “plow, which was to take the place of the heavy, unwieldy one then in use,” but which turns out to be an utterly useless tool and is “broken beyond the possibility of repair” by the ones who actually have the skills and knowledge to run the place, the enslaved black farmers (46, 48). Another “new idea” concerns the making of “some new cheese” the Gaines had tasted at a Northern farmhouse (49). After Aunt Nancy, “the black *mamma* of the place,” purports her ability to fabricate such a product, a cheese-press is ordered and a process worth remembering begins under Nancy’s supervision (49, emphasis in original). First she demands a sheep to be killed as a “runnet,” then ‘discovers’ that, in fact, a calf was needed instead, which is slaughtered the next day. As this process triggers a good laugh among the enslaved, Nancy reveals her true scheme: “You niggers tink you knows a heap, but you don’t know as much as you tink. When de sheep is killed, I knows dat you niggers would git the meat to eat. I knows dat” (50). Her knowledge of obtaining produce off the land, of living within and off her material surroundings, becomes part of a power play with the Gaines. She effectively combines her skills to work with what the Southern land has to offer with a trickster knowledge that helps her secure an at least slightly better life for her fellow-enslaved. Thus, both incidents hint at the ways in which Brown’s enslaved characters, by becoming the true people of the land they worked, often entered into more complex power relations. What Brown demonstrates is not only how a certain amount of social power could be drawn from acquiring an environmental knowledge that coincided with a trickster’s wit, but ultimately also what bell hooks suggests in “Earthbound,” namely that “[w]e were indeed a people of the earth” (33).

This is not to suggest that Brown’s depictions of power plays that involved environmental knowledge omit the complicity of non-human non-discursive materialities in the trauma caused by the peculiar

institution. He draws attention, for instance, to the hardships experienced during flights through a threatening wilderness, and gives one particular example at the beginning of *My Southern Home* that emblematically expresses how social relations under slavery were acted out by harnessing non-human nature as an oppressive tool (cf. 4–6). The episode describes how one of the Gaines’ visitors mistakes a young, fair-skinned enslaved individual named Billy—possibly modelled after Brown himself²⁶—as Dr. Gaines’ son. After the stranger departs, Billy is forced to undergo a procedure in which he “was seen pulling up grass in the garden, with bare head, neck and shoulders, while the rays of the burning sun appeared to melt the child” (5). This “roasting” of Billy, as Brown calls it, and the episode as a whole symbolize the ways in which non-human non-discursive materialities were made complicit in the suffering of the enslaved population and moreover emphasize the moral faults of those masters who fathered enslaved children. Despite the fact that the enslaved were holding a valuable environmental knowledge that could be empowering in some ways, Brown therefore also puts emphasis on the traumatic side that conflating the black body with the non-human entailed.

Brown’s overarching goal in describing an environmental knowledge gained under slavery, however, is to reconnect a postwar black population of the South with their “Southern Home.” The nostalgic but at the same time very nuanced picture Brown draws of the antebellum South and its social relations, customs, and superstitions, entails a celebration of the black farmer and his agrarian environmental knowledge, and seeks to recreate this section as the black man’s home. For Brown, black Southerners are powerful “hewers of wood, and drawers of water” (91); they are the people of the land, “the manual laborer[s] of that section” (246). It is their intimate agrarian environmental knowledge, first gained under slavery, that has transformed this section of the country into their home, and which, he suggests, they can and must live off after emancipation as well. Accordingly, the second part of Brown’s book has its most optimistic moments in the lengthy depictions of those who “sell their cotton or other produce,” and who “do their trading” and earn their living with the help of working the southern soils (167, cf. esp. chapter XVIII.). In this respect, Brown’s environmental knowledge, like Forten’s, is marked by a pastoral rather than an antipastoral impulse, insofar as it acknowledges value in the rural in opposition to the moral corruption of the city.

Against this background, the meaning of Brown’s statement on leaving or staying in the South that seems to be standing against the title of his

book can be re-evaluated. If it is in any way possible for Southern African Americans to live their country life in this section, Brown suggests, this would be the preferable option. If not, he sees the only way to exert pressure against the backlash against Emancipation during post-Reconstruction in “starving” the South, since

[t]wo hundred years have demonstrated the fact that the negro is the manual laborer of that section, and without him agriculture will be at a stand-still.

The negro will for pay perform any service under heaven, no matter how repulsive or full of hardship, He will sing his old plantation melodies and walk about the cotton fields in July and August, when the toughest white man seeks an awning. Heat is his element. He fears no malaria in the rice swamps, where a white man’s life is not worth sixpence.

Then, I say, leave the South and starve the whites into a realization of justice and common sense. Remember that tyrants never relinquish their grasp upon their victims until they are forced to. (*Home* 246–247)

Read against Brown’s celebration of an agrarian African American environmental knowledge in the first part of *My Southern Home*, Brown’s “black men, emigrate” (248) does therefore not necessarily contradict his idea of a “Southern Home” for himself and his brethren. The most significant part of his advice is, after all, that “[w]hether the blacks emigrate or not [...] [they should] keep away from the cities and towns. Go into the country. Go to work on farms” (247). He proposes that the environmental knowledge blacks have gained through the “school of slavery” is not only their most valuable starting capital through which they may strategically exert pressure on a re-ascending Southern white supremacist aristocracy, but also that which may provide African Americans with an identity even if they leave the South. Ultimately, Brown seeks to create a *sense* of home, a new relation to a traumatic rural space, by recovering a shared black history of environmental knowledge that can provide rootedness, mobility, and racial solidarity. Only by recovering a common history will there be a unified and empowering African American identity, will there be the cooperation that may “*unite* the race in their moral, social, intellectual, and physical improvements” (252, emphasis in original). It is, in Brown’s view, reclaiming a common Southern home and environmental knowledge that is vital to writing such a history and that can provide a basis for a post-Emancipation African America.

If Forten's reconfiguration of literary space for expressing environmental knowledge works via creating specific literary topoi, Brown's environmental knowledge is therefore primarily articulated and strategized through the historicizing interplay between the two parts of his book. Forten expresses environmental knowledge through diegetic literary space, by merging the spaces of the household and the classroom with picturesque portrayals of "nature" in order to articulate relations to non-human non-discursive materialities. Brown, on the other hand, rewrites an agrarian environmental knowledge as part of a historiography that is supposed to give African American Southerners a sense of home and thereby, a future. Both, however, are thereby representative of a significant transformation within postwar African American writing more generally, as they articulate their environmental knowledge through literary spaces of education and home. Their texts indicate a broader shift, as environmental knowledge finds expression not through a generic "loophole" like the Underground Railroad, but gains the potential to move to the center of attention, as its articulation converges with two prominent themes of postwar African America.

NOTES

1. Texts such as Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends* (1857), Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859), Delany's *Blake* (1859–1862), or Collins's *The Curse of Caste* (1865), acted as "a sort of bridge venture between slave narrative forms and the presumably more complex and race-conscious kinds of black literature that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century" (Madera 24). On the long-noted close relation between the (early) African American novelistic tradition and the slave narrative, see Reid-Pharr esp. 137–140; or Levine, "Novel."
2. Andrews notes that, "[b]etween 1866 and the publication of *Up from Slavery* in 1901, fifty-four more book-length narratives by formerly enslaved Americans, 1.5 narratives on average annually, appeared" (*Slave Narratives* viii). This proliferation notably occurs not only in the male but—beginning with Keckley's *Behind the Scenes* (1868) and continuing in texts by Veney (1889), Delaney (1891), A. Smith (1893), Drumgoold (1898), or Taylor (1902)—especially also in the female African American life writing tradition. On black women's postwar slave narratives, see Andrews et al. 1–22; and *Slave Narratives* xix.
3. Byerman/Wallinger suggest that writing of "the Black Women's Era" is characterized by a brand of African American domestic sentimentalism that focuses on the theme of home and exhibits "didactic elements," writes

- against “prejudices and discrimination,” and advocates “a retreat into the private and religious” (193, 194). Many of these works, by writers such as Frances Ellen Harper, Pauline Hopkins, and Anna Julia Cooper have been republished in the *Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers* series over the past decades. Cf. Peterson, “Literary Reconstruction”; Byerman/Wallinger 193–205; McKay; Foster.
4. Although his plans were never realized, Douglass had attempted to establish an industrial college for black youths in the 1850s (cf. Stepto, *Home* 112). Henry Bibb, too, whose second wife opened a school in Canada (cf. Horton/Horton 133), had engaged in an education enterprise with his Canada-based newspaper, the *Voice of the Fugitive*. Like writers of slave narratives, antebellum pamphleteers like Whipper, Easton, or Ruggles emphasized the importance of education. Even earlier, Hosea Easton’s father, James Easton, had established one of the first African American manual labor colleges (cf. Price/Stewart 8–9).
 5. About 70 schools and colleges were established in the Reconstruction period, many supported by the church, e.g. by African Methodist Episcopal, AME Zion, or Baptist denominations (cf. Hoffmann 134). See generally on the history of African American education during Reconstruction and Post-Reconstruction Hoffman 119–140; Anderson 1–32; Morris; Goldstein 47–65; Royster 308–310.
 6. As the mainstream book-market was virtually inaccessible for African American authors during Reconstruction and Post-Reconstruction, periodicals published by literary or religious organizations such as the AME or Baptist Churches attained a vital role in the development of black literature. Frances Ellen Harper, for instance, published much of her fiction in the *Christian Recorder* of the AME, and Pauline Hopkins likewise chose various church magazines as venues for her fiction before founding her own publishing company in the early twentieth century. Cf. on the rise and didactic purposes of African American magazines in the postwar-decades Peterson, “Literary Reconstruction”; Foster; and Levine “African American Novel.”
 7. Technically, her diary-keeping lasted 38 years, namely from May 1854 to July 1892. However, since Forten kept her diary much more sporadically after the Civil War, my focus will primarily be on books two, three, and four, which cover the years 1857 to 1864. Forten’s entries appear most regularly and most cohesively in these volumes.
 8. On the Forten family history, see Billington 12–22; on the Forten-sisters and their work, see Oden. For accounts of Charlotte Forten’s later life and her marriage to the Presbyterian minister Francis Grimké, cf. Braxton 95–97; Rodier; or Lerner 268–272. In the following, I will follow Stevenson’s example of not using the compound name Forten-Grimké for the period before Forten married in 1878.

9. Some scholars have been very critical of Forten's elitist position, see Long 40; Jones Lapsansky 9–10. Against such assessments that criticize Charlotte Forten's seeming inactivity despite her privileged position, Peterson argues that one possible explanation for Forten's only moderate success may lie in the fact that the "social ideology of her class [...] discouraged female public self-expression and sought to contain women within the domestic circle of true womanhood" (*Doers* 178). Other factors that should be taken into account when evaluating Forten's (minor) publishing career are her financial problems as well as her chronic illness.
10. After her death, Forten's husband Francis Grimké gave her manuscripts to Anna Julia Cooper, the famous principal of Washington D.C.'s M Street High School. Cooper, who had organized "salon-style weekend evenings" at the Grimké home in D.C. (cf. Rodier 115), made typescripts and collected material in her volume *Life & Writings of the Grimké Family*. The material can be found in the *Anna Julia Cooper Papers* and the *Grimké Family Papers*, located at the Moorland-Spangarn Research Center at Howard University in Washington, D.C. More archival material on Charlotte Forten can be found at the Salem State College archives, the Peabody Essex Museum, and the archives of the Penn Center (cf. Royster 300).
11. In the following, references will be to this edition.
12. Among those are e.g. Forten's feminism (Stevenson; Jones Lapsansky), her chronic illness (Long) and family history (Oden), the style and rhetoric of the journals (Xavier), and their status as private records that have become public documents (Peterson, *Doers* 176, 183–185; Cobb-Moore).
13. While ecocritical studies do not mention Forten so far, a few treatments in African American Studies fleetingly comment on Forten's depictions of non-human nature. Peterson, for instance, notes that Forten's writings are "shot through with picturesque descriptions of landscapes" which she reads primarily "as an indirect strategy of self-expression that would allow her to write the self without going insane" (*Doers* 190, 187). Others (Cobb-Moore 143; Braxton 92–93; Harris 131; Rodier 109) briefly mention Forten's relation to non-human nature, but none of these readings focuses on non-human environments as a major aspect of her texts.
14. "Penn School," established in September 1862 and named in honour of Quaker activist William Penn, became a home to its founders, Laura Towne and Ellen Murray. Later, the school became part of Armstrong's Hampton Institute and was renamed "Penn Normal, Industrial, and Agricultural School." In 1974, "Penn Center" became a National Historic Landmark District. See e.g. Royster 152; Charters 131.
15. Yet another account of Forten's Port Royal experience, "New Year's Day on the Islands of South Carolina," was published in Lydia Maria Child's

- The Freedmen's Book* (1865). This text hardly diverges from the *Atlantic Monthly*-essay, which is regarded as Forten's most important publication.
16. Most scholars have noted Forten's liminal status, as she could identify neither with the freedmen she meant to help nor with the group of (white) schoolmarms, see Braxton 91–93; Stevenson 44; and Royster 146. In her journals, she hints at the racism she had to cope with on the Sea Islands, when she describes that living together with the other teachers was marked by an atmosphere of “kindness,” but laments that “congeniality I find not at all in this house” (*Journals* 403).
 17. Among those who have read Forten as an ethnographer are Peterson, *Doers*; and Rodier. In the journals as well as in “Life on the Sea Islands,” Forten records “shouts” and acts as an early collector of folklore. It is no surprise, therefore, that she was asked to review the pioneering folklore collection *Slave Songs of the United States* (1864), see Harris 138; Charters 132–133, 172.
 18. By the mid-nineteenth century, the idea and vocabulary of the picturesque had become deeply engrained in European and U.S. American cultural and artistic traditions. Turned into an “aesthetic concept of bewildering contentiousness” by eighteenth-century European theorists such as William Gilpin, Uvedale Price, Richard Payne Knight, or Edmund Burke, the picturesque also gained wide currency in nineteenth-century American discourses on painting, (travel) literature, and landscape art (M. Andrews viii). See generally the classic study by Hussey; more recently M. Andrews. On the U.S. history of the picturesque, cf. Nash, esp. chapters 3, 4; and Pohl's chapter “Nature and Nation.”
 19. Since the 1960s, scholars such as Andrews, Stepto, Yellin, Ernest, Greenspan and Levine have written extensively about Brown. Moreover, critical editions and compilations of his works have appeared (e.g. Garrett/Robbins (2006); Greenspan (2014)), and Brown has been included in major anthologies, all of which has helped establish the image of Brown as an important literary figure of nineteenth-century African America, ranking second only to Douglass. On Brown's reception, see Sekora; Andrews, “Introduction”; and Madera 25.
 20. Advertised in the *Christian Recorder* of the AME as “the great inside view of the South” and briefly reviewed in the *Boston Sunday Herald* of May 16, 1880, *My Southern Home* was published by A.G. Brown (A.G. referring to Brown's wife, Anna Gray) and went through four editions until 1884; there is no surviving manuscript. Cf. Greenspan, *Reader* 388–389; and Farrison 446.
 21. In this regard, Brown is an excellent example, as his person embodies a connection between antebellum and post-Emancipation African American environmental knowledge. He made four journeys to the South during Reconstruction, the one that most immediately influenced *My Southern*

Home being his winter tour of 1879–1880, which took him to Tennessee, Alabama, and Virginia. According to Greenspan, Brown “made inquiries among local inhabitants and officials, visited local families, read the local press, attended festivities and services, and surveyed living conditions,” most of which he worked in some form into his 1880 book (*Reader* 388). See also Greenspan, *Reader* 386–388; Farrison 448; Madera 29.

22. Scholars of African American historiography often mention Brown in one breath with historians such as William C. Nell or George W. Williams. His role in this context has been described by Ernest as that of “a transitional historian, working to bring African American identity and experience into the theatre of authoritative history but still very much a practitioner of the poetics of the discourse of distrust” (*Liberation Historiography* 333). On Brown and historiography, cf. also D. Mitchell 93–126.
23. As various critics have noted, Brown’s technique in *My Southern Home* and in many other texts is one of “bricolage” and “literary pastiche” that draws from both his own and other sources (Levine, “Introduction” 6). On Brown’s technique, which has sometimes been criticized as (near-)plagiarism, see Raimon 63–87; Cohen; DuCille; Ernest, *Resistance and Reformation* 20–54. On the intertextuality of *My Southern Home*, which employs textual and graphic material Brown had previously used, see e.g. Sinche 85–87; Farrison 446–452; Greenspan, *Life* 494–497, *Brown: A Reader* 384–388; Ernest, “Strategic Performances” 71–73. On the particularly revealing example of “Negro dentistry,” which recurs throughout Brown’s works, see Garrett/Robbins 461–470.
24. In this respect, Brown presents a biopolitical vision of managing the African American population that converges with his temperance activism. A proper conceptualization of home, for Brown, is a means of protecting blacks from “the immoderate use of wine [...] [which] debilitates the brain and nervous system, paralyzes the intellectual powers, impairs the functions of the stomach, produces a perverted appetite for a renewal of the deleterious beverage, or a morbid imagination, which destroys man’s usefulness” (*Home* 241).
25. In this context, note that Brown had presented *himself* as such a witty trickster in his antebellum *Narrative* (1847); he himself had gone through the “school of slavery.” As his autobiographical “I” disappears in *My Southern Home*, and is replaced by the characters mentioned above, a significant shift occurs. Where, in the *Narrative*, Brown’s author-narrator had expressed regret for some of his morally questionable actions, and had stressed “that slavery makes its victims lying and mean” (57), the tricksterism of the characters in the 1880 book—although involving precisely the same moral dilemmas—is celebrated throughout, with a twinkle in Brown’s eye. In this sense, he revises not merely his own texts, but also his persona as a narrator.

26. Greenspan traces the history of this scene through several works of Brown's *oeuvre*, suggesting that it "presumably derives from Brown's personal experience" (*Reader* 219; cf. also Candela 20). Thus, the episode is another example that demonstrates the collage-like character of Brown's writing as a whole and the difficulties of determining the boundaries between Brown's own experience and his borrowings.

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Transforming Vision: The Pastoral, the Georgic, and Evolutionary Thought in Booker T. Washington

Until today, Booker T. Washington remains one of the most controversial figures in African American history. Although widely celebrated in his own time as an educator and as the new national “Negro leader” succeeding Frederick Douglass, Washington did not attract much scholarly attention until he was re-introduced into the critical canon in the 1960s and 1970s through the work of scholars such as August Meier and Louis Harlan.¹ Since then, Washington has been received as a more complex figure. He has been the subject of various studies, and has gained a prominent status in scholarship and in the American public mind, especially over the past decade, as some have drawn comparisons between Washington and 44th President of the United States Barack Obama. Throughout the twentieth- and into the twenty-first century, Washington and his work have been both praised and excoriated. From the criticisms that had been waged against his education policies during his lifetime—most famously in the controversy with W.E.B. Du Bois—up until today, he has, in the words of his most recent biographer, kept “returning to haunt some and inspire others” (Smock 14). Washington has been “hero as well as villain” (4), as some have lauded him as extraordinarily skilled educator and “builder of a civilization” (Scott and Stowe), while others have chastised him, politically, as an “accommodator” instrumental in establishing Jim Crow, and, literarily, as a “buffoonish teller of ‘darky stories’ to condescending whites” (Moses xiv).

Over the past two decades, a growing ecocritical discourse on Booker T. Washington attests to the potential and viability of linking African American studies with environmentally oriented literary criticism, as “rethink[ing] Washington’s politics from an ecological perspective, we find a figure more dynamic than the sycophantic boogeyman he became to the radical Du Bois” (Claborn 19). Thus, beyond the still continuing general debate over his political and historical legacy, Washington is more and more being recognized as an environmental writer, and is, as I argue in this chapter, significant in the context of African American literary environmental knowledge. Apart from a handful of (earlier) readings of Washington as pastoralist one finds, by now, a growing number of ecocritical treatments, for example those by Hicks (2006), Grabovac (2015), and Claborn (2018).² Both Hicks and Grabovac turn to *Up from Slavery* (1901) to propose Washington’s inclusion in the ecocritical canon. While the former identifies him as a representative of “an early twentieth-century ecocriticism of color” (Hicks 203), the latter reads Washington more broadly in the context of the environmental humanities, suggesting that his “denigration of the liberal arts as a kind of fetishism [...] still resonates in the different context of today’s neoliberal university” (4). A particularly relevant ecocritical contribution in the context of my reading, due to its (partial) focus on *Working with the Hands* and the georgic mode is the first chapter of John Claborn’s recent *Civil Rights and the Environment* (2018). His contribution reframes Washington’s “literary production within the alternative history of colonial-era ecology, marronage, and slave rebellion” and analyzes his “evocation of ecological agencies” (21). Claborn approaches Washington through a “method of eco-historicism” to propose that a “relation between these ecological agencies and marronage sometimes surfaces in the autobiographies, but more often it is only partly conscious or displaced, veiled in the text’s eco-unconscious” (20, 21). His overall argument is that Washington transplants a tradition of maroonage to the “inside [of] the plantation system,” thereby developing alternative forms of black agriculture (29).

This chapter provides an alternative angle on Washington’s autobiographies,³ as I focus on *Up from Slavery* (1901) and its (still understudied) sequel *Working with the Hands* (1904) to demonstrate how Washington signifies on environmental knowledge of his African American literary predecessors and how his (pastoral and georgic) environmental knowledge relates to turn-of-the-century evolutionary thought to negotiate his vision for African American uplift.⁴ Such a reading contributes to previous

scholarly explorations in two main ways. First, by reassessing Washington through (Foucauldian) environmental knowledge to reveal additional facets of his environmentalism, especially regarding *Working with the Hands*. In this respect, my reading shifts the focus from a contextualization within the tradition of maroonage in previous treatments (Claborn) to Washington's transformation of a strategic pastoral of the fugitive slave narrative into an African American georgic. Second, I take up a discourse so far not discussed in ecocriticism on Washington, by considering Washington's environmentalism in the context of evolutionary thought. Although evolutionism and Social Darwinism have been a theme in Washington scholarship (e.g. in studies by Flynn 1969; Williams 1996; or Moses 2004), an ecocritical reading that highlights how Washington's environmentalism is part of his own (but also subversively resists some dominant claims of a broader discourse of) evolutionary thought is missing so far. Before turning to Washington's transformation of the strategic pastoral of the slave narrative, the georgics of *Working with the Hands*, and the ways in which Washington's environmental knowledge relates to evolutionary thought, I will briefly trace some of the broader shifts in the spatial, visual, and biopolitical parameters for Washington's environmental knowledge.

THE CHANGED PARAMETERS OF WASHINGTON'S ENVIRONMENTAL KNOWLEDGE

Scholars generally acknowledge that Booker T. Washington's autobiographies provide a revision of the fugitive slave narrative. Primarily with respect to *Up from Slavery*, many have noted that he employs a characteristic self-reliant voice, formally breaks with a "white envelope" of the antebellum genre, and that his work is, in Robert B. Stepto's words, an "authenticating narrative [...] in which the various authenticating texts are controlled and manipulated by the author" (35). With respect to environmental knowledge, too, Washington's autobiographical texts perform revisions. I want to take a moment to trace three signifying revisions pertaining to the spatial, visual, and biopolitical dimensions of environmental knowledge, as they signal the changed parameters for Washington's environmental knowledge, i.e. for his revision of the strategic pastoral of the slave narrative and a shift to the georgic.

With respect to the spatial, Washington's autobiographies (and his writing and work more generally) can be read as expressions of a post-Emancipation vision for African America that continues a broad revision of literary space. Like Forten and Brown, Washington centrally deals with the themes of education and home in ways that potentially opened up new literary space for expressing environmental knowledge. On the one hand, Washington, after all a symbol of African American "industrial education," employs ideas and spaces of education in virtually all of his writings, sometimes linking them with depictions of non-human non-discursive materialities. On the other hand, he frequently makes the building of appropriate homes that interact with such materialities in the South his explicit theme. In *Working with the Hands*, for example, Washington claims to teach "Lessons in Home-Making," and aims to create "homes that are worthy [of] the name," e.g. by incorporating "courses in Domestic Science into the regular curriculum" of Tuskegee (98, 100). Thus, (literary) spaces of home and education are just as central in this writer as in other authors of the postwar decades like Forten and Brown, or in writers of the "Black Women's Era" such as Harper, Dunbar Nelson, and Hopkins (Byerman and Wallinger 193). Washington's texts, in this respect, provide additional evidence for a broad transformation of postwar African American environmental knowledge through reconfigurations of literary space.

Regarding the visual, Washington's writing revises both the portrayal of southern visual regimes and the rhetoric of visibility of the antebellum slave narrative; it involves a fundamentally altered network of looks that changes the relation of the narrating observer to a depicted visual regime. While the antebellum, formerly enslaved observer-narrator primarily showed how the visual violence of a disciplining and punishing gaze of the master was acting on the African American enslaved body (and thereby on her/himself) as an *object*, Washington's observer-narrator becomes the *subject* of a black disciplinary gaze within a portrayed visual regime. We see a twofold shift: first, Washington's texts observe an (at least formally) free instead of an enslaved population; secondly, they represent a shift from looking and *describing* a panoptic disciplinary regime to looking as *performing* disciplinary observation. The observing witness of the fugitive slave narrative, in Washington's writing, turns into a black *disciplinary* observer.

At points, *Up from Slavery* and *Working with the Hands* therefore read like the work of an ethnographer who examines, registers, and meticulously documents the development of the population of the Black Belt.

Both texts repeatedly emphasize the need to “get a farther insight into the real life of the people,” to explore their habits, customs and conditions (*Up* 62). Accordingly, Washington extensively describes his excursions through rural Alabama, “visiting towns and country districts in order to learn the real conditions and needs of the people,” to the end of “investigat[ing] at closer range the history and environment of the people around us” (*Working* 12, 15). He focuses on diet, living conditions, and homes (cf. e.g. *Up* 54; *Working* 13, 37, 162), and often portrays himself as an embedded observer who “ate and slept with the people, in their little cabins,” thus engaging in a form of ethnographic fieldwork (*Up* 54). In this lies the performance of a basic shift with respect to the observer of the antebellum fugitive slave narrative. An observer who becomes himself the bearer of an analytical, objectifying gaze on the freedman’s body replaces the formerly enslaved witness, who had portrayed the atrocities of slavery’s visual regimes on the enslaved body.

This perspectival shift in Washington to acting as the observing subject of an educational, ethnographic gaze of a postwar African American disciplinary visual regime also alters what I have called the slave narrative’s “rhetoric of visibility.” In contrast to the “eye of the slave,” which was largely circumscribed by the patronizing influence of abolitionists in the antebellum genre, Washington’s gaze on the emancipated population of the South becomes more independent as the “eye of the black educator.” Although formally starting out as a slave narrative with the stock “I was born a slave,” *Up from Slavery* and *Working with the Hands* can be more self-confident in their ways of looking than their literary predecessors (*Up* 7). Especially in *Up from Slavery*, Washington plays with black autobiographical conventions, as he appropriates the eye of the once enslaved black eye-witness in a more determined way. *Up from Slavery* is therefore not only, as Stepto has suggested, an “authenticating narrative” that has a self-reliant voice as it plays with the fugitive slave narrative tradition (35), but also transforms the antebellum genre by fundamentally altering what was once the linguistic means of authenticating the enslaved’s visual experience, a rhetoric of visibility. The “I have seen” of the slave narrative, legitimized through the patronizing influence of abolitionists, re-emerges in Washington as the disciplinary “I have observed, documented, examined” of a black educator’s gaze on emancipated African Americans, legitimized through the project of race uplift.

This educational gaze hints at the ways in which Washington’s texts are also revisions of the biopolitical, as this practice of vision becomes one

facet of a new form of biopolitics concerning the post-emancipation African American population. Washington's biopolitical agenda can be traced along the two general lines Foucault has identified with respect to the emergence of biopower in the nineteenth century (cf. *Will* 139). It involves, first, disciplinary techniques that focus on the individual black body, and, secondly, pertains to the body of the black population as a whole.⁵ Regarding the former, consider the techniques that characterize the system Washington sets up at Tuskegee, which is based on meticulous examination and documentation. In *Up from Slavery*, Washington describes how

the organization [at Tuskegee] is so thorough that the daily work of the school is not dependent upon the presence of any one individual. The whole executive force, including instructors and clerks, now numbers eighty-six. This force is so organized and subdivided that the machinery of the school goes on day by day like clockwork. (118)

Tuskegee functions like a Foucauldian disciplinary institution. It works like "machinery," is spatially compartmentalized, temporally regulated as it runs like "clock-work," and marked by the decentralization of modern power epitomized in panopticism, as it is "not dependent upon the presence of any one individual" to function smoothly (118). It is no coincidence that Tuskegee and Hampton, the school that Washington had first attended and after which his own "Institute" was modeled, were run in a quasi-military spirit, considering that the founder of Hampton and its education model, General Samuel C. Armstrong, was a man of the military. Although the aim was not, as Henry Romeyn, another former soldier who worked at Hampton between 1878 and 1881, stated, "to make soldiers of our students, nor to create a warlike spirit," military techniques were used to "create ideas of neatness, order, system, obedience" (qtd. J. Anderson 58). In this sense, the Tuskegee-Hampton complex is a prime example of a broader process Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish* (cf. "Part Three"), through which the military techniques of drill and examination spread into educational institutions that aimed to produce "docile bodies." In Washington's case, the techniques were meant to produce docile *black* bodies and to control and foster their usefulness as individuals and collectively to the end of solving the "negro problem." Tuskegee, read in this light, was not only a "machine" in the sense in which W.E.B. Du Bois later referred to it, meaning the powerful conglomerate of Washington and his allies (cf. *Dusk* 36–41), but also a prototypical

“disciplinary machine” that sought to take control of individualized freedmen.

Washington’s disciplinary gaze and methods, however, strove not simply for the production of useful and docile black individuals but ultimately did so to the end of manufacturing a productive black population; he meant to perform the “uplift” of an entire “race.” Washington’s writing therefore also expresses a biopolitical scheme driven by the idea of “taking control of life and the biological processes of man-as-species and of ensuring that they are not [only] disciplined, but regularized” (Foucault, *Society* 246–247). In this respect, his strategies include primarily measures pertaining to health and hygiene; his aim regarding the freedmen was, as Houston Baker’s remarks, to “*clean them up*” (58, emphasis in original). From Washington’s first employment by a wealthy white family in Malden, Virginia, to the sweeping of a floor that earned him his entry into Hampton (cf. *Up* 29), and the excessive hygienic policies at Tuskegee, his texts are obsessed with a cleanliness regarded as essential for uplift. One of the most famous examples in this respect is what he calls “The Gospel of the Toothbrush,” an integral “part of our creed at Tuskegee” (80). Washington insists on

[t]he effect that the use of the tooth-brush has had in bringing about a higher degree of civilization among the students. With few exceptions, I have noticed that if we can get a student to the point where, when the first or second tooth-brush disappears, he of his own motion buys another, I have not been disappointed in the future of that individual. Absolute cleanliness of the body has been insisted upon from the first. The students have been taught to bathe as regularly as to take their meals. (81)

The regularities of (self-)discipline are envisioned as a means of ensuring the health of both individual bodies and an entire population body. Military-style drill converges with notions of cleanliness and health at Tuskegee, whereby Washington ultimately seeks to ensure the production of a functioning, physically, mentally and morally sound, and economically productive black population. Ultimately, the central question, in Foucauldian terms, becomes that of an “entry of *black* life into history,” when Washington asks his (white) audience to “decide within yourselves whether a race that is thus willing to *die* for its country [in war] should not be given the highest opportunity to *live* for its country” (116, emphasis mine).

Thus, Washington's autobiographies signify not simply on visual regimes and a rhetoric of visibility of the fugitive slave narrative but also revise its body politics and the disciplinary regimes of American slavery. Where writers of slave narratives described (visually) controlling regimes and disciplinary forces in connection with the iconic and destructive bodily punishments characteristic of southern slavery, Washington appropriates principles of discipline and control into a less archaic, more modern and productive scheme for uplifting a free black population. He aimed to establish and exert new kinds of disciplinary forces on the black body, the productive potential of which he constantly exemplifies in his own person. Consider, for instance, the description of his first employment for a white family in Malden. Washington claims that

the lessons that I learned in the home of Mrs. Ruffner were as valuable to me as any education I have ever gotten anywhere since. Even to this day I never see bits of paper scattered around a house or in the street that I do not want to pick them up at once. I never see a filthy yard that I do not want to clean it, a paling off of a fence that I do not want to put it on, an unpainted or unwhitewashed house that I do not want to paint or whitewash it, or a button off one's clothes, or a grease-spot on them or on a floor, that I do not want to call attention to it. (*Up* 25)

The drudgery at Mrs. Ruffner's may technically not be less menial than that in some antebellum master's household, yet freedom offers, Washington suggests, the opportunity to appropriate discipline for freed individuals and by extension the African American population as a whole. The idea was, as he put it in a 1903 essay in the collection *The Negro Problem*, that of moving from "being worked" to "working" ("Industrial Education" 9). Before Emancipation, discipline inevitably meant *being* disciplined by another, since the enslaved black body was the property of that other. After Emancipation, Washington suggests, a modern, empowering *self*-discipline became possible, which he stresses in the above passage through the repetition of "that I do not *want* to," implying his *own* will. The claim is that even though postwar labor itself may often not look much different than it did before Emancipation, the relation between work and the willful, disciplined black body could become more productive and governable.

Washington seeks to replace relations of domination in which the black body was locked via the antebellum master-slave property relationship with relations of disciplinary power for post-Emancipation generations.

His strategy is to appropriate the black body by inducing (self-)discipline to the end of producing a healthier, more useful population. An anecdote of Washington's trickster play with clock time while working in Malden is emblematic of this strategy: Because his work shift in the coal furnaces ends at nine o'clock, yet school begins at precisely the same hour, Washington "morning after morning" moves "the clock hands from half-past eight up to the nine o'clock mark" (*Up* 20). The face of the clock, upon which "all the hundred or more workmen depended [...] to regulate their hours of beginning and ending the day's work" comes to symbolize not just a white disciplinary regime, but, more importantly, Washington's appropriation of it (20). Accompanied by his *captatio benevolentiae* that "I did not mean to inconvenience anybody," the appropriation of time itself in order to gain education in this scene epitomizes the ways in which his scheme generally seeks to adopt time and space for new forms of discipline (20). The old, *white* disciplinary regimes must be broken to create his own education model at Tuskegee, where time and space are by no means less rigidly structured through a *black* disciplinarily gaze. At the heart of Washington's signifying revision lies therefore, besides a focus on education and home, both the establishment of a new vision, a black gaze that seeks to discipline individuals, and the notion of a black population at the center of a new biopolitical vision.

FROM STRATEGIC PASTORAL TO GEORGIC

In the passage from *Up from Slavery* describing his experience at the Ruffners', Washington refers to his task of cleaning up a "filthy yard" and repairing dilapidated "fences" (25). I want to suggest that his portrayal of the garden at this point not only foreshadows his later obsession with hygiene, but also hints at the ways in which he envisions relations to the non-human natural world. With respect to the latter, the version of the same scene given in *Working with the Hands* is much more detailed. Here, Washington writes:

My task, as I remember it, was to cut the grass around the house, and then to give the grounds a thorough 'cleaning up.' In those days there were no lawn-mowers, and I had to go down on my knees and cut much of the grass with a little hand-scythe. [...] I am not ashamed to say that I did not succeed in giving satisfaction the first, or even the second time [...] But I kept at it, and after a few days, as the result of my efforts under the strict oversight of

my mistress, we could take pleasure in looking upon a yard where the grass was green, and almost perfect in its smoothness, where the flower beds were trimly kept, the edges of the walks clean cut, and where there was nothing to mar the well-ordered appearance. (8–9)

The depiction exemplifies two main elements of Washington's revised form of African American environmental knowledge. First, there is the idea of a "well-ordered" yard that suggests both pastoral harmony and, crucially, the accessibility of this pleasurable pastoral harmony to African Americans. Secondly, one finds the notion that achieving the pastoral requires hard but rewarding bodily labor and what Washington's biopolitics centrally celebrates, namely strict self-discipline.

With regard to the first idea, Washington can be read as a revision of the pastoral of the fugitive slave narrative. Recall, at this point, the strategic functions of the pastoral delineated in Chap. 3: fugitive slave narratives, I have argued, employed the pastoral subversively as part of a two-fold frame of their depictions of the plantation and made use of the spatial and temporal dimensions of pastoral (cf. Snyder 3–11) in order to criticize their enslavement, express environmental knowledge, and articulate their hope for a better future. Crucially, a spatial, Arcadian pastoral retreat was disengaged, represented as unavailable in normalizing plantationscapes, tying the mode to a general antipastoral impulse in the antebellum genre. Even if a Golden Age (temporal) pastoral could at points be used to hint at primal pastoral stages and memories and to articulate environmental knowledge, the slave narrative frequently highlighted the inaccessibility of pastoral space to the enslaved due to their dehumanized position.

Washington's autobiographies, by contrast, proclaim an availability of the pastoral as a "reward"; *Up from Slavery* and *Working with the Hands* mobilize a spatial dimension of pastoral, as they suggest that a pastoral experience is possible for emancipated African Americans under certain conditions. Compare Washington's experience at the Ruffners' with Douglass's description of Colonel Lloyd's garden in his 1845 *Narrative*. Douglass portrays the Colonel's "large and finely cultivated garden" as

afford[ing] almost constant employment for four men, besides the chief gardener, (Mr. M'Durmond.) The garden was probably the greatest attraction of the place. [...] Its excellent fruit was quite a temptation to the hungry swarms of [enslaved] boys, as well as the older slaves, belonging to

the colonel, few of whom had the virtue or vice to resist it. [...] The colonel had to resort to all kinds of stratagems to keep his slaves out of the garden. The last and most successful one was that of tarring his fence all around, after which, if a slave was caught with any tar upon his person, it was deemed sufficient proof that he had either been into the garden, or had tried to get in. In either case, he was severely whipped by the chief gardener. (20)

The Ruffners' garden in *Working with the Hands* clearly echoes this portrayal when Washington writes that "the orchards around the house bore heavy yields of the finest fruits," and the menial labor in which he does "not succeed in giving satisfaction" evokes the traumatic memory of the enslaved's experience epitomized in Colonel Lloyd's garden (*Working* 8). Moreover, Washington's scene repeats elements of the strict discipline and panoptic surveillance of Douglass's portrayal, when he recalls working "under the strict oversight of my mistress" (8). Significantly, however, the corporeal punishments of the enslaved body described in Douglass's passage that had traumatized the plantation pastoral have disappeared in Washington's description of his toil in Mrs. Ruffner's yard. Additionally, Washington is able to find satisfaction in "the result of my efforts" (9) and gains the potential to value his work and the knowledge he thereby gains—something that, although Douglass implies a botanical knowledge that the "four men" maintaining Lloyd's garden must possess, could not easily be communicated in the antebellum fugitive slave narrative. Washington, by contrast, is no more entirely excluded; the tarred fences are gone, and when he claims that "*we* could take pleasure" in looking at the well-ordered, domesticated garden, his use of the pronoun marks his own inclusion in enjoying the pastoral (9, emphasis mine). Although leaving open whether he gains access to the fruit of the yard, pastoral space is not categorically denied. Instead, it becomes available, in *Working with the Hands* and *Up from Slavery*, through Washington's toil, as a "reward" for hard labor.

As this scene suggests, Washington primarily expresses this idea of an availability of the southern pastoral to the emancipated population and to the black writer through his depictions of gardens. This is true for both *Up from Slavery* and *Working with the Hands*, even if more pronounced as part of a progressive ideal in the former. In *Up from Slavery*, the idea of the "pastoral-as-reward" for individual and collective development and as a sign of race uplift becomes clearest in Washington's descriptions of his own garden at Tuskegee towards the end of his book. In chapter XV, he

claims that not only “the woods, where we can live for a while near the heart of nature,” but especially his own yard functions as a

source of rest and enjoyment. Somehow I like, as often as possible, to touch nature, not something that is artificial or an imitation, but the real thing. When I can leave my office in time so that I can spend thirty or forty minutes in spading the ground, in planting seeds, in digging about the plants, I feel that I am coming into contact with something that is giving me strength for the many duties and hard places that await me out in the big world. I pity the man or woman who has never learned to enjoy nature and to get strength and inspiration out of it. (*Up* 121)

The quote and its position at the close of Washington’s story of his individual development point to the pastoral’s function as a sign of leisure. After all, the above statement is part of his response to the question how he “can find time for any rest or recreation, and what kind of recreation or sports I am fond of” (119). Nonetheless, the passage is neither a mere demonstration of Washington’s ability to slip “into a highly Emersonian rhetoric of nature as a recuperative retreat,” as Willis suggests (116), nor simply an example of what Guha and Martinez-Alier have called a “full-stomach”-environmentalism (cf. Grabovac 14). Instead, Washington’s garden, when taking the progressive structure of his narrative into account, functions as a “reward.” His discourse of nature expresses neither solely an Emersonian or Thoreauvian retreat nor a refuge from racism as in Forten, but the “price” for the self-discipline that Washington has mustered. In a first sense, Washington therefore transforms antebellum African American environmental knowledge by disconnecting himself from the burden of an “enslaved eye” and by re-inscribing the pastoral as accessible space into his texts. Contrasted with the uncleanness of the slave huts of his childhood and the coal-furnaces of his youth, Washington’s pastoral turns into an environmental reward.

His revision of African American environmental knowledge, however, goes further. While both autobiographies use the idea of the pastoral as a spatialized reward, Washington’s environmental knowledge introduces a second central element that concerns the process leading to this reward: his georgic. The georgic, generally speaking, is a literary mode (the second stage of the Virgilian career, between pastoral and epic) that focuses on agricultural labor, takes the laborer as its central protagonist, and describes work as “first principle, the common necessity, of life itself,” representing

it as both dignified and difficult (Ronda 864).⁶ Other typical features of the georgic include its focus on the ordinary and collective, and on the way in which work is “valued for the hard-won knowledge it yields” (865). Many of these features account for the attractiveness of the georgic to post-emancipation African American literature and, in the context of the present study, for its importance to a tradition of African American environmental knowledge. With respect to African American literature of the post-Emancipation decades more generally, the georgic is appealing as “a mode suited to the establishment of civilization and the founding of nations” (Low, qtd. D. Anderson 88), but also because it offers another point of access to the material situation that the (plantation) pastoral so grossly distorted. One could represent and dignify agricultural work in a way that was much more honest regarding the exploitative peonage system, and that corresponded with the way in which, as Houston Baker suggests, “the mind of the [agricultural] South was critical to black personality, cultural, economic, and political formation” during the late nineteenth- to the early twentieth century (24).

In the context of environmental knowledge, one key aspect of the georgic is particularly significant, namely what David R. Anderson describes, in his reading of Sterling Brown’s use of the mode, as the georgic’s “celebration of knowledge created through work and experience” (87). If we broadly distinguish between work and other kinds of practices (both conceptually and spatially), Part I of *Environmental Knowledge, Race, and African American Literature* has amply shown that one of the reasons why it was traditionally difficult for African American writers to express environmental knowledge was that such knowledge often emerged through work, but that such work was simultaneously marked by trauma. The georgic, by contrast, attains a significant status and transformative potential in this respect, because it can function as a way to articulate environmental knowledge as a “work-derived knowledge” that has the potential to change images of black labor and represent spaces in new ways as connected to a tradition of African American environmental knowledge (92).

In Washington’s case (and here lies another spatial shift that is specific to his ideas when compared to Forten’s picturesque and Brown’s nostalgic depictions), the turn to the georgic is at the same time literally a return to the plantation through changed parameters, as texts such as *Working with the Hands* suggest. In this book, which almost reads like a farmer’s manual, Washington views “agriculture” as the most “fundamental industry”

to be taught at Tuskegee and declares that his aim is “to awaken in its entire student body a keen interest in farming, farm life, the farm-house and farm society” (*Working* 57, 118). The text, categorized by Claborn as “a work of conservation as well as racial uplift” (36), by exposing the Tuskegee creed not merely in terms of an ideology but by providing concrete information on the “right methods” of proper farming and the efficient use of Southern soils, becomes itself a practical instrument of Washington’s mission, a georgic manifesto (*Working* 163). It is, in this sense, part of the larger Hampton-Tuskegee-strategy of creating clusters of education throughout the South. If the general idea was to produce teachers that distributed disciplinary techniques and biopolitical schemes across the South, so that “[w]herever our graduates go, the changes which soon begin to appear [...] are remarkable” (*Up* 144), *Working with the Hands* is the literary agent of this idea. It acts as a “graduate” with two covers that contains the knowledge to be dispersed and that Washington meant to be read and turned into practice by the black population of the South for the purpose of uplift.

Washington’s African American georgic in *Working with the Hands* involves various forms of environmental knowledge and may be characterized along three central features: the celebration of the local and communal, Washington’s striving towards regaining a “dignity of labor” through the land, and an aesthetics and ethics that can be derived from this form of labor. A celebration of the local and communal becomes visible in the ways in which Washington roots his georgic in material contact with locales, presents Tuskegee as an institution that works as a self-sufficient system, and suggests a connection with the soil through ownership. Note in this respect that for Washington the process of acquiring knowledge in itself is rooted not simply in a specific locale, but in forms of material tactility. “Knowledge of things near at hand should be acquired first,” he writes at one point, “and later of things more distant,” because “a clear and definite acquaintance with home surroundings (plants, animals, minerals, natural phenomena, and the human body) is made the basis of the teaching as a foundation for more advanced study” (92). The notion of contact with a locale as habitat and home, attains significant meaning throughout the pages of *Working*, as it is not only the “hands” of the book’s title that are a means of providing this contact, but other senses of the human body as well. Washington stresses, for example, that “the smell of the soil” provides “a contact with reality that gives one a strength and development that can gained in no other way” (64), and, in a passage that echoes a

Golden Age pastoral of the fugitive slave narrative, depicts his own experiences as enslaved child as formative for his idea of rootedness within locales, when he declares that “I was born nearly out-of-doors” (151).

This rootedness in locales furthermore finds expression in the self-sufficiency of Tuskegee and in the idea of connecting with the soil through land ownership. As Washington remarks, “the school is a community unto itself, in which buildings can be erected, finished, and furnished, the table supplied the year round, and economic independence achieved in large measure” (*Working* 70). Just as much as this passage expresses Washington’s entrepreneurial model, it is connected to an idea of a locale that provides the necessities of life (“table supplied the year round”) and a notion of collective efforts as parts of an environmental knowledge that makes “the school self-supporting” (70). Similarly, his emphasis on land ownership expressed at various points in *Working with the Hands* does not simply have important economic dimensions, but also relies on an intimate and rewarding relationship to the land, since the farmer “must be able to look forward to owning the land that he cultivates” in order to connect with it (32). Through such statements, Washington’s *Working with the Hands* fleshes out an environmental dimension of his post-Emancipation vision that is also significant for readings of his more famous works, as it makes iconic phrases like his 1895 “Cast down your bucket where you are” more ambivalent (*Up* 99–100). While this sentence has often been read as aiming to stop migration to the (Northern) cities, and therefore as blatantly accommodating to the interests of the Southern planter class, it can also be understood more fundamentally as an expression of his georgic environmental knowledge, i.e. in terms of working with whichever non-human, non-discursive material conditions are available. Since, Washington realizes, “[t]he South is not yet in any large degree manufacturing territory, but is an agricultural section and will probably remain such for a long period,” the imperative for a Southern African American population must indeed be to work in that local soil, yet his environmental knowledge in *Working with the Hands* also implies that a primary goal will be gaining black ownership of the land—not succumbing to the planter class of the South (*Working* 108). Washington chose a place that symbolized the old order to begin his education project and develop his re-interpretation of the rural, namely “an old and abandoned plantation” near Tuskegee, but he also became its legal owner (*Up* 61). Thus, when Washington’s georgic seeks to root “his” population in a local rurality rather than in cities or factories, often envisioned through a pastoral lens as unclean, unhealthy

and morally corrupt, this seems much less accommodationist when read through an environmental knowledge expressed in *Working with the Hands* as a means of appropriation.

A second classic feature of Washington's georgic lies in his striving towards reclaiming a dignity of labor through the land; his aim, after all, is to teach students the "advantages of farm life and of work with their hands" (*Working* 39). Early on in his book, Washington sets the premise for this task by arguing that "during the days of slavery labour was forced out of the Negro, and he had acquired, for this reason, a dislike for work. The whole machinery of slavery was not apt to beget the spirit of love of labour" (17). The last sentence in particular attests to Washington's double-voiced strategy in *Working with the Hands*, as it has the potential to alleviate potential feelings of white guilt through its de-individualizing and euphemistic vocabulary ("machinery," "not apt," "love") and, for the same reason, must have seemed purely ironic and cynical to Washington's black readers who had a first-hand experience of enslavement. It is vital nonetheless for the sake of uplifting the latter that Washington *does* ascribe blame to the peculiar institution and to the way in which it had, as Alexis de Tocqueville once noted, "degraded" labor (363), since this marks what he has to propose as a form of resistance.

Furthermore, it is significant that *Working with the Hands* seeks to dignify not only what we might expect, namely agrarian methods and manual labor, but offers a variety of forms of (environmental) knowledge and, in its own form, demonstrates that Washington's education ethos was by no means intended to involve simple drudgery. On the one hand, it is true that we find a strong emphasis on physical labor and Washington's almost iconic dislike of the "witty negro" that is present in many of his writings including *Up from Slavery*. Out of his observations of the "everyday life of the people" and of the devastating and unproductive forms of agrarian toil and vicious circles of peonage and sharecropping, Washington sought to employ disciplinary techniques to the end of introducing a new, more productive relation of the population to the land through a reevaluation of labor (*Up* 54). While an agrarian vision as a means of uplift was not new among black writers by the time Washington was proposing his scheme, his particular kind of education, known as "industrial" or "vocational" training, is often radically set against the stereotype of the "educated Negro, with a high hat, imitation gold eye-glasses, a showy walking-stick, kid gloves, fancy boots, and what not—in a word, a man who has determined to live by his wits" (57). Washington recognized the potential hindrances for race uplift that lay in this stereotype of the

“educated Negro,” both with regard to the antipathy it triggered in a white Southern planter class that feared the migration of its main workforce to the cities, and regarding the ways in which such education could lead African American farmers into (self-)destructive agricultural practices. He saw the danger of monocultures, in which black farmers’ “one object seemed to be to plant nothing but cotton,” that could further destroy the soils and lead into new forms of quasi-slavery (54).

On the other hand, it is striking how *Working with the Hands* balances the notion of purely agricultural or manual labor with additional forms of knowledge and education that are indeed “witty,” especially through its form and its collage-like presentation of material. One need only consider the kinds of examples that are interspersed and presented *as emerging from* Washington’s georgic throughout *Working with the Hands*, such as letters written by students (174–180), complex timetables (e.g. 86–87), or contracts (e.g. 53–54), to sense how ambitious his “gospel of hard work with head *and* hands” is intended to be (173, emphasis in original). Although Washington, as his title suggests, provides an agricultural manual, his book, on the other hand, and through the environmental knowledge that his georgic articulates, also strives for a valuation of other complex forms of knowledge that emerge from re-valuing and dignifying labor. He often suggests this indirectly and encoded in images of the black literary tradition. Consider, for example, his suggestion that “[t]here is something, I think, in the handling of a tool that has the same relation to close, accurate thinking that writing with a pen has in the preparation of a manuscript” and that “one can produce much more satisfactory work by using the pen than by dictation” (59). For a black audience, a statement like this might have (at least) two messages that go beyond the propositional content of the passage and its most obvious intention to emphasize the importance of manual labor. First, it is relevant that Washington signifies on a black literary tradition in which the “pen” had become iconic through the slave narrative (Douglass in particular comes to mind), thus implying that he stands in this tradition of freedomseekers (in addition to a tradition of maroonage (cf. Claborn)). Second, and with this emphasis and background, there is no reason why the quotation should imply that the “tool” should be more important than the “pen.” Washington signals, in other words, that his education and georgic neither simply meant to teach that a rural life “out in the sweet, pure, bracing air” was superior to urban life, nor solely sought to discipline the black body into being a valuable worker (116). Even if there can be no doubt, considering the elaborate forms of

environmental knowledge presented in *Working* through an impressive array of suggestions ranging from course descriptions of experimental agricultural classes to planting schedules and drawings of cultivation plans for fields (cf. 107–118, 135–150, 165–172), that Washington ultimately strives for the large-scale establishment of a kind of black yeoman farmer, there is simultaneously the idea that this dignified farmer’s work will yield a knowledge of the “pen.”

This idea hints at a third facet of Washington’s georgic, namely the aesthetics and ethics that he suggests can be gained through agricultural labor and environmental knowledge. The notion that work means not only physical labor, but includes poetic labor as well, has long been present in the georgic tradition. As Goodman describes, Virgil’s “*Georgics* are just as much about the poet’s careful labor of representation within a larger field of cultivating activities. Highlighting and reflecting on its own medium, in other words, the poem offers a complex meditation on the affinities and differences between the tending of words and the culture of the ground” (556). What D. Anderson’s reading suggests regarding Sterling Brown, namely that this “self-reflexive tendency to comment upon the role of literature in community-building” could be a particularly important facet in an African American georgic tradition (*Working* 88), can also be seen in Washington’s use of the mode. One example that shows most clearly that Washington envisions his georgic environmental knowledge not merely in connection with physical work, but sees a writing tradition itself emerge out of a knowledge thus gained, may be sensed in Chapter VI “Welding Theory and Practice.” Once more, this chapter emphasizes a close connection to the local and the communal, as it describes the process of establishing “the needed machinery” to produce brooms and how “the director of the Agricultural Department discovered that broom-corn could be raised on the farm” (68). More significantly, however, the girls manufacturing the brooms “were asked to write compositions descriptive of their work in this industry” (68), one of which Washington includes in his text. It reads:

I am a nice large broom just made Tuesday by Harriet McCray. Before I was made into a broom, I grew over in a large farm with a great many others of my sisters. One day I was cut down and brought up to the broom-making department, and was carefully picked to pieces to get the best straw. I was put in an machine called the winder. [...] From the cutter I was carried to the threshing machine and combed out thoroughly, and put in the barrel for sale. I was sold to the school for thirty-five cents. (69)

This short piece of writing, titled “Broom-Making” is striking for a variety of reasons. First, it is an emblem that, in almost uncanny ways, echoes the fugitive slave narrative. It seems impossible to read phrases such as “I was sold” or “I grew over in a large farm” as anything but reminders of the rhetoric of the antebellum genre, and while there will be no absolute certainty about whether the author of this piece herself, one Harriet McCray, was aware of this, I would argue that the fact that Washington chose to include this particular example is another sign of his revisionism. Moreover, the passage reflects central aspects of Washington’s georgic environmental knowledge. That “gaining” a voice through the fugitive slave narrative is replaced by “giving” a voice to a non-human material object emerging from the ground (“I grew over in a large farm” (69)), for instance, hints at Washington’s ethical ideas about an intimate relation to the non-human nature of Southern locales. Even more importantly, the inclusion of the passage highlights how his georgic marks a literary potential of environmental knowledge; adding to his mobilization of a spatial accessibility of the pastoral as a reward, Washington’s georgic is significant for its expression of a link between environmental knowledge and a post-Emancipation writing tradition. Georgic environmental knowledge, the inclusion of McCray’s piece suggests, in addition to celebrating a close relationship to the local and communal, and striving towards a dignity of labor through the land, has the potential of becoming a root and resource of African American writing. Washington’s claim that “[o]ur pathway must be up through the soil, up through the swamps, up through forests” is also the claim of moving up through literature (29).

WASHINGTON’S ENVIRONMENTAL KNOWLEDGE AND EVOLUTIONARY THOUGHT

Booker T. Washington was a social evolutionist in many ways, as a variety of scholars (more recently Williams 1996; Moses 2004) have suggested. His environmental knowledge must therefore, on the one hand, be read as part of his evolutionism. On the other hand, the pastoral-as-reward and the introduction of a georgic-as-process (leading to this reward) are not simply revisions of antebellum environmental knowledge that serve Washington’s post-Emancipation model of uplift, but (since this model was rooted in a form of evolutionism) also potentially interact with broader discourses of evolutionary thought. Washington’s environmental knowledge contributed to, but also bore the potential to depart from and signify

on dominant (racist) discourses of evolutionary thought. Before concluding this chapter by suggesting some of the ways in which this happened, I will sketch some of the general premises of evolutionary thought.

Lee L. Baker describes evolutionary thought as the “ideological cement that fused capitalist development, imperialism, scientific progress, racism and the law into a rock solid edifice within US society” around the turn of the century (“Location” 112). Even if such thought therefore figured as one of the great organizing principle of the late nineteenth century, it was by no means uniform. Its heterogeneity becomes visible not only in the ways various (pseudo-)scientific disciplines (biology, (physical) anthropology, sociology etc.) interpreted and deployed evolutionary ideas, but also in the convergence of (older) ideas about race with evolutionism. Consider, for example, the “American School’s” adaptation of evolutionary thought. At first glance, fundamentally monogenistic post-Darwinian evolutionary thought hardly seems to fit the assumption of different types of humans as distinct species that was characteristic of the work of Morton, Nott, or Gliddon. Darwin, in *The Descent of Man* (1871), the book in which he extended his idea of evolution to the human species, claimed that “[t]he most weighty of all the arguments against treating the races of man as distinct species is that they graduate into each other” (226). At other points, he was even more explicit in rejecting polygenism, for instance, in an 1860 letter to Charles Lyell, in which he criticized “Agassiz&Co” for their idea of man as different species, arguing that “[a]ll races of man are so infinitely closer together than to any ape that [...] I should look at all races of man as having certainly descended from a single parent.” It was nevertheless one of American polygenism’s foremost proponents, Josiah Nott, who, in the mid-1860s, hinted at a way for conjoining evolutionism with polygenist theory. In the first issue of the *Popular Magazine of Anthropology* of 1866, Nott stated that it is true that “Darwin and other naturalists, have contended for the gradual change or development of organic forms from physical causes,” yet at the same time claimed that “even this school requires millions of years for their theory” and therefore did not “controvert the facts and deductions” he and others had previously “laid down” (108). Thus, staunch American polygenists (and many evolutionists in Europe) played the “trick of time” with regard to questions of race. Man may be, evolutionarily speaking, one species, but the changes visible in the different racial “types” as they presently existed had taken place so long ago and were therefore so fundamentally fixed that

stable racial characteristics could well be discerned, which became recognizable not only physically but also in terms of mental capabilities and moral faculties. The process of racial evolution, from this point of view, had come to a halt, so that post-Darwinian evolutionism could conceptually merge with older forms of essentialist racial knowledge.

Despite the diversity of U.S. evolutionary thought in general, I want to suggest that there are some specific features characteristic of evolutionary thought pertaining to race and what was called the “negro question.” Virtually all who engaged in evolutionism as an explicatory framework, among them such leading scientists as sociologist William G. Sumner, paleontologist Nathaniel S. Shaler, or geologist John W. Powell, expressed their views in response to three fundamental ideas. First, there was the notion of (hierarchical) “stages of development” between types of humans; second, the question of the permeability of the assumed boundaries between such stages, i.e. the question of the “improvability” of what were regarded as “lower” racial types; and, third, the question whether one should actively interfere in “racial progress.”

With respect to the first idea, evolutionary thought, based on the premise of developments over extensive periods of time, interpreted racial difference in terms of a difference in advancement through evolutionary “stages.” Evolutionism’s notion of an “ordinary succession by generation [that] has never been broken” meant the assumption of distinct, most often hierarchically and teleologically understood stages of long-term development (Darwin, *Origin* 426). This new mode of differentiation converged with old racial hierarchies in late nineteenth-century American discourse on the “negro question,” and was most often adapted to produce trajectories ranging from “lower” to “higher” racial types that echoed the “great chain of being” or older polygenist models.⁷ In an article published five years before Washington delivered his famous Atlanta Cotton Exhibition address, paleontologist Nathaniel S. Shaler, for instance, expressed this idea, when claiming that

[t]he negro is not as yet intellectually so far up in the scale of development as he appears to be; in him the great virtues of the superior race, though implanted, have not yet taken firm root, and are in need of constant tillage, lest the old savage weeds overcome the tender shoots of the new and unnatural culture. To those who believe that the negro is only a black white man, who only needs a fair chance to become all that the white man is, these pages are not addressed. (42)

The racial difference that American society had long established through physical racial markers such as skin color or hair form becomes articulated along an evolutionary “scale of development.” Crucially, this happens in Shaler and others along a differentiation that attributes value: there were those that were “superior” and those “inferior” ones whose inferiority could now be explained by their not being “so far up” the ladder of evolution that supposedly led to civilization—an old hierarchization through a new, evolutionary biologization of race.

This hierarchization was articulated in increasingly elaborate ways, for instance, via the notion of “the negro’s” being arrested in a stage of childhood, or in terms of a fixed racial character. Spencer in particular, who had at least as much influence on U.S. evolutionary thought on race as Darwin, continuously compared the children of the Caucasian race to adults from “lesser” races, pointing out that “[t]he intellectual traits of the uncivilized [...] are traits recurring in the children of the civilized” (*Sociology* 89–90 qtd. Gould 146). Many late-nineteenth-century American scientists willingly took up this notion in debating the “negro problem,” thereby helping to scientifically justify an already widely established set of stereotypes of blacks as child-like. Moreover, this idea was connected with the broader construction of “racial character” that becomes visible in various discursive formations towards the close of the century (cf. the study by Boeckmann). Biologist Joseph LeConte’s claim, for instance, that there was a characteristic “instinct necessary to preserve the blood purity of the higher race” (365), or senator Henry C. Lodge’s suggestion of a “soul of a race” which represents “something deeper and more fundamental than anything which concerns the intellect,” were prominent ideas that attest to an essentializing of racial difference via the notion of a racial character (qtd. Lofgren 98, 99). What becomes clear at this point is that the articulation of racial difference in terms of evolutionary stages had taken root as an underlying knowledge that lent itself well to large-scale, scientifically legitimized interpretations of the workings of race in society. One effect was that moral questions concerning the exploitation of racialized groups, most prominently African Americans, became obsolete via this new biologization of race, since one could rely more than ever before on (evolutionary) “nature” as dictating the reassuring “truth” of their inevitable inferiority. Exempting white elites from any responsibility for the black population was possible, because, in the words of senator John T. Morgan,

“[t]he inferiority of the negro race” became “so essentially true, and so obvious, that to assume it in argument, cannot be justly attributed to prejudice” (386).

With the establishment of a trajectory from “inferior” to “superior” stages as the basis of U.S. evolutionary thought on the “negro problem,” the most pressing question, secondly, became that of the possibility and means of progress. The question was, in other words, that of the permeability of the naturalized boundaries supposedly separating simultaneously existing racial forms of human life, or, in the language of the time, of the “improvability of the negro” in terms of striving towards what was unanimously pronounced the highest stage of social progress, “civilization.” To some, especially those who essentialized racial difference, the answer to this question was evidently negative, even as they claimed to believe in long-term evolutionary developments. Some essentialized race by claiming a by then supposedly fixed and virtually unchangeable mental or moral “racial character,” while others, supported by a burgeoning number of studies in anthropometry and physical anthropology that continued the American School’s obsession with crania, did the same by referring to physical properties.⁸ In either case, a considerable number concurred with what the Presbyterian pastor Henry M. Field’s claimed in his travelogue *Bright Skies and Dark Shadows* (1890), namely that after slavery “[t]he whole race has remained on one dead level of mediocrity” (144). From this perspective, some construed evidence to the end of demonstrating that African Americans were simply not fit—and never would be—for uplift and civilization, and claimed, as one common thesis went, that the black population was inevitably facing extinction.⁹

A large number of participants in the debate, however, did not categorically deny the possibility of a (social) evolutionary change in “the negro,” even if many would see such a change only in the far future. The idea in this respect often was, as historian John Fiske wrote in his *Cosmic Philosophy* (1874), that “men cannot be taught a higher state of civilization, but can only be bred into it” (Fiske and Spencer 344). Yet another group were those thinkers Daphne Lamothe identifies as “environmentalists” and pits against “evolutionists.” She describes that

by 1880 another group of scientists was developing yet another theory of racial formation. This group, the environmentalists, argued for the influence of historical, geographic, and social factors in determining racial patterns and cultural behaviors. [...] while the environmentalists might have shared

with evolutionists the idea that Black communities fostered severe pathologies, they differed from them in that they considered their weaknesses to be caused by environmental factors. (22)

While Lamothe's term "environmentalists" for the folklorists at Hampton is well chosen in the sense that it draws attention to their taking into account environmental factors instead of relying on an assumed innate inferiority (cf. 21–32; also L. Baker "Research"), it is doubtful whether these scientists and collectors of folklore, and especially Armstrong himself, were not "evolutionists" as well. True, Armstrong "argued that Blacks had an innate capacity for social and intellectual improvement" and, in this respect, differed from the bulk of social evolutionists of his time (Lamothe 28). However, reading Armstrong more closely makes clear that his education model was not therefore opposed to evolutionary thought. He embraced, after all, the fundamental trajectory from supposedly lower social forms to higher "civilization," especially with regard to questions of character, for instance, when claiming that African Americans were marked by "low ideas of honor, and morality" while the Caucasian race was strongly developed in terms of "moral strength, in guiding instincts" (qtd. J. Anderson 39). In this sense, Armstrong has the same evolutionary stages of development in mind, even if he negates an innate or long-term incapacity of blacks for improvement. He thinks of his students as "docile, impressible, imitative and earnest, and com[ing] to us as a *tabula rasa* so far as real culture is concerned," yet his aim is always that of moving them towards this "real culture" (meaning exclusively Euro-American 'civilization'), and out of "lower" forms of barbarism and savagery (qtd. J. Anderson 45, emphasis in original). Armstrong's approach is, at the core, that of an evolutionist, even if he takes a different, more optimistic position regarding the question of improvability.

Thirdly, like the question of improvability, the question of (not) taking action regarding the "negro problem" became another central point of debate often discussed in terms of evolutionism. In this respect, too, Armstrong's Hampton ethos presents one extreme end of the responses. Armstrong and his followers' solution was to render large-scale assistance in uplifting the African American population through Hampton's quasi-military disciplinary model. At Hampton, blacks and Native Americans were to learn and acquire the traits of "civilization," which was, in Armstrong's eyes, without a question the highest stage of the social evolutionary ladder. His assimilationist scheme was one of "whitewashing"

non-white populations, sometimes in an almost literal sense, through the Hampton-Tuskegee-machine.

Others, primarily those who believed in an innate or at least, for the time being, rigidly fixed superiority of whites, were far more reluctant about educating “the negro” and suggested instead the opposite, namely non-interventionism. Inaction, a Spencerian *laissez-faire*, was often the answer, either to the most radical end of leaving the black population unassisted (while exploiting them) in order to die out as a race due to their supposed “natural” inferiority, or with the cynical idea in mind that they should in this way show their own capacity to survive. In this sense, some believed that *laissez-faire* would give African Americans a fair chance to evolve on their own, by “natural” means, so to speak, through the struggle of life. This perspective can be found, for instance, in prominent academic figures such as LeConte, Fiske, Shaler, or Sumner.

The questions thus raised through evolutionary thought pertaining to race and the tensions they produced across discursive formations were vital in shaping the cultural climate of what has been called the “nadir” of American racial history, and interact with Washington’s ideas and environmental knowledge. While he was by no means the only black writer of the late nineteenth century to respond to racist evolutionism,¹⁰ the close intertwinement of Washington’s negotiation of evolutionary thought with his environmental knowledge is something that is characteristic of his writing. This is not to say that his pastoral-as-reward and georgic-as-process were only a means to the end of commenting on evolutionism of the day. The revised pastoral is important in its own right as Washington’s way of interacting with a tradition of African American environmental knowledge and as his attempt to write blacks into the human family and overcome the traumatic relation of the black body to non-human nature that resulted from slavery. In this respect, his use of the pastoral continues a line of tradition already visible in Forten’s aim to ameliorate the freedmen’s relation to a Southern landscape free of “the dark shadows” of slavery (cf. “Life” 183), and in W. W. Brown’s nostalgic yet critical attempt to heal a black southern population’s ties to the land.

Unlike those writers, however, Washington is more openly engaging and negotiating turn-of-the-century evolutionary thought through his environmental knowledge. He endorses some but rejects other dominant ideas of evolutionary thought on the “negro question.” Generally speaking, Washington’s autobiographies are written from a (social) evolutionist point of view. At many points, he emerges as a Darwinian monogenist,

who proclaims that we find “[h]uman nature [...] to be very much the same the world over” (*Up* 119). Washington moreover reads differences between races in terms of evolutionary stages of development, speaking about white America as “the very highest civilization that exists,” which “got thousand [sic!] of years ahead of the Negro in the arts and sciences of civilization” (*Working* 233, 231). This often draws him into a framework of divisive social evolutionist language that sought clear demarcations between “negro” and “white” in terms of developmental stages, for instance, in his Atlanta address. Here, his urge to define racial groups figures not only in the (in)famous suggestion that “[i]n all things purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress,” but also in a vocabulary that in itself emphasizes and constantly redraws the “color line” (*Up* 100). Washington’s use of pronouns, his dichotomous “we vs. you,” is, even if he aims for “friendship” between the races, the outward sign of a potentially segregating classification through social evolutionary terms.

Through such divisive language that seems at least tacitly complicit in further inscribing a racializing caesura into the U.S. population, the groups marked as different are described and hierarchized in terms of their supposed stages of development. Echoing voices like Brinton’s, one of Washington’s fundamental ideas is that there must be a “natural process of development” for blacks (*Up* 69). There must be a social evolutionary “process which means one step at a time through all the constructive grades of industrial, mental, moral, and social development which all races have had to follow that have become independent and strong” (*Working* 245). Crucially, this implies not simply a *process* but a (Spencerian) *progress* that inevitably had to move in the direction of attaining an ideal that, for Washington, too, was Euro-American “civilization.” There was, for him, no satisfying alternative path, which becomes clear, for instance, when he describes teaching a class of Native Americans at Hampton. Conducting the “experiment [...] of educating Indians” as a “home father” to this group, he strictly seeks to instill “civilization” in a process that, next to learning English and learning a trade, primarily included “to have their long hair cut, to give up wearing their blankets, and to cease smoking” (*Up* 47, 48). Thus, Washington embraces not only Armstrong’s model but also the fundamental hierarchies of dominant evolutionary thought. He shares in the belief that no “race is wholly civilized until he wears the white man’s clothes, eats the white man’s food, speaks the white man’s language, and professes the white man’s religion” and thus expresses both

the evolutionary idea of developmental stages and the Spencerian notion of a progress towards civilization (48).

Washington's environmental knowledge—his pastoral-as-reward and georgic-as-process—is connected with this point of view. It seems only logical to use the (white) mode of an idealizing pastoral as a sign of reward for achieving (white) civilization, and to embrace a georgic working relationship with the land that is in accordance with the stage thinking of evolutionism. If all races supposedly had to follow the same path from savagery to barbarism to civilization and if the pastoral was a sign of civilization, it was appropriate to use that mode to mark one's achievements. Likewise, if one endorsed the notion of an evolutionary-biologically prescribed law whereby anyone who "is kept employed in one place, [...] will begin to build a home, consisting of a number of huts; [...] will clear a farm or plantation, and stock it with cattle, sheep, pigs, and fowls" in order to move up towards civilization, it was logical that African Americans had to begin "at the bottom of life" by cultivating the soil (*Working* 227–228; *Up* 100). The Hampton-Tuskegee system was thus conceptually based on an evolutionary georgic, in which "the Negro, like any other race in a similar stage of development, is better off when owning and cultivating the soil" (205). The georgic-as-process therefore becomes, when read as an expression of both Washington's environmental knowledge and his evolutionism, also a georgic-as-*progress*. In this respect, at least, Washington's environmental knowledge is clearly in line with evolutionary thought of his age. His environmental knowledge, at this point, is a means to an end, as it does not so much "revise" as "repeat" and adapt to the assumptions of evolutionism of his day.

With respect to questions of an improbability of the black population and of interventional social policies, however, Washington goes beyond repeating a dominant, racist evolutionism and forms alternative positions in conjunction with his environmental knowledge. I want to suggest two ways in which this happens, one having to do with the pastoral, the other with the georgic. The first way in which Washington uses his (pastoral) environmental knowledge to diverge from some of the popular arguments of evolutionary thought has to do with his infallible optimism. This optimism, expressed in both of his autobiographies, regarding the physical, mental, and moral improbability of the African American population, sets Washington in stark contrast to leading scientists like Fiske, Sumner, or Shaler, and authors such as Page or Dixon. His message is, as he declares at the end of *Up from Slavery*, "one of hope and cheer" (146), and he does

not tire to emphasize the various ways in which African Americans have already moved up the social evolutionary ladder after emancipation, for instance through improvements in the ministry and education (cf. *Up* 40–45, 104–106).

The strongest proof of the improbability of “the negro,” is, however, the progress of the author-narrator of *Up from Slavery* himself, the representation of which is supported most vividly through his pastoral gardens of success. Washington presents his persona as the epitome of moving “up from slavery”—the title itself capturing the evolutionary stage thinking that is so fundamental to his texts. In rags-to-riches fashion, Washington sees himself as moving through progressive social evolutionary stages. Sleeping on the floor under slavery, toiling in the dirty coal furnaces of Virginia, sleeping under a sidewalk in Richmond, Virginia, and ultimately becoming the head of Tuskegee and a planter in his own thriving pastoral garden, are the steps through which not only Washington, but, the book implies, potentially any black American can progress. Moreover, Washington celebrates the idea of moving up the social evolutionary ladder through his much-criticized concept of the “school of slavery” (cf. 13–14), which suggests that slavery placed “black people” in a “stronger and more hopeful condition” (13). Thereby evading addressing the injustice of grossly unequal chances for African Americans in a white-dominated world, he claims to have “learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed” (23). It is important, in this respect, that this comes retrospectively and out of a (pastoral) position of relative safety and success. The take of Washington-the-person on such questions would hardly have been as positive while enslaved or toiling away in the coal furnaces, even if Washington-the-writer interprets this start at the very bottom as proof of the possibility of development as such. Washington’s confession in *Working*, too, that as an enslaved child he found the roots of a pastoral harmony in “many close and interesting acquaintances with animals,” seems euphemistic (151). Although the suggestion that relations to non-human nature could help survive under the peculiar institution is important and valid, and interacts with the tradition of African American environmental knowledge, Washington often omits the trauma connected with enslavement and refrains from admitting that only his position in the pastoral-as-reward enables such utterances at all.

Significantly, however, the way in which Washington presents his individual development, smoothed into universality through an assumed

inevitability of evolutionary progress, acts not only as demonstration of the success of his disciplinary and biopolitical agenda, but also signifies on widely held assumptions about “the negro’s” inability to progress and his inevitable extinction. Even if Washington has rightly been criticized for his belief in his own representative status (he was the exception, *not* the rule), for the perversion of elevating slavery into a useful “school,” or for his unrealistic belief in meritocracy, his presentation of a black man who *did* move from rags to riches powerfully signifies on claims that denied the black population’s potential to improve and is enhanced through his use of the pastoral-as-reward. In many other respects a son of his time who endorses the stage-logic and hierarchical trajectory of evolutionary thought, Washington also criticizes some of its racist assumptions. Also by using a revised form of environmental knowledge, he sets his own person as a powerful example in order to disprove the idea that “men cannot be taught a higher state of civilization, but can only be bred into it” (Fiske, qtd. Hawkins 109).

A second way in which Washington’s texts engage in a critique of evolutionary thought, which is related to his georgic environmental knowledge, can be found with regard to the question of (non-)intervention in social progress. In conjunction with more fundamental ideas of the local and communal, which are, as has been seen, key facets of the georgic expressed in *Working with the Hands*, his emphasis in this respect lies on collective efforts, specifically on the notions of intraracial combination and interracial collaboration. The former, “combination,” had been a theme in African American writing long before Washington’s autobiographies appeared, especially in antebellum pamphlets and in postwar texts like Brown’s *My Southern Home*.¹¹ In Washington’s autobiographies, intraracial combination can be found primarily with regard to his efforts of making Tuskegee a self-sufficient agrarian enterprise, a “community unto itself,” and in his biopolitical idea of a unified African American population body (*Working* 70). The second idea of interracial cooperation, articulated memorably in the Atlanta Address’s argument for “mutual progress” of the races, pertains to both the local and the national level. On the one hand, Washington sought local cooperation between Southern blacks and whites, recognizing the need of both groups to add “something to the wealth and comfort of the community” as a whole (*Up* 71). An instance that exemplifies this idea is the episode describing the establishment of a brick trade at Tuskegee. Here, Washington emphasizes the intersection of local economic interests: “Our business interests became intermingled.

We [Tuskegee Institute] had something which they [local whites] wanted; they had something which we wanted" (71). Such forms of local cooperation are vital to Washington's georgic vision of working and living off the land, also because they are connected to his optimistic belief that anybody, collective or individual, "who can do something that the world wants done will, in the end, make his way regardless of his race" (72).

On the other hand, he turns to large-scale cooperation between the races on the national level when he praises the donations off which Tuskegee thrives as an expression of the idea that those who give freely for a good cause are exhibiting the highest qualities of what he sees at the top of the social evolutionary ladder, "civilization." If one does something "that would cement the friendship between the races and bring about hearty cooperation between them," i.e. if one expresses an ethos of help, this becomes in itself a proof of one's being civilized (*Up* 99). In this respect, the autobiographies subversively signify on contemporary evolutionary thought, as they deploy a Darwinian idea to counter arguments for laissez-faire politics. In the chapter on moral faculties in *The Descent of Man*, Darwin identifies moral-ethical values as a factor of "natural selection" and a means of survival for human groups. Imagining a tribal Ur-scene, he contends that

[i]t must not be forgotten that, although a high standard of morality gives but a slight or no advantage to each individual man and his children over the other men of the same tribe, yet that an advancement in the standard of morality and an increase in the number of well-endowed men will certainly give an immense advantage to one tribe over another. There can be no doubt that a tribe including many members who, from possessing in a high degree the spirit of patriotism, fidelity, obedience, courage, and sympathy, were always ready to give aid to each other and to sacrifice themselves for the common good, would be victorious over most other tribes; and this would be natural selection. (404)

Although Darwin's notion could have been (and probably was) interpreted by Washington's contemporaries as supporting the idea of neglecting whichever group was (racially) different, there is at the same time an unmistakable emphasis on "sympathy" and "giving aid to each other" as qualities necessary for human survival in the struggle of life. Washington's writing picks up this Darwinian notion in its own way: on the one hand, Darwin's passage generally corresponds with his scheme of morally improving the black population; on the other, his texts appropriate the

idea of “sympathy” through the ethical dimensions of his georgic as a marker of civilization as such, which enables him to make a powerful claim for benevolent interventions through charity and education.

To grasp this strategy, it is important to note that Washington constantly stresses that the African American population is an undeniable reality that will not simply vanish, as some of his contemporaries believed. For him, the “negro” and the “white” population of the United States were, despite their presumed difference, in fact *one*. They were parts of the same (population) body, inevitably intertwined, as the metaphor in the Atlanta speech suggests, as the “fingers” of *one* “hand” (*Up* 100). In Darwinian terminology, Washington therefore reads the *entirety* of the U.S. population as one “tribe,” to the effect that Darwin’s notion of “sympathy” as “one of the most important elements of the social instincts” becomes usable for Washington in his own strategic way (*Descent* 393). Thus, when he stresses that civilized individuals “lift themselves up in proportion as they help to lift others,” his interpretation of the American population as a whole combines with the Darwinian notion of sympathy to justify and demand interracial cooperation and assistance for the African American part of the population (*Up* 48). It is true that Washington’s strategy appears submissive in many respects, as his revised pastoral is subsumed to a social evolutionary idea of progress towards (white) “civilization.” After all, he thereby suggests that African Americans should begin “at the bottom of life,” through a georgic cultivation of the soil, in this sense succumbing to the interests of the planter-class of the South who feared the loss of its main workforce (100). His environmental knowledge is, in this sense, involved in an accommodationist strategy. Nonetheless, it could also be used to incorporate empowering aspects of evolutionary thought, as Washington’s subversive weaving of a Darwinian evolutionary concept of “sympathy” into his georgic suggests. By simultaneously segregating but biopolitically unifying the American population, and by signifying on a Darwinian notion through his georgic environmental knowledge, he strengthens his claim for cooperation and introduces an obligation to white “civilization.” If white Americans want to be considered civilized, they *must* assist in uplift, since sympathy, cooperation, and assistance are “natural” in the sense of evolutionarily acquired traits of a stage of “civilization.”

In conclusion, Washington’s autobiographies therefore not only signify on earlier forms of African American environmental knowledge and introduce new ways for expressing relations to non-human nature through black literature, but are also examples of how environmental knowledge

could politically interact with broader discursive contexts in potentially empowering ways. Rereading Washington's texts through the lens of environmental knowledge marks three aspects that make them "environmental texts" (L. Buell). First, *Up from Slavery* and *Working with the Hands* are significant as revisions of the strategic pastoral of the antebellum fugitive slave narrative, as they overcome an "enslaved eye" by celebrating a spatially accessible pastoral-as-reward. Second, they are crucial for their use and development of an African American georgic that celebrates a close relationship to the local and communal, strives towards regaining a dignity of labor through the land, and that, Washington at points suggests, has the potential of becoming a root and resource of African American literature. Although both the pastoral and the georgic elements of Washington's environmental knowledge are deployed to contribute to his own social evolutionist ideas, it is just as important that, third, Washington's autobiographies can show how environmental knowledge could be employed to resist claims of late-nineteenth-century racial discourses. They are ambivalent examples of how forms of African American environmental knowledge were involved in larger power struggles by simultaneously writing within but also against newly emerging discourses that prolonged the racial and environmental othering of the black body, such as (large parts of) evolutionary thought. In this respect, *Up from Slavery* and *Working with the Hands* demonstrate once more how African American literature connects the political and the environmental, and highlight ways in which African American environmental knowledge continued to signify on dominant forms of racial knowledge.

NOTES

1. There are a few biographies of Washington in the early- to mid-twentieth century (e.g. Scott and Stowe), yet no systematic scholarly treatments up to the studies by Meier and Harlan in the mid-1960s and 1970s. At a moment when Washington's reputation came under attack from voices in the Civil Rights movement, both scholars drew a much more nuanced picture of him that has become authoritative. Meier argued that Washington "surreptitiously engaged in undermining the American race system by a direct attack upon disfranchisement and segregation" (114), while Harlan exposed Washington's "secret life" of fighting for racial justice on the basis of the *Booker T. Washington Papers*, which he published in fourteen volumes between 1972 and 1989.

2. Studies that focus on Washington's pastoralism are those by E. Jones; and Bone. Ecocritical engagements with Washington include, apart from the articles by Hicks; and Grabovac; readings by Smith 75–87; Ruffin, who mentions Washington in her chapter on George Washington Carver (77–85); and, most recently and extensively, by Claborn, who reads Washington's autobiographies in the context of environmental history (19–43).
3. Washington's autobiographical writings moreover include *The Story of My Life and Work* (1900) and *My Larger Education* (1911), which contains extensive information on his trips to Europe. Furthermore, Washington's *oeuvre* consists of numerous articles and books that deal primarily with questions of self-development, education, and the "negro problem." See generally the *Booker T. Washington Papers*, published by Harlan (1972–1989); archival material is also located at the Library of Congress. I have chosen the two texts mentioned above for this chapter, as they are most pronounced in articulating Washington's ideas on the pastoral and agrarianism.
4. In the following, I employ the term "evolutionary thought" to refer broadly to discursive formations that involve evolutionary ideas after Darwin, Spencer and others in the last third of the nineteenth century and beyond. The unifying and reductive terms "Darwinism" or "Spencerism" will not be used (except when referring to the work of one of those thinkers in particular) in order to stress that "evolutionary thought" may not be easily traced back to any one thinker. In this sense, evolutionary thought will be understood in terms of a broader, heterogeneous form of knowledge as an epistemological background negotiated by some of the texts I turn to.
5. Several scholars have identified discipline as a core organizational principle of Tuskegee Institute, see, for instance, H. Baker esp. 58–60, 96–97; and Schmidt 104–125. While such studies have examined the *disciplinary* side of Washington's Tuskegee scheme, my reading focuses primarily on the *biopolitical* implications of his ideas.
6. On the georgic tradition generally, cf. Garrard 108–120; on the georgic in African American literature, see Ronda; and D. Anderson; on the georgic in Washington, see Claborn 19–43.
7. This is not to say that, at the outset, evolutionary thought necessarily implied this hierarchization. One could, at least in theory, simply have taken up the general notion that "[t]he same laws that govern the growth and multiply the plant also govern society and multiply it," and even, as Yale sociologist William G. Sumner suggested in 1881, that "biology and sociology" were investigating the same "forces [...] acting on different fields" (Woodhull 48; Sumner 14). However, it was a small step from *noting* differences in developmental stages of human social groups to *hierarchizing* them. More often than not, old racial hierarchies were thus

- perpetuated, now based on an agreement that, in Lyman Abbott's words, "all life proceeds, by a regular and orderly sequence, from simple to more complex forms, from lower to higher forms" (1).
8. The latter decades of the nineteenth century saw an unprecedented turn to measurements and statistics of the human body, which was intertwined with evolutionary thought in Europe and the U.S. Driven by the belief that "to explain man's physical structure was to explain mankind" (Hovenkamp 652), European anthropologists like Broca, Topinard, or Vogt, and American scientists like Daniel G. Brinton or Frederick Hoffman relied on measuring bodies and skulls and weighing brains in ways that by far outweighed antebellum work, for instance, by Samuel Morton. Cf. on physical anthropology and anthropometry of the period Haller 3–39; Jackson/Weidman 72–76.
 9. Among those who drew this conclusion were Spencer and Darwin themselves. The latter, for instance, claimed that the "civilized races" would ultimately supersede the "savage races throughout the world" (qtd. Feagin 84), a statement that suggests Darwin's racism, even as he was opposed to slavery and polygenism. In the U.S., some predicted an eventual dying out of "lower" races based on the idea of a biological inferiority, e.g. Brinton, who claimed that the "black, the brown and the red races differ anatomically so much from the white [...] that even with equal cerebral capacity they could never rival its results by equal efforts" (12). Others, also through literature (Thomas Nelson Page, Thomas F. Dixon), acted out their racism through a focus on a supposed "unfitness" of "the negro" in terms of moral and mental faculties.
 10. Other African American writers of the latter decades of the nineteenth century such as Frances Ellen Harper, Maria Stewart, Jarena Lee, Elizabeth Keckley, Pauline Hopkins, Peter Randolph, or Paul Lawrence Dunbar referred to and signified on notions of evolutionary thought in writing for uplift (cf. Ferguson xiii–xxxiv). They did so in diverse forms, often implicitly but also explicitly. An early example is Harper's 1869 "The Mission of the Flowers"—the story of a well-intentioned rose that turns all other flowers of "a lovely garden" into roses but eventually realizes the importance of individuality—which can be read as an allegorical critique of an assimilationist ethos and the social evolutionary trajectory supposedly leading up to "civilization." Another case in which (Spencerian) evolutionary thought becomes an explicit context for an African American writer's articulation of environmental knowledge will be discussed in the next chapter on Charles W. Chesnut.
 11. In nineteenth-century African American writing, the term "combination" primarily refers to economic forms of intraracial cooperation among blacks and most often expresses an idea of unity and racial pride. William Hamilton's 1834 "Address to the National Convention" is one of the ear-

liest texts explicitly using the term. The author refers, on the one hand, to “a strong combination against the people of color,” and, on the other hand, urges “the free people of color [...] [to] combine, and closely attend to their own particular interest” (112). *My Southern Home* presents another example of the term’s usage in the bourgeois economic sense that can also be found in B.T. Washington, when W.W. Brown criticizes that “[c]olored lawyers, doctors, artisans and mechanics, starve for patronage, while the negro is begging the white man to do his work,” and suggests that “[c]ombinations have made other races what they are to-day” (239).

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Transforming the Politics of the Black Body: Trans-corporeality, Epistemological Resistance, and Spencerism in Charles W. Chesnutt

In “The Gray Wolf’s Ha’nt,” the sixth story of *The Conjure Woman* (1900), Charles W. Chesnutt inserts a long quote from Herbert Spencer through one of his main characters. When a rainy gray and “awfully dull” afternoon finds John and Annie, the Northern couple who have moved to North Carolina, seated on the piazza of their new home, John begins to read out “with pleasure”:

The difficulty of dealing with transformations so many-sided as those which all existences have undergone, or are undergoing, is such as to make a complete and deductive interpretation almost hopeless. So to grasp the total process of redistribution of matter and motion as to see simultaneously its several necessary results in their actual interdependence is scarcely possible. There is, however, a mode of rendering the process as a whole tolerably comprehensible. Though the genesis of the rearrangement of every evolving aggregate is in itself one, it presents to our intelligence—(*Conjure* 80)

At this point, Annie interrupts John, bidding him to stop reading “that nonsense,” thus clearing the way for the entrance of Uncle Julius, the formerly enslaved narrator of the embedded tales that lie at the heart of Chesnutt’s stories (80). Scholars have generally taken the passage from Spencer as Chesnutt’s playfully ironic comment on John’s rationalistic

frame of mind. Hemenway, for instance, reads the quotation as ironizing John's inability "to deal with conjure as something other than the abstractions of a philosophical tract" (299), J. Peterson thinks of the episode as "a complex case of sociolinguistic irony" that pits a standard English against a vernacular treatment of the same topic (442), and Trodd suggests that the excerpt plays with "the broad philosophy behind Chesnutt's collection" (124). While readings therefore recognize a thematic link between the "transformations" that are described in the quote and the metamorphoses at the heart of Julius's tales, they rarely pay attention to where precisely the passage stems from. This is not surprising, considering that, while Darwin has been taken up explicitly in scholarship on Chesnutt (e.g. Bender 289–313), himself a staunch monogenist who asserted that "[b]y modern research the unity of the human race has been proved" ("The Future American" 122), Spencer has not had a prominent place so far. Thus, the above quote (without mentioning the name Spencer¹) is usually taken as a general example of Western science of the day and as an expression of John's presumptuousness and sense of superiority over Julius, whose tales he finds quaint and entertaining but does not take seriously.

That Chesnutt chose to quote Spencer, and this passage in particular, is, however, significant for several reasons. Firstly, it shows that Chesnutt satirizes John as a Spencerian "armchair anthropologist." When John refers to the citation and his own scientific rationality as "philosophy" (*Conjure* 80), a term that echoes what Spencer called his "synthetic philosophy,"² the scene becomes nothing less than a parody and caricature. After all, we find John lodging on a piazza (probably in an armchair) "for a quiet smoke" (80), while delighting in what sociologist Albion Small, in 1897, criticized as the popular "fashion of semi-learned [Spencerian] thought" that allowed anyone to deal, supposedly with scientific authority, with the grand questions of life in terms of evolutionism (741).³ John's quotation therefore represents not just any form of Western scientific rationality, but Spencerian evolutionary thought of the period, which existed, as contemporaries like Small realized, in a dubious "semi-learned" form across various discursive formations. By extension, if one takes the passage as a characterization of the one reading out aloud, the often-noted irony of the scene does not simply target John's rationalistic frame of mind per se, but his taking a popular Spencerian perspective that is mocked as unscientific.

Secondly, therefore, not only the act of quoting as such, but the specific content of the excerpt, too, must be reassessed more carefully in its original Spencerian context and in its corresponding meaning in Chesnutt's

texts. The cited passage is taken from the chapter on “The Instability of the Homogeneous” of Spencer’s *First Principles* (1862), the first volume of his monumental *System of Synthetic Philosophy*, and expresses the idea of a universal law of evolution when it speaks of “a mode of rendering the process [of life’s development] as a whole tolerably comprehensible.” Moreover, the quote focuses on material “transformations so many-sided” and on “the redistribution of matter and motion” (Chesnutt, *Conjure* 80 = Spencer, *Principles* 401). Chesnutt’s choice of using Spencer was thus no doubt deliberate, as both share a general theme: transformations of matter. If Spencer, in “The Instability of the Homogeneous,” centrally broaches the issue of the ways in which “any homogeneous aggregation” of matter is “necessarily exposed to different forces” by which “they are of necessity differently modified,” the same is also true for Chesnutt’s stories and, in particular, Julius’s embedded narratives (*Principles* 404). In the tale that follows the introductory frame narrative in “The Gray Wolf’s Ha’nt,” and in the embedded tales generally, it is after all Julius who unfolds before John and Annie’s, and the reader’s eyes a world where human and non-human materialities merge and metamorphose, where both are marked by what Spencer calls the “inter-dependence” between “matter and motion” (401).

Hence, Chesnutt’s quotation not only explicitly suggests that his texts can be read as parodying negotiations of Spencer’s evolutionary thought, but also highlights one of the central issues at stake in the Julius stories: transformations of different kinds of matter. The “Instability of the Homogeneous” is Spencer’s chapter title, but it is also an underlying theme of Chesnutt’s texts.⁴ Chapter 7 explores this theme with respect to the transforming materiality of the black body to demonstrate that stories such as “Po’ Sandy,” “Sis’ Becky’s Pickaninny,” or “The Gray Wolf’s Ha’nt” are expressions of African American environmental knowledge and of Chesnutt’s philosophy of epistemological relations to the material world. To this end, I employ Stacy Alaimo’s concept of “trans-corporeality” to reveal Julius’s embedded tales as narratives of the trans-corporeality of the black body that repeat and revise the traumatic relations of the (enslaved) black body to non-human materialities. A trans-corporeal environmental knowledge thereby becomes part of Chesnutt’s vision for a turn-of-the-century African American literature and of his self-proclaimed “high, holy purpose” of writing against “the unjust spirit of cast which is so insidious as to pervade a whole nation” (*Journals* 139). Moreover, I argue that Chesnutt articulates a philosophy of environmental knowledge

by contrasting a trans-corporeal African American environmental knowledge with Spencerian evolutionary ideas of the late-nineteenth century. Chesnutt's stories perform an "epistemological resistance" that serves not only to criticize Spencerism but also to reflect more generally on the possibilities and limits of human knowledge of non-human non-discursive materialities, which makes them highly relevant environmental texts.

THE TRANS-CORPOREAL BLACK BODY: CHESNUTT'S ENVIRONMENTAL KNOWLEDGE

While scholarship on the Julius stories has thoroughly addressed major issues such as race, space, memory, or Chesnutt's use of the vernacular,⁵ the most prominent theme has always been conjuration. Most critics have read conjuration as an expression of resistance to slavery, as "the ally of slaves whose most deeply felt emotions and relationships, whose essential dignity and human identity are threatened by the inhuman slavery system" (Andrews 59–60), whereas others have identified African roots in Chesnutt's use of the concept.⁶ Ecocritics who have turned to Chesnutt, too, have been drawn to conjuration, as a theme that shows links between the natural world and the plight of the African American population. They read conjure, for instance, as an expression of "a way of inhabiting the South that is humanly and ecologically sustainable" (Myers 7), or as involved in the repression and reworking of the (environmental) trauma of slavery (cf. Outka 103–126).⁷

What such readings have tended to overlook, however, is that not all of Chesnutt's Julius stories involve the trope of conjuration.⁸ Considering the corpus of the texts as a whole, from the 1887 "The Goophered Grapevine," the story that made Chesnutt the first African American fiction writer recognized by the white literary establishment, to the climactic publication of *The Conjure Woman* in 1900,⁹ one also finds stories that do not feature conjure men and women bewitching the diegetic worlds they inhabit. Several stories involving Julius as storyteller, written in the 1880s and 1890s, such as "Dave's Neckliss" (1889), "The Dumb Witness" (1897), or "Lonesome Ben" (1897), omit such characters and overtly supernatural elements, as they present exchanges and transformations between human and non-human matter. What also binds the stories together, therefore, rather than a unifying trope of conjuration, is a thematic focus on the black body as metamorphosing matter. Chesnutt's

Julius stories are not simply “conjure stories” but primarily, I want to suggest, stories of the materiality and trans-corporeality of the black body.

In *Bodily Natures* (2010), Stacy Alaimo employs the term “trans-corporeality” to refer to “material interconnections of human corporeality with the more-than-human world” (2). Trans-corporeality describes a “movement across bodies” and “interchanges and interconnections between various bodily natures,” thus drawing attention to the porous materiality of the human body (2).¹⁰ Such trans-corporeal “interchanges and interconnections” are central to Chesnutt’s texts, whether the trope of conjuration is involved or not. Whether characters are magically turned into birds, bears, foxes, or frogs, or transformed into “mulattoes” because they eat too much yellow clay from a riverbed, the exchanges between human and non-human matter lie at the heart of Julius’s tales. The texts therefore do not simply play with the question of the human in relation to dehumanizing discourses of race—something that was, after all, central to African American literature from its inception—but do so in a characteristic way through the theme of metamorphosing bodily matter. Chesnutt’s environmental knowledge involves a much more radical turn towards the body than that which can be seen in Washington’s disciplinary appropriation of the body of the freedman or in W.W. Brown’s trickster figures, as it writes against the environmental state of exception of a black body trans-corporealized in “a world of biological creatures, ecosystems, and xenobiotics” (115).

It is important to note that a trans-corporeal vision of the black body was in itself highly problematic for an African American writer of the late-nineteenth century like Chesnutt. Julius’s tales are therefore not simply narratives but problematizations of the trans-corporeal black body. They reveal Chesnutt’s awareness of the difficulties that lie in writing about links between African Americans and the non-human world in the post-Emancipation decades, as they draw attention to the ways in which any notion of a trans-corporeal black body was still haunted by the traumatic conflation of this body with the non-human under slavery. Although Chesnutt, as Wilson reminds us, in his writing “strove for a universal subject position that he perceived as outside of race” (xvii), he was well aware that he was speaking to several audiences. He knew, regarding the black body, that his Julius faces a legacy of discourses negotiating the status of African Americans through the signifier “nature” that had either racially othered, i.e. biologically excluded and environmentally exceptionalized the black body by equating it with non-human nature, or that had agitated

against this othering by writing against biological exclusion (cf. Chap. 4). The former is the history of the long-term commodification of the black body, of the pseudo-scientific “biological” justifications of colonialism and racial slavery, and of the enslaved body’s reduction to economic capital through what Eric Sundquist has described as “the elision between human and animal, or human and ‘thing,’ in the philosophy of chattelism” (373). The latter is a discourse of abolitionism and the antebellum fugitive slave narrative that wrote against this biological exclusion of the black body and for its recognition as human. When Douglass, for example, described in his 1845 *Narrative* how “[m]en and women, old and young, married and single, were ranked with horses, sheep, and swine,” he raised his voice against the processes of biological exclusion he depicts (35). Likewise, when antebellum African American pamphleteers such as Easton or Lewis invaded and “dissected” the black body to show its anatomical analogies to the white body, they followed the same basic abolitionist logic that to demonstrate a common biological humanity, while showing “that slaves were ranked with animals, was to show that slavery was unnatural” (Mason 124). Both pamphleteers’ “dissections” of the black body (cf. Chap. 4) and the urge towards hyper-separation characteristic of the fugitive slave narrative (cf. Chap. 3) were in this sense the predominant antebellum answers to the conflation of the black body with the non-human during slavery.

Chesnutt’s texts are attempts to give a new answer by repeating and revising the trans-corporeality of the black body as it emerged out of the history of slavery. This means, first, that they do not forget or omit the trauma that stems from the biological and environmental othering of the black body under the peculiar institution. On the contrary, Julius’s tales signal that a trans-corporeal vision of the black body is problematic, as they centrally recall the enslaved’s harmful conflation with the non-human that lay at the core of racial slavery. In this respect, Julius’s voice becomes a powerful instrument of reworking the trauma of slavery, and, as many have noted, a means of setting a counterpoint to the nostalgia of the popular plantation fiction of Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page, who romantically glossed over the atrocities of the peculiar institution with stereotypes of happy slaves and benevolent masters. Chesnutt, by contrast, presents tales set in the antebellum period that emphasize the haunting cruelties of slavery, cruelties that still complicated the representation of a trans-corporeal black body at the time he was writing. In many of Julius’s tales, therefore, black enslaved bodies, whether their trans-corporeality is emphasized through conjure or otherwise, figure as

reminders of the traumatic legacy of the peculiar institution. In “The Goophered Grapevine,” “Po’ Sandy,” and “The Conjuror’s Revenge,” for instance, three of the stories included in *The Conjure Woman*, all enslaved characters whose bodies merge with non-human matter through conjure, are eventually harmed. In “Po’ Sandy,” the main character, who wishes to “be turnt inter sump’n w’at ‘ll stay in one place,” is transformed into a “big pine-tree” that is eventually cut down and made into lumber for the plantation’s new kitchen (*Conjure* 17). In “The Goophered Grapevine,” Henry unknowingly eats grapes from a bewitched vineyard, which lets his body live through the seasonal cycles of the fruit until he dies with it. Finally, in “The Conjuror’s Revenge,” Primus, after stealing a piglet, becomes the victim of a conjure man’s viciousness as he is transformed into a mule and turned back “‘cep’n’ one foot,” which leaves him a club-footed, “metamorphosed unfortunate” (28, 30, 32).

Apart from revealing the joint exploitation and destruction of the black body and non-human matter through American slavery, Julius’s tales also stress the avariciousness and immorality of masters who exploited the enslaved’s body *as* non-human matter. Primus is bought and sold, whether he is a man *or* a mule (cf. *Conjure* 26); Sandy remains a commodity, whether he figures in the story as (human) materiality of an enslaved who is handed around by his master’s children like a toy *or* as (non-human) materiality of a tree which is uprooted and turned into lumber “fer ter buil’ ‘im [his master] a noo kitchen” (19); and Henry, because of his seasonal metamorphoses, is not only repeatedly sold to other farmers as his rapacious owner realizes that “he could make mo’ money out’n Henry,” but is eventually the one who must pay the price for his master’s greed with his life (10). Chesnutt’s planters are not the benevolent patriarchs of Page and Harris, but full of avarice, and make use of the socially constructed racial demarcations, the artificial “biological-type caesuras” drawn between the human and the non-human for a single purpose: maximizing their economic profit (cf. Foucault 255).

Chesnutt presents his most drastic deconstructive statement regarding the arbitrariness of drawing demarcating lines between human and non-human matter in “Mars Jeems’ Nightmare,” the third story of *The Conjure Woman*. This text is remarkable for breaking with a general pattern, as “Aun’ Peggy, de free-nigger conjuh ‘oman down by de Wim’l’ton Road,” temporarily transforms a cruel master into a slave (94). While Chesnutt’s stories otherwise exclusively present transformations of black bodies into non-human animals, conjuration in this tale is used to transform a white

body into a black one to teach a cruel master, Jeems McLean, a lesson. Thus, the tale can be read as an ironic comment on how arbitrary the “caesura” dividing the (white) human and the (black) non-human was, as McLean is not turned into non-human matter, as is generally the case through Chesnutt’s conjurers, but into another form of human materiality that is, however, socially *constructed* as non-human. The story thereby highlights Chesnutt’s general take on race as a social construction, his conviction that it was “[t]radition [that] made the white people masters, rulers, who absorbed all the power [...] [and], on the other hand, made the negro a slave, an underling” (“Charles W. Chesnutt’s Own View” 5). Julius’s tale, in “Mars Jeems’ Nightmare” expands this thought into a twofold deconstructive potential of the master’s transformed body. In biopolitical terms, it points out the arbitrariness of racial distinctions; in terms of a speciesist “caesura” between the human and the non-human more generally, it involves an ecopolitics that stresses potential flows between all kinds of matter. In unsettling the “naturalness” of biopolitical, racializing “caesuras” by stressing their construction out of power struggles and economic interests, Chesnutt moreover demonstrates an awareness of the convergence of racial distinctions with distinctions between the human and the non-human. His texts are, in other words, conscious of the intertwinement between racial and environmental knowledge, and identify the roots of the trauma marking the trans-corporeality of the black body precisely within this intertwinement. Thus, the stories reveal that the combination of the peculiar institution’s claiming the black body as non-human property with the avaricious practices of the masters left African Americans with an ambivalent legacy of the trans-corporeal, in which the link between the black body and the non-human material became both a source of degradation and a potential means of resistance. Chesnutt stresses, however, that, under slavery, conjure-induced trans-corporeality provided an at best *temporary* or imaginary means of resistance.

The same is also true for those cases of trans-corporeality where conjuration is not involved. “Lonesome Ben,” for instance, a text first published in the *Southern Workman* in 1900 and predominantly read in the context of the alienation involved in a mixed race identity (cf. e.g. Sundquist, 404–406; Wonham, *Chesnutt* 51–55), does not feature conjure, yet shares many themes, including trans-corporeality, with other stories. Here, too, we find traditional abolitionist themes of family separations and iconic corporeal punishments, as the plot unfolds when Ben decides to run away at the threat of an imminent “cownhidin’” (*Conjure* 53). The black body’s

trans-corporeality, in this case, however, is not expressed through the work of a conjure man, but via (mal)nutrition and digestion. As he repeatedly eats yellow clay from a riverbed, Ben turns into a lonely, “mis’able lookin’ merlatter” outcast (56), who ends up lying on the shore of the creek

‘til he died, an’ de sun beat down on ‘im, an’ beat down on ‘im, an’ beat down on ‘im fer th’ee or fo’ days, ‘til it baked ‘im as ha’d as a brick. An’ den a big win’ come erlong an’ blowed a tree down, an’ it fell on ‘im an’ smashed ‘im all ter pieces, an’ groun’ ‘im ter powder. An’ den a big rain come erlong, an’ washed ‘im in de crick, ‘an eber sence den de water in dat crick’s b’en jes’ as yer sees it now. (58–59)

By becoming first a “brick” and then a “powder” that gives the stream its peculiar color, Ben, like enslaved characters in other stories, not only turns into a commodity, but also becomes part of the traumatized landscape in which the frame narrative is set. As in those stories that involve conjuration, Chesnutt thereby presents the pain of the enslaved as permanently inscribed into the land. The Sandy-lumber, too, is still present in a small frame house, the “goophered grapevine” from which Henry once supposedly ate still exists and is bought by John, and Primus still has a clubfoot. The frame narrative, in short, is “teeming with the ghosts of dead slaves, victims of the cruelties perpetrated by the slave system,” as Kimberly Smith observes (137). Beyond unveiling the trauma of slavery against the nostalgia that prevailed in much late-nineteenth century plantation fiction, trans-corporeality therefore attains an additional crucial function in Chesnutt’s texts, namely that of creating the landscape itself as a body that remembers. Julius’s narratives of the trans-corporeal black body act against the nostalgic forgetfulness of a post-Reconstruction plantation pastoral not only by recalling the lasting trauma of slavery that resided in the antebellum links between the black body and the non-human, but also by employing the trans-corporeality of the black body to create material monuments against forgetting the enslaved’s fate.

While the Julius stories thus problematize an African American vision of trans-corporeality, they are at the same time attempts to renegotiate the meaning of the material relations of the black body. On the one hand, Chesnutt repeats the harmful conflation of the black body with the non-human under slavery and creates a monument to the interconnected humanity of those who had to live through it. On the other hand, however, the texts go beyond recalling the victimization as well as the potential

of (temporary) resistance inscribed into formerly enslaved bodies and the land, as they articulate an environmental knowledge that involves a revised, more positive version of the trans-corporeality of the black body. This may be seen, first, in the ways in which Julius's tales suggest an intimate local knowledge and an empowering emotional attachment of African Americans to the land, and, second, in Julius's role as a co-narrator of the land in the frame narratives.

To begin, there is the idea that enslaved blacks possess an intimate and empowering local knowledge of the non-human non-discursive material world, a knowledge rooted in both plantation space and the wilderness beyond. In "Po' Sandy," for instance, only the enslaved realize a change in the environs after Sandy is transformed into a part of the landscape surrounding the plantation. Only they know the forest well enough to recognize "a tree w'at dey did n' 'member er habbin' seed befo'; it wuz monst'us square, en dey wuz bleedst ter 'low dat dey had n' 'membered right, er e'se one er de saplin's had be'n growin' monst'us fas'" (*Conjure* 17). Chesnutt's conjure men and women, too, can be read as emblems of an intimate African American knowledge of non-human nature. They employ birds and other animals as spies and allies, or make use of storms or floods, thus representing their power as one based on the collaboration between the human and the non-human rather than merely the domination of the former over the latter. Moreover, the character of Julius himself at times betrays an intimate African American local knowledge of the non-human world. In "Hot-Foot Hannibal," for example, the last story of *The Conjure Woman*, Julius and the mare Lucy team up as tricksters to settle a quarrel between Annie's visiting sister Mabel and her lover, the young Southerner Malcolm Murchison. Here, it is not so much Julius's tale, but the manner in which he places it in the framing story that reveals his intimate local environmental knowledge. As John, Annie, and Mabel take a "drive to a neighbour's vineyard," Julius arranges a meeting between the estranged couple by organizing a delay and detour seemingly caused by Lucy's disobedience (121). That they have to stop "about half-way" to their destination and take another route, supposedly due to the mare's fear of a haunt roaming the land, has two effects. First, it places Julius in the position to tell his story, which subversively urges Mable to re-join her bonds with Malcolm and, secondly, arranges the two temporally estranged lovers' meeting on the alternative route that the party have to take. Julius's tricksterism therefore significantly involves a non-human agent, Lucy, who apparently joins him in his scheme. Although he alleges that the otherwise

compliant mare's disobedience is "a cu'ous thing ter me," one is convinced by the end, that she has been involved in his plan all along in ways the reader is not allowed to decipher. Through Julius's conspiring with Lucy, both together achieve the reunion of the couple, who are eventually "walking arm in arm" again (130). In such instances, Chesnutt expresses an idea that also runs through W.W. Brown and B.T. Washington. Like the former, who repeatedly suggested the enslaved's agrarian knowledge of the land (cf. Chap. 5), and the latter, who claimed that black freedmen by going through the "school of slavery" could work out an African American georgic (cf. Chap. 6), Chesnutt, too, implies an intimate and empowering local environmental knowledge of African Americans as experts of the land.

Moreover, Julius's narratives of the trans-corporeal black body suggest an emotional attachment of African Americans to the land that could secure survival under the peculiar institution. This attachment involves a way of reading and understanding the non-human world that differs from a Washingtonian georgic vision that focuses primarily on the agrarian usefulness of the land, as it endows the surroundings with spiritual meaning. Moments in which reading non-human non-discursive materialities in a particular way provides an empowering emotional attachment can be found, for example, in "Sis' Becky's Pickaninny," another story written specifically for *The Conjure Woman*. Once again, Julius's tale begins by recalling the traumatic conflation of the black body with the non-human: an enslaved woman, Becky, is traded by her master for a race horse named "Lightnin' Bug," and separated from her child, little Moses (cf. *Conjure* 104–105). In the course of the story, however, the work of a conjure woman is exceptionally successful in reuniting mother and son, in part because the mother is able to find an emotional attachment to non-human matter that helps her survive. When Moses is turned into a "hummin'-bird" and flies to Becky's far-off plantation, the text describes how the mother is able to hear "sump'n hummin' roun' en roun' her, sweet en low. Fus' she 'lowed it wuz a hummin'-bird; den she thought it sounded lack her little Mose croonin' on her breas' way back yander on de ole plantation" (107). Subsequently, when he is turned into a "mawkin'-bird," she feels him "stayin' roun' de house all day, en bimeby Sis' Becky des 'magine' dat mawkin'-bird wuz her little Mose crowin' en crowin', des lack he useter do w'en his mammy would come home at night fum de cottonfiel'" (107). In such moments, Becky's ability to find a connection to the non-human non-discursive material world through her senses and her imagination in a way that acknowledges a spiritual presence in non-human nature

allows her the emotional solace necessary to endure her hardships. It is not important at this point that this involves superstition and not rationally acceptable knowledge, since, Chesnutt's story suggests, her form of knowledge has a true effect—something that Annie realizes, too, when she empathically remarks after Julius has finished his tale that “the story bears the stamp of truth, if ever a story did” (110). The text as a whole thus self-reflexively celebrates the empowering potential that lies in imagining the black body as trans-corporeal, and simultaneously signifies on what I have called, in the context of the Underground Railroad, a “hermeneutics of freedom” (cf. Chap. 2). Chesnutt's story echoes this process of finding meaning and spiritual solace in the “book of nature,” but combines the idea with imagining a trans-corporeal black body.

Ultimately, “Sis' Becky's Pickaninny” furthermore hints at the lasting strength that African Americans may draw from imagining a trans-corporealized bond of the black body with non-human non-discursive material surroundings. In the end, Moses, having been turned into a variety of birds,

could sing en whistle des lack a mawkin'-bird, so dat de w'ite folks useter hab 'im come up ter de big house at night, en whistle en sing fer 'em, en dey useter gib' 'im money en vittles', en one thing er ernudder, w'ich he alluz tuk home ter his mammy; fer he knowed all 'bout w'at she had gone th'oo.
(*Conjure* 110)

Here, Chesnutt suggests that connecting spiritually to non-human matter has an empowering potential and offers a more permanent means of survival. Moses, through his temporary transformation, has acquired skills and gained character traits that, to some extent, alleviate his fairing under slavery. If taken at face value, Chesnutt's suggestion at this point is no doubt radical, as it emphasizes through Julius's tales a fluidity not only of matter but also of knowledge *through* matter. The embedded tales repeatedly express this notion by presenting more than merely bodily traits that persist between human and non-human forms of matter. Primus, for example, in “The Conjuror's Revenge,” continues to have a fondness of tobacco and wine, whether he is a mule or a man, and—as a mule—tries to fend off the advances of another suitor of his wife (cf. 26–28). Likewise, Tobe's desultoriness in wanting “ter git free too easy” in “Tobe's Tribulations” is also visible while he is transformed into a bear, a fox, or a bull-frog (115, cf. 116–119). Although the outcome of this fluidity of

knowledge and character traits across different forms of matter therefore rarely has effects that are as beneficent as in the case of “Sis’ Becky’s Pickaninny,” such moments highlight Chesnutt’s revision of the problematic trans-corporeal relation of the black body to non-human non-discursive materialities. Representing more than merely anthropomorphizations of animals, the characteristic fluidity of Chesnutt’s notion of trans-corporeality expressed through Julius’s tales involves transmissions of knowledge from human to non-human matter and vice versa. If one follows this thought through, the implication is that all materialities, whether human or not, remember, know, and live in an interconnected way. Taken less literally, however, it may also be read as another assault on the biopolitical, simultaneously racializing and speciesist “caesura” between the human and the non-human. In this respect, Chesnutt’s trans-corporeal environmental knowledge proposes the empowering potential that can lie in a co-agency of the human and the non-human, which may be acted out if African Americans recognize not only the trauma but also the strengths that lie in their intimate local knowledge and in their emotional attachment to the non-human non-discursive material world.

Such a co-agency between human and non-human materialities is also represented through Julius’s relation to the land in the frame narrative. The empowering potential of Chesnutt’s trans-corporeal environmental knowledge becomes visible not only in the embedded tales, but also in their interaction with the frame narrative that involves Julius, John, and Annie. As noted, Chesnutt’s texts turn the landscape into a locus of memory.¹¹ Beyond connecting the antebellum diegetic world of Julius’s tales with that of the frame narratives, however, the land also marks Julius’s *own* trans-corporeality within the act of narration. The texts suggest that a common knowledge resides in Julius and the land itself, and that both join in relating the stories that Julius turns into intelligible discourse. Thus, he emerges in the frame narratives not simply as an inventor of stories, but as an interpreter of a memory and knowledge shared by the trans-corporeal black body and the non-human materiality of the land, which becomes a co-agent in the narrative process.

Evidence of this can be found when considering how phenomena such as changes in the weather or the sensual experience of the surroundings in the frame narrative correspond with Julius’s tales. In “The Gray Wolf’s Ha’nt,” for instance, after Julius has told his story of two lovers, Mahaly and Dan, and the malignant work of a conjurer that leads to the permanent transformation of the latter into a wolf who supposedly stays around

Mahaly's grave "howlin' en howlin' down dere" in the swamp (*Conjure* 89), the frame narrative ends with a gothic moment:

The air had darkened while the old man related this harrowing tale. The rising wind whistled around the eaves, slammed the loose window-shutters, and, still increasing, drove the rain in fiercer gusts into the piazza. As Julius finished his story and we rose to seek shelter within doors, the blast caught the angle of some chimney or gabel in the rear of the house, and bore to our ears a long, wailing note, an epitome, as it were, of remorse and hopelessness. (89)

Julius's response may not come as a surprise. He reads this "long, wailing note" in the context of his own story: "Dat's des lack po' ole Dan useter howl" (89). Connecting the storm, a non-human material phenomenon, with his tale, he interprets a facet of the land as a form of communication that he translates into a language intelligible for his listeners and Chesnutt's readers. The question here and in other tales is not so much whether we believe in the tale as such and, in this case, its supernatural elements; whether we dismiss it as superstition or celebrate an ethos of resistance of the enslaved expressed through conjure. Instead, the point is that Chesnutt presents Julius as a skilful interpreter of non-human material phenomena. He reveals his storyteller not only as possessing a particular local knowledge of the land, but also places him in a relation of co-agency with the non-human materialities within the act of narration. As Julius opens up the memory of slavery as the concealed knowledge of the land, African American environmental knowledge becomes visible, in Chesnutt, as a knowledge of interpretation.

Similar observations can be made regarding "Tobe's Tribulations" and "Lonesome Ben." The former presents Julius's tale about Tobe, who attempts to escape slavery with the help of a conjure woman, but ends up permanently transformed into a frog in a marsh that John, in the framing story, plans to use as a "food-supply" (*Conjure* 112). The non-human phenomenon Julius interprets in this case is Tobe's supposed lament among the nightly "chorus from the distant frog-pond," which, according to his tale, is a remnant of the peculiar institution (112). Here, too, the landscape is revealed as remembering, "knowing," and expressing the traumatic experience of the black body. As he relates his tale and connects his narrative with the non-human material, Julius and the land become co-agents in telling the same story. Both the bullfrog's cry and the human

voice and body of the former enslaved are presented as spiritually invested matter that creates meaning in a reciprocal process fundamental to Chesnutt's environmental knowledge, in which Julius and the land do not simply share memory but become co-narrators. In this way, Chesnutt's environmental knowledge becomes highly self-reflexive, as it emphasizes how the land shapes the production of a human environmental knowledge, and how human interpretations and narratives, in turn, shape relations to the land. As both the body of the former enslaved and the body of the land link two timeframes and levels of narration, the stories suggest more generally that the ways in which we *read* rain, thunder, the sound of frogs, or other natural phenomena, and the ways in which we *narrate* this shape our relation to non-human non-discursive material environs.

"Lonesome Ben," the story in which the clay-eating Ben pines away and eventually dies, being transformed first into a brick and then into a powder that supposedly gives a creek's water its peculiar hue, further demonstrates Julius's role as co-narrator of the land. Julius's tale is not just a fanciful attempt to explain the color of the stream, which has "an amber tint to which the sand and clay background of the bed of the stream imparted an even yellower hue" (*Conjure* 55). Rather, the materiality of the water itself becomes the representation of a trans-corporeal memory and knowledge that connects the narrative levels of the story; Julius's explanation stresses the lasting effects of interactions between different kinds of matter, human and non-human, that once made the water "yaller lak it is now" (55). Just like human constructions such as the frame house that is supposedly built out of Sandy's lumber, or non-human material phenomena such as thunderstorms or the croaking of bullfrogs, the coloring of the stream, too, functions as a way of revealing the land as a memorizing trans-corporeal entity, the meanings of which can be co-narrated through narrators like Julius.

Trans-corporeality is therefore crucial to Chesnutt's stories in two main ways. On the one hand, Julius's embedded tales are narratives of the trans-corporeal black body that reveal the black body's relation to the non-human material as simultaneously haunted and empowering. On the other hand, the act of narrating the tales itself marks Julius's own trans-corporeal relation to the materiality of the land, a relation in which both matter and knowledge appear fluid. Chesnutt, in this way, articulates African American environmental knowledge as a knowledge that realizes its own perspective in a world of uncertainties—a knowledge that self-consciously implies that any attempt to *relate* a story of the land is at the same time a means of

relating to the land. Since, as Julius suggests, “dey ain’ no tellin’ w’at ‘s gwine ter happen in dis worl’,” the process of narration itself becomes essential to Chesnutt’s environmental knowledge (*Conjure* 18). In this respect, Chesnutt’s trans-corporeal environmental knowledge can be understood as tied to his broader political strategies—his “high, holy purpose” of writing against racialization—as well as his ideas about storytelling. Whether with respect to settings that first enable articulations of memories, of interconnections between these and his black characters, or in terms of co-agencies within narrative processes, the non-human non-discursive material world is vital to Chesnutt’s stories. His texts’ environmental dimensions are therefore a significant part of his idea of educating whilst entertaining, of his subtle, refined, and indirect tactics of “amusing them [the (white) public mind] to lead them on imperceptibly, unconsciously step by step to the desired state of feeling” (*Journals* 140).

Reading the Julius stories in this way not only highlights their importance in the history of African American environmental knowledge, but also reveals Chesnutt as a far-sighted environmental writer. He is not just “strikingly modern” with respect to his views on race as a social and linguistic construction (cf. McWilliams ix), but also intriguing as a theorist of a racially shaped history of the American environmental imagination, who provides, with the Julius stories, significant “environmental texts” (L. Buell). With respect to the tradition of African American environmental knowledge more specifically, the stories’ vital contribution lies in moving from writing against biological exclusion to writing against an environmental state of exception. They refrain from repeating the slave narratives’ urge towards hyper-separation and do not reiterate antebellum pamphleteers’ move inside the body to argue for a sameness of the black body on “biological” or “anatomical” grounds, and strive instead toward trans-corporealizing the black body as a means of overcoming its racially produced state of exclusion and exception. Although the texts acknowledge the problems of a trans-corporeal vision of the black body, building literary monuments to the enslaved who were harmed by the conflation of their bodies with the non-human, they environmentalize the body in a way that neither romanticizes the relation between African Americans and the non-human through a sentimental or picturesque discourse of nature nor interprets that relation as one of a mere georgic usefulness. Instead, Chesnutt trans-corporealizes in a more fundamental way that seeks to show the power that lies in imagining and narrating the black body in its interconnectedness with non-human non-discursive materialities.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL RESISTANCE: CHESNUTT'S PHILOSOPHY OF ENVIRONMENTAL KNOWLEDGE

Chesnutt's trans-corporeal environmental knowledge is not only a vital part of his narrative technique in the Julius stories, but also a component of what William Andrews describes as his broader political vision and strategy "to accustom the public mind gradually to the idea of Afro-American recognition and equality" (14). Therefore, the following examines one of the ways in which his environmental knowledge, too, subversively interacted with discourses of his time, by enabling a broader philosophical critique of Spencerism. Chesnutt, as aspiring, light-skinned African American writer of the turn of the century, held a deep belief in "the unity of the human race" ("The Future American" 122) and explicitly engaged, as the quote from the beginning of this chapter suggests, in reflecting on Spencer's philosophy, which may therefore be read as potential context for his stories. His philosophy of environmental knowledge is part of his strategy to write "not so much [for] the elevation of the colored people as the elevation of the whites" (*Journals* 139), and becomes a means of signifying on Spencerian thought (which also involves certain forms of trans-corporeality) and reflecting on narration, knowledge, and interpretation.

In this context, it is vital to note first that a trans-corporeal African American environmental knowledge is not the only form of environmental knowledge (in a broad sense) presented in the Julius stories. Another, competing knowledge of the human in its non-human non-discursive material conditions negotiated through the texts is that of evolutionary thought or, more precisely, as Chesnutt's quote in "The Gray Wolf's Ha'nt" explicitly suggests, of Spencer's "synthetic philosophy." Unlike Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Spencer's extensive writing, comprising his multi-volume *Synthetic Philosophy* and numerous books and essays published from the 1840s on, focused primarily on human society. Calling Spencer "the apostle of social *Darwinism*" is therefore misleading, since his central framework was not that of Darwinian biology, but one that employed biology indiscriminately as a metaphor to articulate a biopolitical vision that imagined the social body itself as "naturally," quasi organically evolving towards perfection (Gould 146, emphasis mine). His major concepts, including "the survival of the fittest" and the notion of a society's tending towards an ultimately purified state of "equilibration," broadly influenced U.S. discourse and were popular at the time Chesnutt was writing; they fit a late-nineteenth-century American view of society

that involved a tradition of biologizing conceptions of race. At the heart of Spencer's "philosophy" lay his conviction that evolution was the driving force *within* human societies and not just what had first brought about humankind as a whole. Furthermore, there was his concomitant unwavering belief in the inevitability of progress in human societies as something that was "naturally" guaranteed. Progress was

not an accident, but a necessity. Instead of civilization being artefact, it is part of nature; all of a piece with the development of the embryo or the unfolding of a flower. The modifications mankind have undergone, and are still undergoing, result from a law underlying the whole organic creation; and provided the human race continues, and the constitution of things remains the same, those modifications must end in completeness. [...] So surely must the things we call evil and immorality disappear; so surely must man become perfect. (*Social Statics* 80)

Exhibiting a Lamarckian optimism,¹² Spencer thinks of social evolution not simply as a biological process but as progress from an unordered, chaotic state of savagery or barbarism towards ever more complex stages of civilization. In this respect, he epitomizes central notions of U.S. evolutionary thought outlined in the last chapter, such as the idea of a developmental difference in simultaneously existing human (racial) groups, and of a hierarchical trajectory as an adequate way of describing the relation between these groups (cf. Chap. 6).

Furthermore, Spencer "naturalized" societies as "organisms" that tended towards perfection; he conceives different racial groups in terms of body parts that were either beneficent to or holding back the progress of a social body as a whole. There were, according to this view, elements of society that had been evolutionarily left behind, that were yet in "lower," child-like stages of (social) evolution and that would ultimately perish if they did not evolve, since society *had* to progress towards ever more perfect forms of civilization. Spencer's evolutionary scale was, as Jackson and Weidman point out, "a unilinear one. Mankind was a unity, not because all human beings were the same, but because the different human groups stood at different steps in the same process" (80). Even if this did not necessarily imply taking active measures against those allegedly "deficient" elements of the social body that were supposedly evolutionarily left behind in the way the eugenics movement proposed, it provided, for Spencer and many of his American followers, a justification of laissez-faire policies that

included opposition e.g. to public education or sanitation laws. In order to evolve, it was deemed essential for the social body to “excret[e] its unhealthy, imbecile, slow, vacillating, faithless members to leave room for the deserving” by letting “nature” take its course (Spencer, *Social Statics* 355). In the late-nineteenth century U.S., Spencer’s “synthetic philosophy” thus lent a cold and cynical “scientific” rationale to explicitly racist policies, as it suggested that the “poverty of the incapable, the distresses that come upon the imprudent, the starvation of the idle, and those shouderings aside of the weak by the strong [...] are the decrees of a large, far-seeing benevolence” (354).

If this was the kind of evolutionary thought that Chesnutt alluded to by quoting Spencer, the more specific idea he invited his readers to take into account in relation to his own views was Spencer’s take on transformations of matter. The part of *First Principles* from which the quote in “The Gray Wolf’s Ha’nt” stems is concerned, as I have pointed out in the beginning of this chapter, with how matter rearranges itself over long stretches of time in accordance with the law of evolution. On the one hand, Spencer suggests that all matter evolves and metamorphoses, that therefore “the condition of homogeneity is a condition of unstable equilibrium,” and that “to grasp the process of redistribution of matter and motion [...] is scarcely possible.” On the other hand, he simultaneously puts forward that “the process as a whole [is] tolerably comprehensible” through evolution as the all-embracing, “natural” law of progress (*Principles* 401). His deductive reasoning is based on the premise that

Nature in its infinite complexity is ever growing to a new development. Each successive result becomes the parent of an additional influence, destined in some degree to modify all future results. [...] As we turn over the leaves of the earth’s primeval history [...], we find this same ever-beginning, never-ceasing change. We see it alike in the organic and the inorganic—in the decompositions and recombinations of matter, and in the constantly-varying forms of animal and vegetable life. [...] With an altering atmosphere, and a decreasing temperature, land and sea perpetually bring forth fresh races of insects, plants, and animals. All things are metamorphosed [...]. (*Social Statics* 45)

He goes on to suggest that the same is also true for humankind, since “[s]trange indeed would it be, if, in the midst of this universal mutation, man alone were constant, unchangeable. But it is not so. He also obeys

the law of indefinite variation. His circumstances are ever changing; and he is ever adapting himself to them" (46). In this respect, Spencer's evolutionary thought itself can be read as involving a concept of trans-corporeality based on the notion that "[a]ll things are metamorphosed" (45). His idea of the "material interconnections of human corporeality with the more-than-human world" (Alaimo 2), however, is a harmful one that racializes social bodies through biological metaphors, suggests changes only over extensive periods, and premises an inevitable progress towards perfection.

In this context, the Julius stories, beyond introducing a trans-corporeal vision of the black body, engage in what I want to term an "epistemological resistance." As Chesnutt's philosophy of environmental knowledge, epistemological resistance in the Julius stories works in two senses. In one sense, and more profanely, the texts epistemologically resist by satirizing Spencer's philosophy, primarily through the character constellation in the frame narrative. In another, they provide a more radical, deconstructive critique of the possibilities and limits of a human knowledge of the non-human non-discursive material as such.

The character constellation of the framing story that involves Julius, John and Annie not only allows Chesnutt to play with a range of possible responses to Julius's reminiscences that correspond with those from the various audiences he imagined for his texts,¹³ but also to juxtapose competing epistemologies. The triumvirate who convene on piazzas and in carriages in a diegetic North Carolina to discuss Julius's tales has usually been read as involving two opposing poles, John and Julius, with John's wife Annie covering an alternative, middle ground. The constellation centrally involves, as Hemenway points out, a "tension between John and Julius [that] is the tension between two systems of thought which operate throughout *The Conjure Woman*" (298).¹⁴ This basic pattern is significant with respect to Chesnutt's epistemological resistance, if one identifies Julius as representative of a trans-corporeal vision of African American environmental knowledge, and John as a representative of Spencer's evolutionary thought. Not just in "The Gray Wolf's Ha'nt," but throughout the stories, John is depicted as an evolutionist. He stands for a "scientific" Western perspective, as his responses to Julius's tales as "absurdly impossible yarn" and as "plantation legend[s]" reveal, is sometimes aligned with an exploitative attitude reminiscent of the slaveholders of Julius's tales, and represents characteristically Spencerian ideas (cf. *Conjure* 22, 24). In "Sis Becky's Pickaninny," for instance, John proclaims, after Julius exposes

his belief in a “rabbit-foot,” that “your people will never rise in the world until they throw off these childish superstitions and learn to live by the light of reason and common sense,” thus echoing the notion of a child-stage to describe supposedly evolutionarily less developed groups (103). Similarly, he views him, in “Tobe’s Tribulations,” as someone who “had seen life from what was to us a new point of view—from the *bottom*, as it were” (113, emphasis mine), and, in “Dave’s Neckliss,” refers to “his curiously undeveloped nature [that] was subject to moods which were almost childish in their variableness” (33). John primarily thinks of Julius in a Spencerian way as exhibiting the “intellectual traits of the uncivilized,” in the sense of “traits recurring in the children of the civilized” (Spencer, *Sociology* 89–90, qtd. Gould 146). The African American storyteller, although seen as quaint and entertaining, is frequently reduced, from John’s perspective, to a specimen of a left-behind “Negro intellect” (*Conjure* 113). He stands for those supposedly at “the bottom, as it were,” of an evolutionary trajectory that should in time progress towards “the light of reason and common sense” (113, 103).

As John represents Spencerian evolutionary thought, ridiculing him on the level of the frame narrative becomes at the same time Chesnut’s way of satirizing Spencer’s ideas and epistemologies. John is mocked not only when he is depicted as an “armchair anthropologist” in “The Gray Wolf’s Ha’nt,” but also through Julius’s repeated trickster schemes. As one of those memorable Chesnuttean “confidence men” who are sometimes “shown to be the equal, often more than a match for his once-superior victim,” Julius often subversively fools his Northern listeners, especially John, as he frequently pursues more profane goals through telling his tales (Andrews 15).¹⁵ In “Po’ Sandy,” for example, one purpose of relating the story about an enslaved turned into lumber that has supposedly been worked into the “old schoolhouse,” is to scare off Annie from using this lumber for her new kitchen, so that the building may be used as a new meeting place for Julius’s Baptist congregation (*Conjure* 22). In “The Gray Wolf’s Ha’nt,” the practical goal of Julius’s storytelling is to conceal his beekeeping enterprise in the “neck of woods down by the swamp” that John plans to clear (81); in “Mars Jeems’s Nightmare,” one effect of recalling a harsh master’s punishment is that John lets a non-satisfying servant recommended by Julius keep his position; and in the first story of *The Conjure Woman*, Julius’s tale aims at preventing John from buying the vineyard in the first place, since he had “derived a respectable revenue from the product of the neglected grapevines” (13). That John is, to some

extent, aware of Julius's ulterior motives, but seems benevolent enough to let it pass, does not mean that he escapes a mockery that, at the same time, ironizes his arrogant Spencerism. Although he claims to recognize, from the start, "a shrewdness in his [Julius's] eyes [...] which, as we afterwards learned from experience, was indicative of a corresponding shrewdness in his character" (6), he is drawn into—and sometimes loses—in the power plays acted out through Julius's storytelling.

If Chesnutt's stories urge readers to beware of one-sided visions of the power plays, the strategic games that are acted out in the texts between John and Julius are also crucial for Chesnutt's philosophy of environmental knowledge. In this respect, the two characters are a means of juxtaposing two forms of environmental knowledge, and enable Chesnutt to express epistemological resistance against evolutionary thought. Not only are there opposing ethical views towards the land in the sense of "mastery" (John) versus "kinship" (Julius), or a racism on the part of John that involves "viewing Julius as part of the farm," as other ecocritical readings have suggested (cf. Myers 8; Outka 108). Moreover, the stories epistemologically resist Spencerian discourse, as may be seen, for instance, in "The Conjuror's Revenge." The framing story of this text, like many others, begins with John's proposal of a new scheme for making economic profit off the land. His plan is to "set[...] out scuppernong vines on that sand-hill, where the three persimmon-trees are," a task for which he intends to acquire a mule, because it "can do more work, and doesn't require as much attention as a horse" (*Conjure* 23, 24). Julius, in turn, playing with John's practical mind, argues for a horse as the more useful "creetur" and seeks to lend weight to this claim with his tale about the club-footed Primus, a formerly enslaved worker on the plantation who supposedly "was oncet a mule" (24). Even as the skeptical John, in this case, is backed up by his wife, who finds that Julius's story is plain "nonsense" (31), the storyteller proposes that he is "tellin' nuffin but de truf"—and a useful and strategic if not factual truth his tale provides, if measured along the outcome of Julius's deeper scheme (31). The tale, in conjunction with his casual mention that he "knows a man w'at's got a good hoss he wants ter sell" is most effective, as John eventually buys a "very fine-looking" but defective horse instead of a mule, and Julius, apparently deeply involved in the bargain, gains a "new suit of store clothes" (31, 32).

The story, apart from presenting Julius's skills as a trickster, is revealing as an instance of Chesnutt's strategies of epistemological resistance. To see this, consider the relation between John's Spencerian evolutionary thought

and Julius's African American environmental knowledge as a play with their competing ideas about transformations of matter. "The Conjuror's Revenge" both satirizes Spencerism and problematizes a knowledge of non-human non-discursive materialities in general by showing that absolute truth about such materialities will ultimately remain inaccessible to human sensual experience (in this case primarily vision), whether through John's supposedly objective, scientific, rational eye, or through Julius's view on the non-human world.

In a first sense, the story epistemologically resists by mocking John's abstract and deductive evolutionary thought. The fact that John does "remember *seeing*" Primus, the man with the clubfoot that is invested with a deeper meaning through Julius's tale, but does not believe in the storyteller's explanation, demonstrates his skepticism towards the deeper meaning of matter (*Conjure* 24, emphasis mine). This is, of course, justified, as Julius's tale is highly unlikely from a rational perspective, and something few readers, back then or today, would take seriously as a factual truth, especially since it explicitly involves conjuration. However, the story at the same time exposes the hypocrisy of a rational Spencerian perspective John adopts, when it presents his being fooled into buying a sick horse. On the one hand, John *sees* Primus's clubfoot yet does not believe in the trans-corporealizing knowledge that attributes meaning to this phenomenon. On the other hand, he also *sees* and buys yet does not believe in the sickness of a horse, which "appeared sound and gentle" and "very fine-looking" but turns out to be blind and has "developed most of the diseases that horse-flesh is heir to" (31–32). The process of being tricked into buying a sick horse thus turns into a mockery of his deductive logic, which abstractly assumes and deductively reasons, but does not necessarily arrive at a meaning of matter, whether in the case of Primus's clubfoot or in the case of the horse. John professes to theorize about material "transformations so many-sided" yet his theory does not grasp a true meaning of the non-human non-discursive material world when it is right in front of him. No matter how rationally justified and commonsensical his rejection of Julius's tale may be, the process itself of evaluating the material on the basis of abstract rationality as well as visual perception is therefore radically criticized. Chesnut's text reveals the flaws, arrogance, and blindness of a deductive Spencerian evolutionism, which it unmasks as epistemologically unreliable.

Beyond offering another example of Chesnut's mocking of John's abstract Spencerism, however, the story also exposes a more radical form

of epistemological resistance by pointing out that Julius and John make precisely the same mistake concerning epistemological processes. After he has told his tale, Julius begins disputing the idea that the earth is moving around the sun. He claims that “I sees de yeath stan’in still all de time, en I sees de sun gwine roun’ it, en ef a man can’t b’lieve w’at ‘e sees, I can’t see no use in libbin’—mought ‘s well die en be whar we can’t see nuffin” (*Conjure* 31). Thereby, he expresses a notion that not only goes against John’s scientific knowledge, but also exhibits the same simple but flawed logic John applies to Primus’s clubfoot and the horse. Julius, too, attempts to arrive at a true knowledge of the non-human non-discursive material through sensual, visual experience, suggesting that it must be possible to “b’lieve w’at ‘e [a man] sees” (31). Therefore, as Julius cannot disprove that the earth *is* moving at the moment in which he makes his statement, and John cannot disprove conclusively, in Chesnutt’s fictional world, that Primus was *not* indeed “oncet a mule,” Chesnutt reveals that both forms of knowledge are prone to the same ultimate failure. Both epistemologies eventually rely on belief and produce, as discourse, a fractured knowledge but never deliver ultimate truths. If a first form of epistemological resistance lies in the ways in which Chesnutt’s texts mock the established “science” of Spencerism, a second one becomes visible at this point, in a broader, deconstructive critique of human knowledge of the non-human non-discursive material world as such. When John, at the end of “The Conjuror’s Revenge,” laments the “deceitfulness of appearances,” the story arrives at the core of both Julius’s mocking of John and of this fundamental critique of the possibility and limits of an environmental knowledge in general (31).

Chesnutt’s radical epistemological resistance involves not only, as in “The Conjuror’s Revenge,” a deconstruction of the link between supposedly true knowledge and (visual) perception, but also figures more generally in the changing representations of the trans-corporeal black body throughout the stories. In this respect, recall my proposal that these texts should not simply be understood as “conjure stories” but as “stories of the trans-corporeal black body.” The majority of transformations through conjuration, on the one hand, may be clearly differentiated from Spencerian transformations of matter. John’s character allows readers to adopt a logic that justifies belief in evolutionary notions of trans-corporeality while rejecting the magical forms of trans-corporeality involved in conjuration, since the former supposedly involve long stretches of time while the latter seems scientifically impossible as happening within seconds. The magic of

conjunction or “goopher” does to human and non-human matter in the blink of an eye what, according to evolutionism, might happen only over extensive stretches of time across generations of living species. Where Spencer, in his idea of evolving societies, emphasized the “unchanging habits” and the “greater rigidity of custom” that marked certain (racialized) human groups and that he saw as proof of a *slow* progress of evolution (qtd. Jackson and Weidman 81), Julius’s metamorphoses of man into non-human materialities and back require only that a conjure man or woman begins, *in an instance*, to “work their roots.” With respect to transformations through conjure, one may therefore discern clear boundaries between the two epistemological models. Readers are offered, in other words, a seemingly solid ground through John’s rational perspective in those moments in which the trans-corporeality of the black body is expressed through “goopher.”

In those cases where the trans-corporeality of the black body does *not* involve conjure, on the other hand, the question of metamorphosing matter becomes much more ambivalent. In such moments, Chesnutt’s texts cunningly deconstruct a fundamental epistemological ground. A story like “Lonesome Ben,” for instance, does not involve magic, but nonetheless interacts with the concept of conjunction present in the majority of the stories through a shared notion of trans-corporeality. The text crucially presents not only Julius’s tale about how poor, lonesome Ben is transformed through (mal)nutrition and digestion, but also depicts bodies in the frame narrative that are physically metamorphosed by the same process. The inhabitants of the neighborhood are “of a rather sickly hue,” and John and Annie, during a carriage ride, see with their own eyes the trans-corporeal changes Julius problematizes with respect to Ben (*Conjure* 51). As they observe “a greater sallowness among both the colored people and the poor whites thereabouts than the hygienic conditions of the neighbourhood seemed to justify” (51), and witness how a “white woman wearing a homespun dress and slat-bonnet” gathers a “lump of clay in her pocket with a shame-faced look” for later consumption (52), they can experience and verify a trans-corporeality of the black body.

Reading this scene in the larger context of Chesnutt’s stories of the trans-corporeal black body makes clear that his radical epistemological resistance also plays out precisely through the tension that exists across the texts between the trans-corporealizations of black bodies through conjunction and those through other means. *That* bodies are trans-corporeal entities that interact with their surroundings, none of the characters in the

frame narrative disputes. In fact, the idea is a premise for the set-up of the stories in the first place, since readers learn, in the beginning of the lead story that the reason for John and Annie's moving to North Carolina is that Annie "was in poor health" and needed "a change of climate" (*Conjure* 3). In this sense, the possibility of trans-corporeal relations of human bodies is the very cause for the existence of the stories as such. It is the skeptical John, who acknowledges that "[t]he ozone-laden air of the surrounding piney woods, the mild and equable climate, the peaceful leisure of country life, had brought about in hopeful measure the cure we had anticipated" (102). What is problematized by Chesnutt is the truth-value of a human knowledge of the non-human non-discursive material—whether this means the truth-value of evolutionary or African American environmental knowledge. Although the texts do not categorically deny the usefulness or effectiveness of such knowledge, they refrain from suggesting any kind of capital-T-Truth.

In this regard, Chesnutt's philosophy of environmental knowledge points out the arrogance of any deductive interpretation of the non-human non-discursive material world. The prime example of such an interpretation is, of course, a Spencerian evolutionary thought that, on the one hand, claims that grasping "the total process of redistribution of matter and motion [...] is scarcely possible," yet, on the other hand, proposes to know "a mode of rendering the process as a whole tolerably comprehensible" (Chesnutt, *Conjure* 80 = Spencer, *Principles* 401). Thus, it is enlightening to return once more to Chesnutt's quote from Spencer and especially to Annie's key role as the character who cuts off both Julius's and John's arguments. She uses the same word, "nonsense," to interrupt Julius's tale in "The Conjuror's Revenge" (*Conjure* 31), and John's recitation of Spencer in "The Gray Wolf's Ha'nt" (80). It is crucial *how* and *where* the latter happens, namely in the middle of the quoted sentence that begins: "Though the genesis of the rearrangement of every evolving aggregate is in itself one, it presents to our intelligence—" (80). Beyond its obvious mocking of Spencer's "synthetic philosophy," the act of interrupting is significant as it marks the scene as a moment of Chesnutt's self-conscious reflection on his own environmental knowledge. This becomes clear when considering how the interrupted line may go on. While Selinger suggests that "we can in fact finish John's paragraph in quite a satisfactory fashion" with the words "an appearance of multiplicity: a variety of histories or processes in which transformation occurs" (679), it seems more logical to trace how the passage actually finishes in a perhaps less

“satisfactory” but more meaningful fashion in Spencer’s original text.¹⁶ In *First Principles*, Spencer goes on: “[...] it presents to our intelligence several factors; and after interpreting the effects of each [evolving aggregate] separately, we may, by synthesis of the interpretations, form an adequate conception” (401). The part of the sentence *actually* (and not in a scholarly fantasy) cut off and left out in Chesnutt therefore highlights not a “variety of histories or processes in which transformation occurs” (Selinger 679), but stresses, once more, a central idea of Spencer’s philosophy. According to him, although there is an “instability of the homogeneous” that implies an impossibility of absolute interpretation of single “aggregates,” an absolute principle—evolution—from which everything derives exists, due to which “an adequate conception” and interpretation may be formed (Spencer 401).

Considering this process of interpreting “every evolving aggregate” that describes Spencer’s way of reading evolution’s work against the single representations of trans-corporeal black bodies—the “aggregates” of the Julius stories—makes clear that Chesnutt suggests a fundamental difference between his and Spencer’s modes of interpretation. Where Spencerian evolutionary thought contended to be unable to grasp the meaning of every existing particular materiality but pretended to know the ultimate, underlying “Truth” (evolution), Chesnutt cuts off ultimate truths of the materialities presented in his own tales through the changing forms of trans-corporealized black bodies. His use of conjuration in some, and of other strategies of trans-corporealizing the body in other stories unsettles the clear boundaries between the two opposing epistemologies of John and Julius, and ultimately severs an absolute truth from any form of knowledge of the human in its non-human non-discursive materialities. His philosophy of environmental knowledge does not pretend to know, in other words, a capital-T-Truth, but instead emphasizes the power of narration and interpretation within producing useful and effective, as well as harmful and destructive, forms of knowledge about human and non-human non-discursive materialities.

In conclusion, this does not mean a denial or denigration of the empowering potential of an African American environmental knowledge that Julius articulates. On the contrary, as has been seen in the first part of this chapter, the stories emphasize that imagining the black body trans-corporeally could be an important means of remembering the humanity of those harmed in so many ways by the peculiar institution. Recognizing links between the black body and the non-human world was moreover

vital for recovering from the trauma of enslavement and for moving the black body out of a racially produced environmental state of exception, and could be a means of “imperceptibly, unconsciously step by step” arguing against racialization (Chesnutt, *Journals* 140). Yet, Chesnutt’s more abstract philosophy of environmental knowledge at the same time leaves no doubt that he does *not* presume that any knowledge of the human in its relation to non-human non-discursive materialities, no matter by whom it is articulated, arrives at an absolute truth; the texts “epistemologically resist” this idea that drives evolutionary thought. Just as Spencerian evolutionary thought is interrupted at a significant point mid-sentence in “The Gray Wolf’s Ha’nt,” significantly directly *before* it can introduce a principle from which an ultimate meaning of the material may be deduced, the stories as a whole highlight ruptures in a link between human knowledge and an absolute truth about the non-human non-discursive material world. Where Spencerism provides the reassuring notion that a general true principle exists (and is known), Chesnutt, via conjuration and other means, turns the black body into “epistemological quicksand.” Instead of proposing definite truths, the stories use the trans-corporeal black body to focus on the creation of environmental knowledge through narration and interpretation, thereby making it part of their articulation as well as their philosophy of environmental knowledge. Beyond using trans-corporeality to agitate against an environmental state of exception of the black body, Chesnutt therefore thoroughly problematizes the possibilities and limits of environmental knowledge as such. His stories show the perspectivalism of narratives and discourses about non-human materialities, their involvement in power struggles, and their productive as well as destructive potentials. In this sense, too, the stories are rich environmental texts that provide insights through which much may be learned, perhaps even about competing environmental narratives and epistemologies today.

NOTES

1. Although most interpretations take the quote as a comment on the transformations depicted in Julius’s embedded narratives, they do not generally focus on Chesnutt’s negotiation of Spencer’s philosophy. Hemenway, for instance, reads the passage as a “philosophical tract” without mentioning Spencer (298); J. Peterson sees it as a contemporary “scientific explanation of the fantastic reality that Julius has so vividly described” (442); and for Trodd, the quote universally represents the “broad philosophy” of Western

- science (124). An exception is McWilliams, who draws attention to the irony of quoting Spencer, “one of the nineteenth-century’s most ambitious system builders,” and briefly points out that “Julius’s voice in these stories contradicts Spencer on virtually every point” (91, 92). Others who mention the excerpt but not Spencer are Baker 45–47; Wonham, *Chesnutt* 37–38; Dixon 194–195; and Selinger 679.
2. Between 1862 and 1897, Spencer published ten volumes on the *System of Synthetic Philosophy*, employing the term “synthetic philosophy” in a broad sense to describe his application of evolutionary principles to the study of human societies. See Harris 108–141; Hawkins 82–103; Jackson and Weidman 76–84; Haller 121–152.
 3. Spencer’s “capacious and highly adaptable philosophy” was particularly well received in the U.S. (Jackson and Weidman 79). His popularity rivalled that of Darwin, as his ideas fit well with an emerging progressivism, and as his “science became an instrument which verified the presumptive inferiority of the Negro and rationalized the politics of disenfranchisement and segregation into a social-scientific terminology that satisfied the troubled conscience of the middle-class” (Haller x). John, in Chesnutt’s stories, is in many ways an example of this conscience-stricken middle-class. On Spencer’s influence in the U.S., cf. Graves 74–85; Hawkins 104–122; Gossett 145–175.
 4. It seems significant in this respect that Chesnutt inserted the Spencer-quote in a story written specifically for the *Conjure Woman* collection at a time when he had already written and published Uncle Julius stories for more than a decade. As the ambitious and clear-sighted writer he was, Chesnutt must have been aware of Spencer’s popularity and the ways in which citing Spencer through John might alter not only the perception of this character but also the general meaning of his texts. Therefore, I take his explicit adaptation of Spencer’s philosophy in this story as signalling the significance of this body of thought for other stories as well.
 5. Traditionally, scholars have read Chesnutt’s Julius stories in the context of the plantation fiction of his contemporaries Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page (cf. Andrews 39–73; Sundquist 323–359); in terms of Chesnutt’s use of dialect (Minnick 77–98; Baker 42–47); or Julius’s tricksterism (e.g. Dixon). The past two decades have seen a “Chesnutt renaissance” that has focused especially on his ideas about language and race, and which has led to new readings of Chesnutt’s Julius stories, including recent ecocritical interpretations (Myers; Outka 103–126; Johnson 84–109).
 6. It is only logical that conjuration has figured as the most prominent issue in interpretations, considering that all of the seven stories in *The Conjure Woman* involve the concept of conjure. As Outka points out, it is the

- “intrinsic fluidity” of this concept that has allowed Chesnutt’s stories “to accommodate a wide range of readings” (106). Readings of conjuration as a form of resistance are, for example, those by Baker 42–57; McWilliams 76–99; Sollors; or J.S. White; an interpretation that focuses on African(ist) elements can be found in Sundquist 323–406.
7. Chesnutt is one of the most prominent writers in ecocriticism on African American literature; one scholar even aligns him with Thoreau and Muir (Myers 15–16). Ecocritical readings of Chesnutt have primarily turned to *The Conjure Woman*. Myers, for instance, sees Julius as a kind of conservationist trickster, while Outka suggests that *The Conjure Woman* serves as a critique of mainstream nature writing by providing a “devastating intervention on the white fantasy of a plantation pastoral” (104). Most recently, Lindgren Johnson has provided a reading that is more sceptical towards conjure’s powers of metamorphosis and reveals Chesnutt’s “fugitive humanism” (84–109). More ecocriticism on Chesnutt is provided by K. Smith 137–138; Wagner-McCoy; and Mondie; Mason (119–156) gives a reading of another set of short stories in the context of the nineteenth-century animal protection movement.
 8. Exceptions in this respect are Wonham, who notes that in several Julius stories “the conjure element has been replaced by a harrowing psychological realism” (“Plenty” 142); and McWilliams, who observes that “not all of these stories include conjuring,” and therefore chooses to speak of “John and Julius stories” instead of “conjure stories” (76). While the latter term has been widely used, others have referred to the texts as “dialect stories” (Andrews), “John and Julius narratives” (Duncan), or “Julius tales” (Wonham).
 9. The publication of “The Gophered Grapevine” in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1887 made Chesnutt the first African American fiction writer to gain a nation-wide audience. Chesnutt’s publishing record is in many ways revealing regarding the ideological climate of the late-nineteenth century. Although he had written in 1889 to his writer colleague Albion Tourgée that he had “about used up the old Negro who serves as a mouthpiece” (“Letter to Tourgée” 44), he continued to write and publish Julius stories throughout the 1890s, as this seemed to be the only way to gain a foothold in a racist U.S. literary marketplace. On the publication history of the Julius stories, see Gleason, who identifies three phases (67–71).
 10. Alaimo’s argument in *Bodily Natures* builds on various theorists from the fields of the new materialisms and ecocriticism, and envisions trans-corporeality as a critical model that re-aligns human bodies with the non-human material world. Structured into two main parts, her work focuses, on the one hand, on environmental justice, and, on the other, on environmental health, arguing for a trans-corporeal model that recognizes “flows

of substances [...] between people, places, and economic systems" (9). For the purposes of this chapter, I employ "trans-corporeality" in a broad sense as a concept that helps describe Chesnutt's new vision of the black body's materiality.

11. On memory and the ways in which the landscape is involved in acts of remembrance, see Molyneaux; or Trodd. The geographic locations depicted in the Julius stories have also been compared with the actual North Carolinian locales Chesnutt was familiar with, cf. Ingle.
12. Spencer's philosophy (unlike Darwin's) is firmly rooted in the Lamarckian idea of inheritance and the concomitant conviction of the perfectibility of humankind. See on Lamarck's influence on Spencer, Harris 110–114; Jackson/Weidman 79; Graves 81; and Gossett 152, 163.
13. Chesnutt himself made clear that he meant to reach both a black readership among whom, he believed, his works "sold very well" (qtd. H. Chesnutt 120), and a white readership, which he aimed, as noted in his journal on May 29, 1880, to lead "on imperceptibly, unconsciously, step by step, to the desired state of [unprejudiced] feeling" (*Journals* 140). On Chesnutt's multiple audiences, see also T. J. Smith.
14. Readings of the character constellation of the framing story usually emphasize this polarity: McWilliams, for example, identifies in John and Julius "two narrators, two languages, and two views of the world" (76); and Church suggests that John stands "for those with cultural power" against whom Chesnutt, through Julius, launches a thorough critique (124). Annie, as the character, who, on the one hand, sees some of the stories as "ridiculous nonsense" ("Revenge" 24), yet, on the other hand, shows some understanding of the deeper truths Julius conveys (e.g. in "Sis' Becky's Pickaninny"), is often read as emotional complement to John's rational frame of mind (cf. e.g. Callahan 40–41; Bundrick 56–58), or as a middle ground, an "almost ideally responsive reader for a racially mediatory fiction" (Petrie 126, cf. also 126–135).
15. Among those readings that examine power plays and Julius's tricksterism, are e.g. Dixon; Bundrick; Britt; Farnsworth; and Lundy.
16. Selinger's imagined ending goes on: "Thus, while complete and deductive interpretation may be almost hopeless, partial and inductive interpretations, rendered in the mode of narrative under the auspices of the imagination, are certainly possible" (679). Hence, he suggests a reading that may well fit Chesnutt's *own* take on interpreting the material world, but that seems problematic in two ways. First, as it does not take into account that there is an original version from which Chesnutt quotes (Selinger does not mention Spencer); secondly, because it therefore ignores that Chesnutt's act of quoting and cutting off the quote at precisely this point meaningfully interacts with Spencerian evolutionism.

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Conclusion: African American Environmental Knowledge at Yellowstone

The year 2009 saw a somewhat quaint episode in Barack Obama's presidency that hints at the timeliness of the issues and questions raised in *Environmental Knowledge, Race, and African American Literature*. In August 2009, the 44th U.S. President and his family took a trip to Yellowstone National Park and the Grand Canyon. At first glance, this may not seem in any way extraordinary or noteworthy. Obama was only continuing a long tradition of American leaders visiting Yellowstone and, more generally, the vast natural sites, parks, and resources of the nation in a publically visible manner. What was peculiar in this case, however, was how the announcement of the Obama's trip soon triggered an echo across media that was bent on the question whether the first family was actually going to be camping outside, in the wilderness. Especially after White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs, on a press conference held during the visit, confirmed such speculations to be true, acknowledging that Obama had "always tremendously enjoyed being outside," and expanding, more specifically, on his fascination with "fly-fishing," a whole array of responses emerged. While some voices began to caricature the idea of the President's standing on top of the Grand Canyon gazing down into its depth by drawing analogies to his staring at the debts of his financial politics, most of the evolving discussions involved mildly amused imaginings and comments on Obama's (apparently rather unsuccessful) fishing

endeavors: Gibbs had informed the journalists that “he was dying to do that, and finally got the chance to do that, though was a bit frustrated he didn’t get to hold one of the fish.”¹

What became perceivable throughout the exchange was how deeply unfamiliar the image of Obama, and of African Americans generally, sharing “the outdoors and some of the beautiful places in the country” seemed to be (Gibbs). On the internet, comments drew attention across blogs to the oddness of the idea, sometimes in connection with statistics documenting a lack of African American visitors to U.S. National Parks, and asking, to quote one representative blogger: “As Obama goes camping, why don’t more blacks do the same?” (qtd. James 176). Responses thus reveal, as Jennifer James suggests, that camping is “a racially loaded signifier which points to the reification of spatial imaginaries in discussions of blacks and nature” (176). They also point, by extension, to another underlying question that involves a paradoxical tension, namely why and how it is, that the first black U.S. President was much less expected to enjoy nature than his predecessor in office. Why was Obama, after all well known for his political “greenness,” felt to be much less capable of connecting to nature than George W. Bush, Jr., who could pull off the nature man through iconic images that showed him playing with his dogs on a Texas farm whilst cancelling the Kyoto protocol? Why was there apparently something odd in imagining Obama in nature, fly-fishing?

In a sense, *Environmental Knowledge, Race, and African American Literature* can be read as a dive into the long-standing history behind this question through the African American writing tradition; I have investigated some of the cultural roots connected to the surprise and wonderment that also became visible in responses to Obama at Yellowstone. What has been seen in this investigation is that an African American literary and cultural tradition was by no means oblivious to non-human non-discursive materialities, even though its modes of expression may not fit dominant narratives of “nature’s nation.” African American literature *has* a long nineteenth-century tradition of environmental knowledge that was decisively shaped by the violent histories of slavery, race, and other, more dominant forms of environmental knowledge of the period considered. There may not be a “black Thoreau” (Smith 4), yet a closer look through the dimensions of the spatial, visual, and biopolitical shows that nineteenth-century African American literature holds a rich environmental knowledge and that it developed its own places and patterns for such knowledge. Non-human non-discursive materialities figured as loopholes, refuges, or

rewards; environmental knowledge was written through modified frameworks of the pastoral, the sublime, or the picturesque. Thus, there are no doubt many “environmental texts” (L. Buell) in this particular part of American literature as well. African American literature was never marked by a “lack” or “deficiency” in terms of writing about the human in its relation to non-human non-discursive material conditions, even though this has not traditionally been recognized in U.S. mainstream culture, as considering the wonderment at Obama’s attempt at fly-fishing suggests. In other words, if Obama’s going into the wilds was perceived as odd, this is not because he and his family did something that was strikingly extraordinary in light of an African American cultural tradition, but because this tradition and its diverse forms of relating to and writing about nature has long been overlooked. To be sure, in order to see this, one has to “reverse the optics” of reading as I have suggested by alluding to Morrison’s approach in *Playing in the Dark*, since the conditions under which African American environmental knowledge developed were (also) marked by the violent histories of slavery and race. It is necessary to read with a changed perspective that extends beyond traditional ecocritical frameworks in order to make visible an often strategically used, sometimes hidden environmental knowledge of the black literary tradition.

By demonstrating how this African American environmental knowledge signified on both black and white traditions, *Environmental Knowledge, Race, and African American Literature* not only contributes to ecocritical work on African American literature, but also speaks more broadly to the scholarly fields of African American studies and ecocriticism, which it seeks to interlink more thoroughly. First, and with respect to the immediate scholarly context of this book, a Foucauldian perspective that reads through the lenses of the spatial, the visual, and the biopolitical, may help further explore environmental dimensions of African American texts of the period I have considered and beyond. With respect to the nineteenth century, one might turn to black spiritual autobiographies, to fiction writers such as Paul Laurence Dunbar or Frances Ellen Harper, or expand the focus to drama or poetry. Regarding other timeframes, much ecocritical work has been done in the recent past, for instance in studies by Posmentier (2017) or Claborn (2018). Nonetheless, it seems fruitful to further contextualize their findings as well as literary works like W.E.B. Du Bois *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*, Jean Toomer’s *Cane* (1923), or Zora Neale Hurston’s fiction in the broader context of an African American environmental knowledge that developed in the nineteenth century.

Moreover, my readings show that the assumption of an overwhelming antipastoralism in African American literature ignores the diversity of responses to, and uses of the pastoral in black letters. Even with respect to the slave narrative, the label “antipastoral” does not fully capture the complexities of the engagement with the pastoral as a literary mode. This is not to say that Bennett’s claim of an African American antipastoralism is false if one understands “antipastoral” more broadly in the sense of “anti-nature.” Outka, in this respect, validly classified the slave narrative as “anti-nature writing, the enactment of, and proof of, the author’s disconnection from nature, from the bestial and the field” (Outka 58). In my reading, both of these ideas describe what I have termed, after Val Plumwood, an impulse of “hyper-separation” that no doubt marks the genre and antebellum African American literature more generally, and that sometimes leads to a literary antipastoralism. Nevertheless, *Environmental Knowledge, Race, and African American Literature* also reveals that there were ways to express an environmental knowledge via the “loophole” of the Underground Railroad and through a double-eyed pastoral in the slave narrative that is much more complex than the term “antipastoral” suggests.

The shortcomings of the idea of an overwhelmingly antipastoral African American literary tradition become even clearer when considering the implications of my readings concerning the postwar period. During Reconstruction and Post-Reconstruction, when African American writing increasingly began to turn to themes and spaces of education and home, the pastoral itself became *involved* in the act of hyper-separation. If hyper-separation, in the slave narrative, had meant a general tendency towards omitting descriptions and discourses of “nature,” many postwar writers, although guided by the same hyper-separating impulse to move into “civilized” humanity, recognized the pastoral as well as the picturesque as “domesticizing” modes that could function as the *sign* of “civilization.” Creating discourses of “pastoral nature” or “picturesque nature” therefore followed the same imperative to become “civilized” through hyper-separation. As shown, both modes figured prominently in writing that focused on education and home, for instance, in Charlotte Forten’s or William Wells Brown’s valuations of the rural over the city, or in Booker T. Washington, who hyper-separated and moved “up from slavery” precisely by claiming the pastoral as the reward, the mark of his “cultivation” and “civilization.” In this respect, it is also telling that the (traumatic) wilderness narrative that had its roots in the heterotopia of the Underground Railroad largely disappeared at the time when the pastoral became a sign

of achieving humanity. In any case, such observations question the existence of an overwhelming antipastoralism in the black literary tradition for the period treated in this study.

Secondly, it is my hope that my readings more broadly suggest how productive exchanges and interlinkages between ecocriticism and African American studies may become. On the one hand, ecocriticism may benefit greatly from treating African American texts through more interaction and exchange with African American literary criticism. As the use of Gates's concept of signifying demonstrates, ecocritics who turn to African American writing should embrace the expertise and alternative models that African American studies has long brought to interpreting the tradition and employ concepts such as "signifying" or "double consciousness" more centrally. On the other hand, African American literary criticism may find new themes and dimensions in the black literary tradition by incorporating ecocritical concepts and perspectives. When recalling that the field of African American studies has at times overlooked no doubt existing environmental dimensions, sometimes simply by referring to abridged editions as in the case of the Billington-edition of Forten's *Journals* (Chap. 5), it seems a rewarding task to reread texts anew against previous interpretations that were traditionally focusing on the issue of race. This is not to suggest drawing attention away from this issue, but rather to move on to considering the interrelations between race and environmental knowledge. The two, black writers themselves often imply, cannot be thought apart.

Thirdly, and beyond the immediate scope of this book, an explicitly Foucauldian perspective as employed in *Environmental Knowledge, Race, and African American Literature* may be another fruitful mode of analysis for ecocriticism more generally. If taking Foucauldian thought not as radically constructivist but instead as one strand of a "weak constructionism" (Heise), a Foucauldian ecocriticism could become a means not only of finding and describing new environmental texts, but also of further exploring links between race, environmentalism, and discourses of nature. If Buell, in his preface to *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, alludes to W.E.B. Du Bois's famous prediction of the "problem of the color line" to suggest that an ultimately still more pressing twenty-first century question could "prove to be whether planetary life will remain viable for most of the earth's inhabitants," exploring environmental knowledge may be one productive way of analyzing the long history of intersections between both issues (vi). A Foucauldian ecocriticism offers ways to write this history, which seems an essential task in the age of the Anthropocene and at

a time of global environmental crises and continuing racism. If we require “a climate of transformed environmental values, perception, and will” (Buell, *Future* vi), environmentally rereading cultural histories like that of African America can help working towards such a transformed climate. In other words, to critically think about and historicize why it apparently felt so odd for many Americans that Obama goes fly-fishing may be part of the solution of broader environmental and social problems.

NOTE

1. A transcript of the exchange between Gibbs and White House reporters can be found on the official website of the White House, www.obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/press-gaggle-press-secretary-robert-gibbs-81509. See also on the medial debate James 175–177.

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INDEX¹

A

Abolitionist movement

black pamphleteers and, 133, 135, 154, 156, 159n11, 161n21

C. Forten and, 174, 180, 188

employment of formerly enslaved eyewitnesses in, 96–98, 217

patronizing attitude toward formerly enslaved in, 96, 98–99, 118n15, 118n16, 217

politics of, 47, 49, 87, 258

radicalization of in the 1830s and 1840s, 91, 140

Underground Railroad and, 46, 52, 55, 74n11, 75n14, 75n15, 76n16, 77n24

Agamben, Giorgio, 128, 129, 158

Agassiz, Louis, 94, 117n13, 141, 232

Alaimo, Stacy, 27, 253, 255, 270, 280n10

Allen, Richard, 135, 137

American Colonization Society (ACS), 135–136, 159n12

American School of Polygenesis, 94, 96, 129, 141, 147, 232, 235

Anderson, David R., 17, 225, 230, 245n6

Andrews, William L., 75n15, 78n25, 78n28, 118n16, 170, 194, 197, 199, 203n2, 206n19, 254, 267, 271, 279n5, 280n8

Animals (non-human), 226, 240, 269, 280n7

in black pamphlets, 151, 153–155
as co-agents during flights, 66–67, 70, 71

harnessed by slavery, 65, 77n23
in proslavery arguments, 129–130, 140, 157n2, 256

transformations into through
conjure, 257, 260, 262–265

Anthropocene, 289

¹Note: Page numbers followed by ‘n’ refer to notes.

- Anthropometry, 235, 246n8
- Antipastoral, 88, 115n1, 201, 222
 definition of (Gifford), 106
 as dominant in African American literature, 18–19, 33n25, 87, 107, 113–115, 288–289
 in Douglass (*see* Douglass, Frederick, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*)
 in H.B. Brown (*see* Brown, Henry Box, antipastoral imagery in)
 imagery in fugitive slave narratives (*see* Slave narrative, antipastoral in)
 and strategic pastoral (*see* Strategic pastoral, relation to antipastoral)
- Arcadian (spatial) pastoral, 90, 103, 106, 108, 109, 222
See also Pastoral, spatial and temporal (Snyder)
- Armstrong, Samuel C., 205n14, 218, 236, 238
- Asher, Jeremiah, 136
- B**
- Ball, Charles, 97–98
- Bayley, Solomon, 24, 48, 67–69, 71
- bell hooks, 114, 200
- Bennett, Michael, 18, 19, 32n22, 33n25, 88, 107–109, 118n18, 288
- Bentham, Jeremy, 93
- Bibb, Henry, 28, 98, 117n11, 173, 181
 co-agency of the non-human in, 69–71
 correspondence with former master, 77n22
Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, 21, 24, 48, 63, 64, 69–71, 78n28, 113, 193; in ecocriticism, 78; as representative text, 78n25
Voice of the Fugitive (newspaper), 204n4
- Billington, Ray A., 176–178, 289
- Biological exclusion, 25, 127–135, 139–141, 145, 146, 150–153, 156, 158n6, 161n21, 256, 266
- Biopolitics, 12, 207n24, 243, 245n5, 258, 263, 267
 in B.T. Washington (*see* Washington, Booker T., biopolitical vision of)
 as critical lens for reading African American environmental knowledge, 15–16, 19, 24, 127, 215, 286, 287
 in ecocriticism, 31n17
 racialization and, 128–129, 238, 257, 258, 263
 through biological exclusion of the black body, 127–134, 161n18
- Black agrarianism, 26
See also Georgic
- Black Belt, 216
- Black nationalism, 139, 145, 159n13
See also Walker, David, black nationalism of
- Black Women's Era, 172, 174, 203n3, 216
- Blight, David, 74n12
- Bolster, Jeffrey, 16, 64
- Brown, Henry Box, 25, 48, 53, 56, 68, 90, 98, 108, 110, 111, 114, 182
 antipastoral imagery in, 101–102, 106
 moving panorama of, 118n17
Narrative of Henry Box Brown, 52–53, 87, 101–106, 112
Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown, 53, 102
 strategic pastoral in, 101–106

- Underground Railroad experience
of, 52–53, 75n15
- Brown, John, 57–58, 77n23
- Brown, Sterling, 225, 230
- Brown, William W., 98, 237, 261, 288
agrarian environmental knowledge
in, 199–203
- Black Man, The*, 56, 194
- Clotel or, The President's Daughter*,
170, 193, 194
- Escape, The*, 194
- as historian, 193, 194, 207n22
- as literary pioneer, 170, 193
- moving panorama of, 193
- My Southern Home*, 26, 174,
193–203, 206n20, 241,
247n11; on emigration,
201–202; nostalgia in,
197–198; sources for, 207n21;
technique of, 194–195, 207
- Narrative of William Wells
Brown*, 207n25
- Negro in the American Rebellion,
The*, 194
- Rising Son, The*, 194
- tricksterism in, 26, 198–200,
207n25, 255
- Bruce, Henry C., 170
- Buell, Lawrence
on environmental texts, 6, 27, 244,
266, 287
- Future of Environmental Criticism,
The*, 30n11, 289–290
- on pastoral, 88, 89, 106, 107,
113–114, 115n1, 116n3
- Bullard, Robert D., 32n19
- Burns, Anthony, 180
- C**
- Cable, George W., 194
- Caldwell, Charles, 141
- Carver, George W., 245n2
- Chesapeake Bay, 111, 113
- Chesnut, Mary B., 194
- Chesnutt, Charles
Conjure Woman, The, 251, 254,
257, 260, 261, 270, 271,
279n4, 279n6, 280n7
- “Dave’s Neckliss,” 254, 271
- “Dumb Witness, The,” 254
- in ecocriticism, 254, 280
- epistemological resistance in, 27,
267–278; and visual
perception, 272–275
- “Goophered Grapevine, The,” 254,
257, 259, 280n9
- “Gray Wolf’s Ha’nt, The,” 27,
251–253, 263–264, 267,
269–271, 276, 278
- “Hot-Foot Hannibal,” 260
- “Lonesome Ben,” 254, 258–259,
264–265, 275
- “Passing of Grandison, The,” 3–9,
15–16, 20, 23, 28
- philosophy of environmental
knowledge in, 27, 273–278
- “Po’ Sandy,” 27, 253, 257,
260, 271
- “Sis’ Becky’s Pickaninny,” 27, 253,
261–263, 281n14
- and Spencer, 27, 251–254,
267–278, 278n1,
281n12, 281n16
- “Tobe’s Tribulations,” 262,
264, 271
- trans-corporeal environmental
knowledge in, 27, 253–267,
270, 274–278
- Wife of his Youth, The*, 3
- Claborn, John, 17, 18, 32n22, 214,
215, 226, 229, 245n2,
245n6, 287
- Clay, Edward W., 128–129, 131

- Co-agency of the non-human
 in Chesnutt, 263–266
 in fugitive slave narratives (*see* Slave
 narrative)
- Coffin, Levi, 46
- Coker, Daniel, 135
- Colfax, Richard H., 129–130
- Collins, Robert, 130, 161n18
- Conjure, 199, 252, 254–261, 263,
 264, 274–275, 279–280, 280n7
- Cooper, Anna J., 22, 176,
 204n3, 205n10
- Cornish, Samuel E., 137
- Craft, Ellen, 53, 56, 67, 75n15, 182
- Craft, William
*Running a Thousand Miles for
 Freedom*, 48, 53–54
 and Underground Railroad, 53–54,
 56, 60, 67, 75n15, 182
- Craniometry, 94–96, 127
- Crary, Jonathan, 95, 96, 100,
 116n6, 118n14
- Cult of True Womanhood (Welter),
 182, 187, 205n9
- Curry, James, 24, 48, 63, 64, 66–68,
 70, 71, 77–78, 77n22
- D**
- Daguerre, Louis, 91, 116n7
- Darier, Éric, 12, 14, 30n13
- Darwin, Charles, 232, 234, 245n4,
 252, 279n3, 281n12
Descent of Man, The, 232, 242–243
 on moral-ethical values as factor of
 natural selection, 242–243
On the Origin of Species, 233, 267
 racism of, 246n9
- Davis, Clarissa, 74n10
- Discipline, *see* Washington, Booker T.,
 discipline in
- Dixon, Melvin, 17, 63–65, 67, 71,
 73n5, 77n21, 78n26, 78n28,
 279n1, 279n5, 281n15
- Dixon, Thomas F., 239, 246n9
- Douglass, Frederick
Heroic Slave, The, 77n22, 170
 “Lecture on Pictures,” 91, 116n7
 “Lecture on Slavery,” 51
Life and Times of Frederick Douglass,
 28n3, 51, 54, 170
My Bondage and My Freedom, 50,
 60, 63, 75n15, 76n16,
 110–111, 118n15
*Narrative of the Life of Frederick
 Douglass*, 21, 24, 25, 48, 50,
 57–60, 70, 87, 90–93, 100,
 106–113, 173, 193, 256;
 Chesapeake Bay in, 63, 111–113;
 Colonel Lloyd’s garden in, 107,
 222–223; as example of African
 American anti-pastoralism
 (Bennett), 19, 87, 107; response
 by A.C.C. Thompson to, 99;
 surveillance in, 92–93
 “Niagara,” 1, 15, 28n2
 and Niagara Falls, 1, 4, 7–9, 15–16,
 28, 28n1
 “Pictures and Progress,” 91, 116n7
 signifying on the sublime, 2–3, 15,
 19, 23, 29
 and strategic pastoral, 87, 106–113
 and Underground Railroad,
 58–60, 75–76
 on visual culture, 90–91, 116
- Drew, Benjamin, 51, 55, 75n14
- Du Bois, William Edward Burghardt,
 22, 119n21, 289
 controversy with Booker
 T. Washington, 213, 214
Dusk of Dawn, 218
Negro Church, The, 135
Quest of the Silver Fleece, The, 287
Souls of Black Folk, The, 173
- Dunbar, Paul Laurence, 22,
 246n10, 287
- Dunbar Nelson, Alice, 216
- Dungy, Camille T., 9, 17

E

- Easton, Hosea, 21, 25, 127, 152, 156, 160n16, 161n21, 173, 204n4, 256
 “A Treatise on the Intellectual Character, and Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the United States,” 138–139, 141–146, 148–150, 160n15
- Easton, James, 204n4
- Ecocriticism
 on African American literature, 7, 16–20, 32n19, 32n20
 and African American studies, 21, 23, 287, 289
 Foucauldian theory in, 11–12, 14, 16, 23, 31, 289–290
 particular significance of
 Underground Railroad for, 24, 47–48, 57, 66, 71–72, 73n6
- Eco-historicism (Claborn), 18, 214
- Education
 in antebellum pamphlets, 134, 150, 154, 156
 antebellum projects of, 204
 in B.T. Washington, 217–221, 226–230, 245n3 (*see also* Washington, Booker T., and industrial education)
 in C. Forten, 183–193
 of C. Forten, 175, 179
 Douglass on, 91
 literary spaces of, 26, 174, 182, 193, 203, 216
 as theme in post-Emancipation African American writing, 172–174, 204n5, 288
 W.W. Brown on, 195–196
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 180
- Environmental humanities, 12, 16, 214
- Environmental justice, 17, 32n19, 280n10
- Environmental knowledge
 African American, 27–28; agrarian forms of, 195, 199–203, 224–231, 241, 243, 261; antebellum foundations of, 7, 18, 24, 169, 177, 180, 192, 287; in antebellum pamphlets, 25, 127–128, 132–157; in antebellum slave narratives, 24–25, 47–48, 61–72, 86–90, 100–115; in B. T. Washington, 26–27, 213–244; in C. Forten, 26, 174–193; in C. W. Chesnut, 27, 251–278; dimensions of, 15–16; diversity of, 21–22; at Niagara Falls, 1, 15–16, 20, 29n6; post-Emancipation transformations of, 7, 18, 25–26, 169–174, 177, 182, 193, 202–203, 206n21, 216, 224, 231, 243–244, 288; and signifyin(g) (Gates), 8, 15, 22–23; subversiveness of, 5, 6, 20, 29n6, 30n10; in W. W. Brown, 26, 193–203; at Yellowstone, 285–287
 as alternative ecocritical lens, 9, 18–20
 and evolutionary thought, 215, 231–244, 246n10, 251–253, 267–278
 Foucauldian dimensions of (*see* Foucault, Michel, dimensions of knowledge in)
 general definition of, 10–11, 30n11
 as opposed to indigenous knowledge, 10–11, 30n12
 as opposed to knowledge of nature, 11, 31n16
 racialized antebellum forms of, 128–132, 159n14, 233
- Environmental state of exception, 128–132, 255, 266, 277–278

- Epidermalization of race (Fanon), 126, 142, 148
- Epistemological resistance, *see*
Chesnutt, Charles,
epistemological resistance in
- Escapes
in boxes, 52–54, 68, 74n10, 101
in disguise, 53, 54, 74n10
by ship, 4, 54
by train, 54, 60, 75n13
- Evolutionary thought, 171, 214
African American critique of, 246
broad definition of, 245
of B.T. Washington (*see* Washington,
Booker T., as social
evolutionist)
B.T. Washington's critique of (*see*
Washington, Booker T.,
signifying on evolutionary
thought through environmental
knowledge)
C. Chesnutt's critique of (*see*
Chesnutt, Charles, and
Spencer)
racism in, 232–237, 239, 241,
245–246, 267–269
Spencerian forms of, 252–253,
267–273, 276–278
See also Environmental knowledge,
and evolutionary thought
- Evrie, John H. van, 155–156
- F**
- Fanon, Frantz, 28, 126, 157n1
- Field, Henry M., 235
- Finseth, Ian F., 17, 18, 32n22, 72n2,
90, 115n1, 116n4, 116n6, 138,
143, 159n13
- Fiske, John, 235, 237, 239, 241
- Foner, Eric, 47, 49, 55, 72n2, 74n9,
74n11, 75n12, 75n13, 75n14,
76n17, 76n20
- Forten, Charlotte, 288
in ecocriticism, 205n13
education and, 183–193
family history of, 204n8, 205n9
home-building and,
182–183, 185–187
“Interesting Letter,” 188, 190–191
Journals; after the Civil War, 204n7;
editorial history of, 21,
176–177, 205n10, 289;
picturesque in, 179–180, 182,
189; as refuge of nature,
177–181, 224
“Life on the Sea Islands,” 174,
187–192, 206n17, 237
literary space in, 26, 169–193,
203, 216
picturesque in, 179–180,
182, 189–192
“Poem,” 184
at Port Royal, 174,
184–193, 205n15
private *vs.* public voice, 187–193
at Salem, Massachusetts, 175
and Seth Rogers, 190
“The Two Voices,” 184
- Forten, James, 127, 134–136, 138,
139, 159n11
- Foster, Frances S., 116n8, 133,
204n3, 204n6
- Foucault, Michel
African American studies and, 16
on biopower, 125, 217–219
dimensions of knowledge in,
11–14, 31n15
Discipline and Punish, 13, 93, 218
in ecocriticism, 12, 16, 31

- environmental thought and, 11–12,
14, 30n13, 31n16, 31n17
on heterotopia, 49, 71
influence of on G. Agamben,
158n4
on panopticism, 92–93
Society Must Be Defended, 30n13,
219, 257
Will to Knowledge, The, 125
Franklin, John H., 73n3, 74n7
Frederick, Francis, 170
Freedmen's Bureau, 173
Freedmen's School Movement, 173
Frontier Thesis (Turner), 136
Fugitive humanism (L. Johnson), 18,
132, 280n7
Fugitive Slave Act (1850), 53,
55, 180
- G**
- Gara, Larry, 46, 47, 56, 72n2, 73n3
Gardens, 181, 201, 221, 246n10
in B.T. Washington, 222–224, 240
inaccessibility of to the enslaved,
107–109, 169, 222–223
kept by the enslaved, 47,
61, 62, 110
Garnet, Henry H., 127, 138
Garrard, Greg, 12, 16, 17, 31n17, 88,
115, 116n3, 245n6
Garrett, Thomas, 74n11
Garrison, William Lloyd, 1, 76n19,
100, 159n11, 187, 190
Gates, Henry Louis, 7, 8, 22–24,
116n8, 117n12, 132, 170, 171,
178, 289
Georgic, 23, 27, 171, 214, 215,
245n6, 261
attractiveness of to post-
Emancipation African American
literature, 225, 230
environmental knowledge in
B.T. Washington (*see*
Washington, Booker T., georgic
vision of)
general definition of, 224–225
as process (*see* Washington, Booker
T., georgic-as-process in)
significance of for African American
environmental knowledge, 225
Georgics (Virgil), 230
Gifford, Terry, 86, 106, 115n1
Glave, Dianne D., 16, 62
Gliddon, George R., 94, 141, 232
Goings, Henry, 170
Golden Age (temporal) pastoral, 90,
103–104, 106, 110–111,
222, 227
See also Pastoral, spatial and
temporal (Snyder)
Grand Canyon, 285
Green, Lear, 74n10
- H**
- Haitian Revolution, 135
Hampton Institute, 205n14, 218,
219, 226, 236–239
Harper, Frances E. W., 22, 158n7,
173, 204n3, 204n6, 216,
246n10, 287
Harris, Joel C., 194, 256, 257, 279n5
Haviland, Laura, 46
Hayles, Katherine, 14
Heise, Ursula K., 14, 289
Hekman, Susan, 12, 30n14
Henry, George, 170

Hermeneutics of freedom, *see* Slave narrative

Heterotopia (Foucault), 10, 49, 55, 71

literary (*see* Slave narrative, and Underground Railroad, as literary heterotopia)

six principles of, 49

Heterotopology (Foucault), 49

Home

B.T. Washington on, 216, 217

in C. Forten (*see* Forten, Charlotte, home-building and)

literary spaces of, 26, 174, 182, 193, 216

South as in W.W. Brown, 196–197, 201–202

as theme in post-Emancipation

African American writing, 172, 173, 203n3, 288

in W.W. Brown, 195–196, 207n24

Hopkins, Pauline, 22, 119n21, 174, 204n3, 204n6, 216, 246n10

Hurston, Zora Neale, 287

Hussey, Christopher, 189, 206n18

Hyper-separation (Plumwood), 114, 119, 133, 256, 266, 288

I

Idylls (Theocritus), 85

Intertextuality, 10, 23, 133, 171

See also Signifyin(g)

J

Jacobs, Harriet, 50, 117n11, 119n19

Jefferson, Thomas, 4, 125–127, 132, 157n2, 161n18

in David Walker, 140–141, 159n13

Johnson, Charles, 32n21

Johnson, Eastman, 78n27

Johnson, Lindgren, 17, 18, 32n22, 131, 132, 279n5, 280n7

Johnson, Walter, 51, 74n8, 77n23, 117n10

Johnson, William H., 74n11

Jones, Absalom, 135

Jones, William “Box” Peel, 74n10

K

Keckley, Elizabeth, 198, 203n2, 246n10

Knights of Liberty, 60

Knowledge

environment and (*see* Environmental knowledge)

in Foucault (*see* Foucault, Michel, dimensions of knowledge in)

indigenous and local forms of, 10–11, 30n12

materiality of, 12–14

Knox, Robert, 141, 145

Kyoto Protocol, 286

L

LeConte, Joseph, 234, 237

Lee, Jarena, 246n10

Lewis, John, 21, 25, 127, 141, 146–150, 152, 156, 160n15, 160n17, 161n19, 161n21, 256

Liberator, The (Garrison), 1, 97, 159n11, 187

Lodge, Henry C., 234

Loguen, Jermain W., 55, 60, 65, 73n4

Lyell, Charles, 232

M

Malvin, John, 60

Maroonage, 62, 74n7, 214, 215, 229

Mason-Dixon line, 57
 Mayer, Sylvia, 17
 McKittrick, Katherine, 47
 Missouri River, 194
 Mitchell, William M., 60
 Monogenism, 232, 237, 252
 Montrie, Chad, 16, 62
 Morgan, John T., 234
 Morrison, Toni, 9, 18, 30n10,
 32n21, 287
 Morton, Samuel G., 94, 141, 161n20,
 232, 246n8
 Morton, Timothy, 14, 31n16
 Moving panorama, 118n17, 193
 Muir, John, 280n7
 Murray, Ellen, 185, 205n14
 Myers, Jeffrey, 17, 19, 20, 32n22,
 33n25, 78n26, 118n18, 131,
 254, 272, 279n5, 280n7

N

Nadir (of American race
 relations), 237
 Nature
 book of, 64, 262
 as controversial theme of African
 American literature, 7–8
 as discourse justifying African
 American enslavement, 27,
 113, 125–127, 129–131
 as discourse justifying freedom,
 62–63, 77n22
 as discourse strategically used in
 antebellum pamphlets, 25, 127,
 134, 142–146, 150–157
 knowledge of as opposed to
 environmental knowledge,
 11, 31n16
 as refuge in C. Forten (*see* Forten,
 Charlotte, *Journals*, as refuge
 of nature)

role in concept of environmental
 knowledge, 11–14
 romantic concept of, 109, 224
 Nell, William C., 207n22
 Newman, Lance, 17, 18, 32n22, 49,
 89, 93, 101, 111, 114
 Niagara Falls, 1, 15, 19, 28,
 29n6, 29n7
 African American history of, 30n9
 in C. Chesnutt (*see* Chesnutt,
 Charles, “Passing of
 Grandison, The”)
 in Douglass (*see* Douglass, Frederick,
 and Niagara Falls)
 environmental knowledge at (*see*
 Environmental knowledge,
 African American, at
 Niagara Falls)
 as icon of the sublime (*see* Sublime,
 Niagara Falls and)
 satires of, 29n4
 Underground Railroad history of
 (*see* Underground Railroad, at
 Niagara Falls)
 Niagara Movement, 30n9
 Nott, Josiah C., 94, 141, 232

O

Obama, Barack, 27, 213,
 285–287, 290
 Ohio River, 58, 69, 113
 Outka, Paul, 17, 18, 32n22,
 33n24, 48, 78n26, 113,
 116n4, 131, 158n6, 254,
 272, 279n5, 279n6,
 280n7, 288

P

Page, Thomas N., 239, 246n9, 256,
 257, 279n5

- Pamphlet tradition (African American),
7, 15, 21, 24, 25, 127–128, 173,
181, 193, 256
between oral and written
tradition, 159
discourses of nature and, 151–157
as dissecting and environmentalizing
the black body, 140–150, 266
environmental knowledge in (*see*
Environmental knowledge,
African American, in
antebellum pamphlets)
influence of on abolitionism, 159
radicalization of through D. Walker,
137–138, 160n15
themes of during antebellum
period, 133–139
as understudied in comparison with
slave narrative, 133, 158
- Panopticism (Foucault), 10, 92–93,
117n9, 216, 218, 223
as facet of slavery, 31n18, 93–94,
96, 103, 117n11
- Pastoral, 15, 23–25, 119, 158n6, 171,
179–182, 201, 287
as problematic in context of African
American culture, 18–19, 33,
33n25, 87–89,
113–114, 287–288
as reward (*see* Washington, Booker
T., pastoral-as-reward in)
spatial and temporal (Snyder), 25,
89–90, 103, 110, 222
in Theocritus, 85–86
tied to images of the plantation (*see*
Plantation pastoral)
U.S. tradition of, 89, 114–116
visual dimensions of, 86, 115
as white privilege, 105, 112
- Pastoral apparatus (Buell), 89, 106,
107, 113, 114
- Paul, Nathaniel, 153
- Peterson, Carla, 117n10, 172, 176,
188, 204n3, 204n6, 205n9,
205n12, 205n13, 206n17
- Pettit, Eber M., 46
- Phrenology, 117n13, 127, 141,
148, 155
- Physical anthropology, 232,
235, 246n8
- Picturesque, 15, 23, 26, 158n6, 171,
203, 206n18, 266, 287, 288
in C. Forten (*see* Forten, Charlotte,
picturesque in)
as dominant nineteenth-century
mode of vision (Hussey), 189
as part of W.W. Brown's nostalgia,
197, 198
- Pierce, Edward L., 184, 185
- Plantation
use of in B.T. Washington, 214,
225, 227
difficulty of representing
environmental knowledge in
connection with, 88–90
non-human animals on, 70, 110
as normalizing space, 25, 47, 50–51,
61, 72, 87
nostalgic representation of in
W.W. Brown, 196
pastoral and (*see* Plantation pastoral)
power negotiations between owners
and enslaved on, 49
surveillance on, 92–94,
117n10, 169
- Plantation pastoral, 19, 33n24, 88–89,
105, 116n4, 128–129, 131, 223,
259, 280n7
- Plumwood, Val, 113, 119n20, 288
- Polygenism, 94, 117n13, 141,
160n17, 232, 233, 246n9
See also American School of
Polygenesis
- Polyphemus, 85–86

- Port Royal Experiment, 174, 184–185
 Posmentier, Sonya, 17, 18, 287
 Powell, John W., 233
 Purvis, Robert, 55, 175
- R**
- Racial uplift, 135, 150, 173, 246n10
 in B.T. Washington (*see* Washington, Booker T., racial uplift in)
- Racism
 in abolitionist movement, 98–99
 environmental, 17
 environmental alienation and, 19–20, 131
 in evolutionism (*see* Evolutionary thought, racism in)
 of plantation pastoral, 128–131
 (pseudo)scientific (*see* Scientific racism)
 as working through biological exclusion and environmental state of exception, 128–132
- Radical pastoral (L. Newman), 89, 114
- Reconstruction, 46, 170, 172, 174, 194, 204n5, 204n6, 206n21, 288
- Redpath, James, 55, 77n20
- Reese, David M., 154–155, 161n21
- Rhetoric of visibility, *see* Slave narrative, rhetoric of visibility of
- Ride for Liberty (E. Johnson), 78n27
- Ruffin, Kimberly, 17–20, 32n22, 73n6, 245n2
- Ruggles, David, 60, 73n4, 127, 153–156, 161n21, 181, 204n4
- S**
- Salem, Massachusetts, 175, 179, 184, 205n10
- Saunders, Prince, 135
- Schweninger, Loren, 73n3, 74n7
- Scientific racism, 27, 87, 94, 157n1, 232, 256
 evolutionism and (*see* Evolutionary thought, racism in)
 in Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 126–127
 late nineteenth-century turn to statistics in, 246
 polygenist forms of, 94, 117n13, 140; adaptation of evolutionary thought in, 232–233
 in proslavery arguments, 129–131
 refutation of in antebellum black pamphlets, 140–150, 155–157, 160, 160n15
 role of antebellum visual regimes in, 94–96
- Shaler, Nathaniel S., 233–234, 237, 239
- Shaw, Robert Gould, 185
- Shockley, Evie, 17
- Siebert, Wilbur, 30n8, 46, 47
- Signifyin(g)
 by black writers on Euro-American traditions, 23, 24, 119n21, 133, 171, 243, 267
 by black writers on foundational African American environmental knowledge, 23, 24, 171–172, 192, 215, 221
 definition of (Gates), 23
 as fundamental to African American environmental knowledge, 8, 15, 22–24, 171–172, 289
- Slave narrative
 antebellum visual regimes and, 25, 86, 90–96, 100, 118n15, 216, 220
 as anti-nature writing (Outka), 33n24, 48, 113, 288

- Slave narrative (*cont.*)
 antipastoral in, 87, 88, 100–103,
 106–110, 113–115,
 222, 287–289
 co-agency of the non-human in, 48,
 61, 64, 66–72, 78n27
 generic conventions of, 47, 52, 62,
 87, 100, 111
 gothic mode in, 49, 93,
 101–103, 264
 hermeneutics of freedom in, 48,
 62–64, 68, 69, 72, 113, 262
 rhetoric of visibility of, 86, 90,
 96–100, 105, 114–115, 188,
 216, 217, 220
 after slavery (Andrews), 170, 194
 strategic pastoral in, 25, 87, 90,
 100–115, 181, 215, 244
 surveillance in, 92–94, 117, 223
 and Underground Railroad, 24,
 45–72; as literary heterotopia,
 47–60, 72, 169; with non-
 human co-agents, 61–62,
 65–72, 78n27
 as witness literature, 91, 96–98,
 116, 216–217
- Slave plot, 47, 62
- Slavery
 confinement of enslaved body
 under, 51, 117n11
 H. Easton on mental and physical
 changes through, 144–146
 non-human nature harnessed by, 51,
 67, 70, 94
 proslavery arguments and, 127, 146,
 148, 149, 153 (*see also*
 Scientific racism, in proslavery
 arguments)
 school of, 198, 199, 202, 207n25
 (*see also* Washington, Booker T.,
 school of slavery in)
 subversive forms of resistance to,
 49, 61–62
 topographies of, 47, 49–51, 54, 62,
 64–65, 93, 108, 170
 visual violence of, 94, 216 (*see also*
 Visual regimes, of slavery)
- Smallwood, Thomas, 56
- Smedley, Robert C., 46
- Smith, Kimberly, 8, 17, 18, 32n22,
 78n26, 245n2, 259, 280n7, 286
- Smith, Samuel A., 52
- Snyder, Susan, 25, 87, 89–90, 103,
 104, 106, 110, 222
- Social Darwinism, 215, 267
See also Evolutionary thought
- Spencer, Herbert, 27, 171, 234, 235,
 237, 238, 245n4, 246n9,
 246n10
 and C. Chesnutt (*see* Chesnutt,
 Charles, and Spencer)
First Principles, 252–253,
 269, 276–277
- Lamarckian optimism of,
 268, 281n12
Social Statics, 268–270
- Stewart, Maria W., 127, 138, 246n10
- Still, William, 45–46, 56, 60, 72n1,
 74, 76n20, 151
- Stoll, Mark, 16
- Stowe, Harriet Beecher, 55
- Strategic pastoral, 25, 26, 181, 244
 as alternative framework for reading
 African American literature
 environmentally, 87,
 89–90, 114–115
 definition of, 89
 in Douglass (*see* Douglass, Frederick,
 and strategic pastoral)
 in the fugitive slave narrative (*see*
 Slave narrative, strategic
 pastoral in)
 in H.B. Brown (*see* Brown, Henry
 Box, strategic pastoral in)
 relation to antipastoral, 87, 89–90,
 106, 107

transformations of in
 B.T. Washington (*see*
 Washington, Booker T.,
 transforming the strategic
 pastoral)
 utopian potential of, 25, 89, 90,
 103–106, 111–113
 and vision, 101, 104–107, 111–113
 Sublime, 131, 133, 179, 180, 287
 and beautiful (Burke), 190
 in Douglass (*see* Douglass, Frederick,
 signifying on the sublime)
 Niagara Falls and, 2–4, 6, 8, 29n5
 as racialized concept, 2–3, 16, 29,
 29n7, 33n24, 158n6
 Sumner, William G., 233, 237,
 239, 245n7
 Swamp, 106, 186, 202, 231, 264, 271
 as heterotopic space subverting the
 plantation system, 47, 62
 as part of Underground Railroad
 experience, 64, 69
 Synthetic philosophy (Spencer), 252,
 253, 267, 269, 276, 279n2

T

Theocritus, 85–86
 Thompson, A.C.C., 99–100
 Thoreau, Henry David, 9, 55, 109,
 224, 280n7, 286
 Tocqueville, Alexis de, 134, 228
 Toomer, Jean, 287
 Topographies of enslavement, *see*
 Slavery, topographies of
 Torrey, Charles T., 74n11
 Towne, Laura, 185, 188, 191, 205n14
 Transcendentalism, 94
 Trans-corporeality (Alaimo), 27, 255,
 270, 280–281
See also Chesnutt, Charles, trans-
 corporeal environmental
 knowledge in

Tricksterism

in B. T. Washington, 221
 in C. Chesnutt; *Conjure Woman*,
The, 271, 272, 279n5, 280n7,
 281n15; “Hot-Foot Hannibal,”
 260; “Passing of Grandison,
 The,” 3, 5, 20
 in W.W. Brown (*see* Brown, William
 W., tricksterism in)
 Tubman, Harriet, 55, 60
 Turner, Frederick J., 136
 Tuskegee Institute, 216–219, 221,
 223, 225–228, 237,
 239–242, 245n5

U

Underground Railroad
 abolitionism and (*see* Abolitionist
 movement, Underground
 Railroad and)
 African American conductors of,
 60, 76n18
 anthropocentrism of, 47, 60, 73n6
 definitions of, 60, 76
 as discursive loophole for
 environmental knowledge,
 61–62, 72, 133, 169, 203, 288
 Douglass on (*see* Douglass,
 Frederick, and Underground
 Railroad)
 focus on role of whites in
 accounts of, 46
 as literary heterotopia (*see* Slave
 narrative, and Underground
 Railroad)
 at Niagara Falls, 6, 23, 29n8, 30n9
 operating in South, 60
 in Philadelphia, 45, 53, 72n1,
 74n11, 76n20, 77n24,
 101, 151
 as quasi-public, 55–56,
 74n11, 75n13

Underground Railroad (*cont.*)
 radicalized by Fugitive Slave Act, 55
 relevance of for ecocriticism, 24,
 47–48, 57, 66, 71–72
 scholarly engagement with, 46–47,
 73n3, 73n4; from a literary
 perspective, 73n5
 secrecy surrounding, 56–60
 secret records of (Still), 45, 46
 in the slave narrative (*see* Slave
 narrative, and Underground
 Railroad)
 and spontaneous help, 60
Underground Railroad, The (Still),
 45–46, 72, 74
 Union Army, 173, 184

V

Vesey, Denmark, 135
 Vigilance committees, 55, 57,
 72n1, 75n13
 Virgil, 116n5, 230
 Virgilian career, 224
 Visual regimes, 25, 86, 100
 of the antebellum period,
 92, 94–100
 definition of, 117
 fugitive slave narrative and (*see* Slave
 narrative, antebellum visual
 regimes and)
 (pseudo)scientific racism and (*see*
 Scientific racism, role of
 antebellum visual regimes in)
 of slavery, 90–94, 108, 118n15,
 216, 217
 transformations of in
 B.T. Washington,
 216–217, 220

W

Walker, Alice, 18, 32n21

Walker, David, 127, 140, 141, 145,
 147, 156, 160n15, 160n16
 “Appeal to the Colored Citizens of
 the World,” 25, 133,
 137–140, 159n13
 black nationalism of, 137–138,
 141, 149
 influencing the African American
 pamphlet tradition,
 137–138, 160n15
 responding to Jefferson, 140–141
 Wardi, Anissa J., 17, 18,
 30n11, 32n21
 Washington, Booker T., 7, 21, 27, 28,
 247n11, 255, 261, 288
 “Atlanta Exposition Speech,” 233,
 238, 241, 243
 biopolitical vision of, 217–221
 controversial views on, 213, 244n1
 controversy with W.E.B. Du
 Bois, 213
 discipline in, 216, 217, 219–220,
 224, 245n5
 in ecocriticism, 213–214, 245n2
 evolutionism in scholarship on, 215
 georgic-as-process in, 231, 237, 239
 georgic vision of, 224–231,
 241–242, 245n6, 261
 and industrial education, 216,
 220, 228
 “Industrial Education for the
 Negro,” 220
My Larger Education, 245n3
 pastoral-as-reward in, 222–224,
 231, 237, 239–241, 244
 as race leader, 22, 213
 racial uplift in, 214, 217, 219–221,
 223, 225–226, 228–229, 231,
 235, 236, 243
 school of slavery in, 198, 240,
 241, 261
 signifying on evolutionary thought
 through environmental

- knowledge, 215,
 231–232, 237–244
 signifying on the fugitive slave
 narrative, 215–221
 as social evolutionist, 231, 237–239
Story of My Life and Work,
The, 245n3
 transforming the strategic pastoral,
 214–215, 221–224
 tricksterism in, 221
Up from Slavery, 26, 203n2,
 214–225, 228, 239–244
Working with the Hands, 26, 27,
 214–217, 221–223, 225–231,
 237–239, 241, 244
 Watkins, William, 153
 Watson, Henry, 56, 77n22
 Weak constructionism
 (Heise), 14, 289
 Weems, Anna M., 74n10
 Weld, Theodore D., 50, 55, 97, 105
 Western Abolitionist Society, 1
 Wheatley, Phyllis, 148
 Whipper, William, 25, 127, 134,
 150–151, 153–155, 173,
 181, 204n4
 Whittier, John Greenleaf, 176, 180,
 184, 189
 Wilderness, 33n24, 63, 65, 66, 71, 77,
 78n26, 101, 201, 260, 285, 288
 Williams, George W., 207n22
 Williams, James, 170
 Wright, Richard, 88
 Wynter, Sylvia, 47
- Y**
- Yellowstone National Park,
 27, 285–286
 Young, Robert A., 137