

Interior Design: The Doll's House and the Working-Class Child

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FRANCES Hodgson Burnett's children's novella *In the Closed Room* (1904) opens on a young girl named Judith lying in the "fierce airless heat of the small square room . . . in a corner of the hive of a workman's flat a few feet from the Elevated Railroad" in New York City.¹ Summer promises many such nights, but relief seems in sight when Judith's father, a shop-worker, becomes seasonal caretaker of a large, empty house next to Central Park; the family moves into the cool basement of their summer home with the understanding that they will maintain the entirety of the house, excepting a mysterious locked room on the fourth floor. Judith's curiosity is piqued on arrival when her mother tries and fails to open the "closed room's" door, and Judith quietly resolves to try the lock herself. The next day, she climbs from the basement to the top floor; this time, the door opens, and Judith realizes the room is a nursery when she sees "a large doll's house . . . looking as if someone had just stopped playing with it. Some toy furniture had been taken out and left near it upon the carpet" (14). The toy's owner, it turns out, is dead, but her ghost soon appears and invites Judith to play with a doll that "looks as if it had died too" (14). This distinctly eerie play continues for several weeks, until Judith's mother comes up one day to discover the door to the closed room swung open, and her daughter inside, dead.

Much might lead us to give but fleeting glance to the specificity of the playthings that Judith encounters. She owns no toys herself, and the doll's house appears at first an all too transparent signifier of the privileged childhood Judith is denied, a material surrogate for the security and domestic comfort of the middle-class children who typically owned such toys. Such ready dismissal, however, would ignore the complexity and broader cultural resonance of this juxtaposition of doll's house and tenement.² In what follows, I examine the cultural significance of the doll's house in nineteenth-century culture, demonstrating its singular

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and unexpected significance in representations of working-class childhood. Reading Frances Hodgson Burnett's work alongside the essays of London housing reformer Octavia Hill (as well as records of Hill's time supervising the manufacture of doll's house furniture by students in London's Ragged Schools), I argue that through much of the nineteenth century, the formative value of the doll's house was understood as deriving from a belief in the object's ability to both embody and indeed *enact* linear temporality. According to this notion, children required access to regulated and delimited domestic spaces to form a viable identity; the capacity to grow into a fully realized subject is inextricable from the child's lived spaces. I suggest that the doll's house is a central object around which these beliefs cohere. Much is known about the middle-class Victorian fascination with peering into the homes of the poor; however, in what follows, I examine the doll's house as an object that inverts the seemingly unidirectional gaze of wealthy voyeurs or reformers. The doll's house becomes an instrument through which working-class children may gaze into the homes of the upper classes. Although the toy is intended in some contexts to work as a disciplinary mechanism for interpellating children into a specifically classed model of subjectivity, the rich and eclectic cultural history of doll's houses in the nineteenth century also gestures toward ways in which children might rescript these expectations to surprising ends.

I begin with a description of how the doll's house as a spatial construct modeled a temporal path of progressive development. Robin Bernstein argues that toys, like other objects of material culture, "script" the behavior of those who encounter them. This is not to say that scripting involves a set of compulsory responses, but "instead describes a set of invitations or prompts that by definition remain open to resistance and revision."³ For Bernstein, "The operative questions are, what historically located behaviors did this artifact invite, and what actions did it discourage? The goal is not to determine what any individual did with an artifact but rather to understand how a nonagential artifact, in its historical context, prompted or invited—scripted—actions of people who were agential and often resistant."⁴ Moving through a broad range of nineteenth-century representations of the doll's house, I establish the ways in which this particular plaything "scripted" an understanding of the nascent and inchoate self as progressing linearly through a set of prescribed developmental stages; the spatial divisions of these miniature homes model for the child a normatively understood relationship to time. Having established this path of development, I return to

Hodgson Burnett's story and Octavia Hill's experiences both as a teacher in the Ragged Schools and as a manager of a housing estate in London to argue that the self-contained, temporally regular model of self that is instantiated in the doll's house was put to use as a compensatory pedagogical object for children whose homes in urban slums bore little resemblance to these miniature domestic havens. To grow up in a one-room home was to grow up oblivious of the careful segmentation of time enacted by a house with many rooms, and this spatial deprivation was conceived of as a kind of temporal, and consequently developmental, form of deviance.

The earliest British "baby houses" were spartan objects, consisting of simple arrangements of dolls' furniture on a shelf or inside of a plain box.⁵ Baby houses did not begin to resemble today's standard form "doll's house" until the early nineteenth century.⁶ With the growth of a newly rich industrial class, Britain saw significantly increased demand for privately commissioned and furnished doll's houses that resembled homes externally as well as internally, with facades and roofs enclosing vertically stacked rooms. As the popularity of the doll's house rose, so too did its print depictions. A pervasive feature of these descriptions is the equation of the doll's house with a form of absolute self-containment and sense of sheltered interiority. The doll's house may be opened and viewed, momentarily destabilizing the categories of interior and exterior, but by virtue of its scale, it retains an interiority that remains fundamentally inaccessible to the observer. As part of his "Letters from Lilliput" series in *Belgravia* magazine (1869), George Augustus Sala articulates this sense of fascination with the doll's house as an object that opens and closes in an anecdote about finding a "sordid, shabby, rickety, gone-to-seed doll's house" in a poor part of London's Camden Town.⁷ Sala writes: "Soberly looking at that doll's house in the everything-shop, I recognize very few differences—save in degree—between it and the palatial doll's residence on the purchase of which I could easily expend from five to ten guineas in Regent-street or the Burlington-arcade. It is the same box of a tenement, the entire façade of which is but a door; and opening on hinges, discovers so many floors furnished splendidly or shabbily, according to the means of the occupant" (376). For Sala, the most essential quality of the doll's house is that its front swings open, leaving it exposed to a simultaneous view of the workings of interior life. In another class-bound reference, *Punch* makes use of this trope in an 1860 piece lamenting decay in parts of Buckingham Palace's facade: "The Palace will soon be as open as a doll's house, and we

shall be able to look into the interior of all the rooms, and to see exactly what the inmates are doing . . . we should recommend some screen being temporarily thrown up to protect the residents of this crumbling Palace from the ocular invasion of the million.”⁸

The miniature home, so easily opened and snapped shut, is phenomenologically associated with compressed and intensified modes of interiority. Gaston Bachelard describes the exaggerated quality of miniatures in *The Poetics of Space*. “The cleverer I am at miniaturizing the world, the better I possess it. But in doing this, it must be understood that values become condensed and enriched in miniature.”⁹ Prominent nineteenth-century children’s author Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s oft-reprinted poem “The Baby-House” (1824) foregrounds this connection between miniaturization and feelings of ownership. The poem begins: “Dear Agatha, I give you joy, / And much admire your pretty toy, / A mansion in itself complete / And fitted to give guests a treat.”¹⁰ The description of the toy as “in itself complete” hints at a central pleasure of the doll’s house, a sense that the house is both an absolutely discrete environment, yet simultaneously an intensification of one’s own world. Barbauld continues: “We almost wish to change ourselves / To fairy forms of tripping elves, / To press the velvet couch and eat / From tiny cups the sugared meat.”¹¹ These lines assert the most beguiling frustration of the doll’s house, that it is sensually unavailable to entry. Yet this frustration also begets a sense of the pleasurable pang of gratifying a child’s desire for entitlement to space. Barbauld suggests with this wish to “change ourselves . . . To fairy forms” that there is something more vitally satisfying about the miniature velvet couches and “tiny cups” of meat than their real-world counterparts. Susan Stewart writes that the miniature is “a diminutive, and thereby manipulatable version of experience, a version which is domesticated and protected from contamination.”¹² Juliana Horatia Ewing’s *Doll’s Housekeeping* (1884) reiterates the preoccupation with the impossibility of entering (and thereby contaminating) a doll’s house when the young narrator mentions the lack of a door on her doll’s house but remarks that even “If there were, I couldn’t play with anything, for I shouldn’t know how to get inside.”¹³ If we are in sympathy with Bachelard’s phenomenology of the miniature, however, this sensual inaccessibility becomes paradoxically necessary to the possibility of an absolute sense of pleasurable possession.

The rise of the doll’s house in Victorian Britain accompanied what domestic historians have identified as a new preoccupation with specialized and separate spaces within the home.¹⁴ Conventional wisdom

among the middle classes held that each biological function required its own segregated space; for instance, the *Architect* magazine argued that to use a bedroom for anything other than sleep was “unwholesome, immoral, and contrary to the well-understood principle that every important function of life required a separate room.”¹⁵ In *Our Homes and How to Make Them Healthy* (1883), Shirley Murphy argues likewise that “each room must be carefully planned with a view to its special occupation or use.”¹⁶ In Jane Panton’s enormously popular *From Kitchen to Garret: Hints for Young Householders* (1887), Panton describes particular spaces as themselves demanding certain standards of behavior from those inside. The drawing-room, she writes, “is and must be essentially a best room, and it is invaluable as a teacher to the untidy or unmethodical mistress or servant. . . . [A] certain amount of fine manners is maintained by use of a room that holds our dearest treasures, and sees little of the seamy side of life.”¹⁷ The room itself exerts a salubrious influence on character: “A certain politeness maintained to each other in the best room, almost insensibly enforced by the very atmosphere of the chamber, will go a long way towards keeping up the mutual respect that husband and wife should have for each other” (109).

This strictly maintained sense of spatial differentiation, I suggest, served two interrelated purposes: class differentiation and the clear marking of the temporal stages of middle-class life. In “The Idea of Home,” Mary Douglas argues that the category of “home” possesses an intrinsic sense of organized time. “Storage,” she writes, “implies a capacity to plan, to allocate materials between now and the future, to anticipate needs. . . . For the sake of the plan, space is differentiated, parceled out, allotted to different intentions.”¹⁸ The divisions of the home anticipate both short- and long-term cycles of time: the daily pattern beginning and ending in the bedroom, or the longer cycles beginning in the nursery and lying-in room. In keeping with her belief that the room itself shapes character, Panton cautions against the insidious effects of allowing children to spend too much time in a part of the house uncalibrated to their time of life; she chastises the laziness of a hypothetical mother who, reluctant to trudge upstairs to the nursery, “has her children with her [in the drawing room] in and out of season, until they gradually absorb the grown-up atmosphere, and become little prigs who care nothing for a romp” (191). Panton’s own children, she assures us, stay firmly put in the nursery, thus precluding the risk of “becoming *blasé* before their time. They are frankly children, and are treated as such” (191).

The idea of a “frank” or normative child is closely enmeshed with corporeal health, specifically the hygienic and well-nourished body. Barbara Leckie reframes the reformer Edwin Chadwick’s 1842 *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population* as a text not solely, or even primarily focused on sanitary reform. Instead, Leckie argues that Chadwick (a close professional associate of Thomas Southwood Smith, maternal grandfather to Octavia Hill) is as much invested in “*the idea of architecture*.”¹⁹ The report’s reliance on descriptions of “opening the houses of the poor to public scrutiny” constitutes a significant shift to the new methodology of the exposé, taking “the spatial boundary confusion and interpenetration that commentators repeatedly found in the environs of the poor . . . and produc[ing] a secret, configured spatially as ‘the interior,’ in need of what Eve Sedgwick calls, in a different context, ‘the drama of exposure’” (8). Chadwick’s report relied extensively on the input of Southwood Smith, a physician who, following the typhoid epidemic of 1837, shared graphic documentary accounts of squalid housing conditions and open drains in the streets of Bethnal Green and Whitechapel.²⁰ Southwood Smith himself draws an explicit architectural connection between moral and physical health in 1844 when he writes: “A clean, fresh, and well-ordered house exercises over its inmates a moral, no less than a physical influence . . . Whereas, a filthy, squalid, unwholesome dwelling . . . tends to make every dweller in such a hovel, regardless of the feelings and happiness of each other, selfish and sensual” (Leckie 29).

Thad Logan notes that it was the mere fact of differentiated space, rather than the size of the home, that was of primary import to middle-class families. We see this idea in evidence in floor plans of middle-class London houses that mimicked the plans of large country estates in minutiae. Robert Kerr’s manual *The Gentleman’s House* (1864) remarks: “The character of a gentleman-like Residence is not [a] matter of magnitude or costliness, but of design . . . However small and compact the house may be, the family must have privacy and the servants commodiousness.”²¹ Kerr’s refrain as to what homes must possess, “however small” they be, is significant, as his book aims to depict those aspects of domestic planning that remain elemental with every diminution in the size of home, and the “first principle,” Kerr writes, is privacy.²² The “Family Rooms shall be essentially private, and as much as possible the Family Thoroughfares. It becomes the foremost of all maxims, therefore, however small the establishment, that the Servants’ Department shall be separated from the Main House, so that what passes on either side

of the boundary shall be both *invisible and inaudible* on the other.”²³ Again, we see how the doll’s house offers an uncannily compressed and fantasized permutation of reality by often dispensing altogether with “thoroughfares,” the stairs and hallways where family and domestics might messily collide. As Dickens writes in his doll’s house description in “A Christmas Tree” (1850): “And though it *did* open all at once, the entire house-front (which was a blow, I admit, as cancelling the fiction of a staircase), it was but to shut it up again.”²⁴ Halina Pasierbska suggests that structural changes in the nineteenth-century doll’s house kept pace with many of the actual changes occurring in how domestic space was divided.²⁵ One such example of a simultaneous shift was the inclusion of nursery wings in doll’s houses, a clear departure from eighteenth-century baby houses, which often had some iteration of a lying-in room, but no space specifically demarcated for children.

Ewing explicitly establishes multiple discrete rooms as a fundamental quality of home in *Doll’s Housekeeping*. Her story traces the building of two homes, a “new house” that “father is building” and the narrator’s miniature toy house, “given to me for my own” (5). As the little girl tracks the improvements made to both structures, she digresses: “I never heard of a house with only one room, except the cobbler’s, and his was a stall. I don’t quite know what that is; but it isn’t a house, and it served him for parlour and kitchen and all” (10). The doll’s house amplifies our awareness of time; it is at once an emblem of absolute fixity as well as temporal transience in its evocation of a particular moment in early life. We might infer from Vincent Murché’s *Object Lessons for Infants* (1897) that, in the tradition of Pestalozzian education later described in this article, the doll’s house was used to emphasize how different parts of the house organized different parts of the day. The lesson “My Doll’s House” begins: “Introduce the lesson by asking the children to tell where they go when school is over. They go home . . . Here is a pretty doll’s house. Isn’t it a beauty, children? Now I want you to tell me all you can about the house where you live, by looking at dolly’s house.”²⁶ The instructor goes on to ask the children to play out the process of arriving home: “‘When you reach home, how do you get into your house?’ ‘We go in at the door.’ . . . ‘What does mother do when she has let you in?’ ‘She closes the door again.’ ‘What does she do with the door at night?’ ‘She locks and bolts it to keep any one from getting in’” (52). Space is parceled out so that one is always standing in readiness for the following act; the door mat sits in place so the children can clean their boots before entering; the lamps are there to be lit when nights falls. An 1880 volume

of the *American Journal of Education* similarly depicts the doll's house as an object through which children engage with time, though it also reveals how *actual* children might take up the object's temporal "script" only to offer their own idiosyncratic variations. The writer describes a scene in which a mother is invited by her daughter "to be present at the marriage ceremony of two of her dolls, and looking into the doll-house was amused to see a complete mimic representation of a wedding party. But what was her horror on the next day to find the wedding succeeded by a funeral, and twenty jointed dolls dressed in deep mourning and holding tiny handkerchiefs to their eyes, sitting round a coffin in which lay the same doll who had played the part of bride."²⁷ Through the comic and grotesque oddities of play, the daughter obliterates any sense of a calmly procedural movement through time—today's bride is tomorrow's corpse. Moreover, the macabre second scene upends cherished sentimental notions of childhood innocence. In staging the end of life, the child both acknowledges her understanding of the toy's script and engages in its anarchic disruption.

The *Journal of Education* anecdote continues: "I have seen a child not four years old repeat with her paper-dolls all the experiences of her own little life. A basin of water represented the ocean, a paper boat the steamer in which she had crossed the Atlantic, blocks arranged in different ways stood for different cities, and the little one's *memories gathered themselves into a connected whole* in her dramatic reproductions."²⁸ The temporal orientation here is retrospective; past moments are restaged in miniature to accrue into a coherent present. Though the doll's house operates as a lesson in temporality for both rich and poor child alike, the affective ends of this model of self, I argue, were class-contingent. For the presumably well-off girl described here, induction into temporal awareness provides a sense that past moments might be revisited and consolidated into a present, cohesive self. This model of linear temporal accretion, with retrospection constituting the self's interior, aligns with the model of interiority described by Carolyn Steedman in *Strange Dislocations*. During the nineteenth century, Steedman suggests, the individual and personal history embodied in the figure of the child came to be a material stand-in for human interiority. Beginning with the Romantics and culminating in the insights of psychoanalytic theory, subjects comprehend the present self through an archival reach back into childhood; the self is understood as formed through the accumulated matter of personal history, and these pieces of the past coalesce in the shape of the child. According to Steedman, the child within "was always

both immanent—ready to be drawn on in various ways—and at the same time, always representative of a lost realm, lost in the individual past and the past of the culture.”²⁹ The modern self is envisaged as being *inside*, and the term “interiority” seeks to describe this spatial sense of the self within. This concentric idea of self is a model of linear temporal progression in which the former small self is incorporated into and ultimately superseded by the present self. There is a certain telos implied in this model; the subject produces a retrospective account of life wherein the small self lends a sense of meaning and inevitable movement toward the present self.

The doll’s house’s relationship to this (now broadly normative) modeling of depth psychology is twofold. In its modeling of linear development, the doll’s house functions pedagogically as a lesson in Steedman’s model of selfhood. Yet the fact that the doll’s house was an object of pedagogy as well as play emphasizes that this linear model of self was both constructed and contingent. For children growing up in one-room homes, the doll’s house was a compensatory and classed iteration of temporal progression that was fundamentally inaccessible without the spatial differentiations of a multi-room home. Where *Punch* derides the prospect of an “ocular invasion” of Buckingham Palace by commoners, a different subset saw instrumentality in this class-inverted gaze. My second claim is that, for poor children, though the doll’s house did indeed teach a kind of linear temporality, it was of a decidedly ambiguous cast. Whereas the middle-class child might use the plaything flexibly as an object permitting retrospection, the scriptive intention for working-class children was to enjoin movement toward an unrelenting futurity. For them, spatial and temporal differentiation are modeled so as to look forward not to consolidated middle-class selfhood, but to more fragile hopes for the afterlife, encouraging perpetual acts of self-abnegation in service of a deferred reward.

Returning to *In the Closed Room*, we see how the doll’s house, a self-contained object housing self-contained rooms, poses a marked counterpoint to Judith’s home. Her room is unsettlingly permeable. She lies awake listening to the people in the next flat “quarrelling, irritated probably by the appalling heat and their miserable helplessness against it. All the hot emanations of the sun-baked city streets seemed to combine with their clamour and unrest, and rise to the flat” (3). The city’s industrial incursions into domestic space disrupt natural patterns of sleeping and waking; Judith is “kept awake by the constant roar and rush and flash of lights. . . . If she could fall asleep between the trains, she would not

awaken. But they came so quickly one after the other” (5). The rooms of a house exist to organize how a day unfolds, but we see no such temporal regularity in the cells of this “workman’s hive,” where biological rhythms are oppressively governed by what goes on outside the home. The sleepless Judith is achingly conscious of the grim nocturnal life surrounding her: “Judith heard a loud slap, and then the woman began to cry. She was a young married woman, scarcely more than a girl. . . . Through the thin wall Judith could hear the girl sobbing angrily as the man flung himself out of bed, put on his clothes and went out, banging the door after him” (6). The minuteness of aural detail here is a specter of Judith’s probable exposure to the couple’s sexual relationship as well. As we will see in Hill’s essays, premature and ongoing exposure to sex was at the heart of concerns about developmental abnormality in working-class children. Being privy to sexual activity is a form of temporal irregularity insofar as sex is an activity beyond a child’s years, but we might also note the ways in which the inevitable exposure of children in one-room homes to the sexual life of their parents or neighbors disrupts another foundational narrative of self—the primal scene and its repression. Sigmund Freud locates the adult’s neuroses following the primal scene as having its origins “in the earliest period of childhood,” but a prepubescent child, like Judith, who regularly witnessed, and presumably remembered sex acts would be unlikely to follow the trajectory of repression and sublimation Freud describes of his bourgeois and aristocratic subjects.³⁰

It is thus of little wonder that on arrival at the large house, the absolute sequestration of the closed room seizes Judith’s imagination. “She wanted so much to go into the room. Without in the least understanding the feeling, she was quite shaken by it” (11). Judith’s excitement is reflected in granular depictions of shifting somatic experience as she approaches the top floor: “Yes, she must get to it—she must put her hand on it—her chest began to rise and fall with a quickening of her breath, and her breath quickened because her heart fluttered” (13). It is perhaps surprising, then, that when the climactic moment arrives and Judith finds herself able to enter the room, she does not stop to survey its interior, instead walking straight to a pair of windows that “opened upon the flat roof of an extension . . . some one who had used the room had been in the habit of going out upon the roof and staying there as if it had been a sort of garden” (13). Judith pauses, transfixed by her sense of distance from the street below: “If one stepped off the parapet it would surely take one a long time to reach the earth. She knew now why she

had come up here. It was so that she might feel like this—as if she was upheld far away from things” (13–14). This moment is less peculiar if we consider the act of looking at the world from a great height as itself both an act of miniaturization and complex seizing of agency over her environment, obscurely foreshadowing the first object Judith turns to inside: the doll’s house. In gazing at the city below her, Judith sees it in miniature, uncontaminated and open to possession. Yet this act of miniaturization is crucially also a moment of suicidal ideation. It echoes the bizarre and confounding ways in which a child might manipulate the temporality of scriptive play, as shown in the young dolls’ dressmaker Jenny Wren’s famously unsettling invitation to Fascination Fledgeby to play “Come up and be dead!” in a rooftop garden of *Our Mutual Friend* (1865): “‘Ah!’ said Jenny. ‘But it’s so high. And you see the clouds rushing on above the narrow streets, not minding them, and you see the golden arrows pointing at the mountains in the sky from which the wind comes, and you feel as if you were dead.’ . . . ‘How do you feel when you are dead?’ asked Fledgeby, much perplexed. ‘Oh, so tranquil!’ cried the little creature, smiling. ‘Oh, so peaceful and so thankful! And you hear the people who are alive, crying, and working, and calling to one another down in the close dark streets, and you seem to pity them so!’”³¹ Judith’s death emerges as the ghastly happy ending anticipated by Jenny Wren; Judith steps “out upon the broad, fresh green pathway . . . here was no boundary or end to its beauty” (20). If the spatial segments of the house have a temporal counterpart, the unbounded roof garden is itself external to time. Instead of returning Judith to the unregulated world of her tenement life, Hodgson Burnett permits her the unregulated time of eternity.

In this text, the doll’s house is yoked with the doomed nonfuture of the working-class child, but in her 1906 story *Racketty Packetty House*, Hodgson Burnett uncannily allegorizes, then *inverts* the class-specific gaze of the “exposé methodology” described by Leckie.³² In doing so, Hodgson Burnett models Bernstein’s notion of playthings as both scriptive, yet open to dizzying revision—again, via active play. *Racketty Packetty House* recounts a little girl’s sidelining of an inherited early-nineteenth-century doll’s house, populated by shabby and “disreputable looking” Dutch dolls, in favor of a gleaming new object named “Tidy Castle,” which houses a cluster of rather more aristocratic inmates (4). The Racketty dolls reside in a corner of the nursery likened to “a low neighborhood,” crowding their days with raucous delight by parodically imitating the residents of Tidy Castle (9). In this story, it is the careworn

and impoverished Racketty inmates who not only gaze *out* of their house to peek at the lives of those in Tidy Castle, but who in doing so also ultimately save them from scarlet fever—a disease rife in impoverished and unsanitary urban neighborhoods.

Hodgson Burnett's ghostly confluence of doll's house, tenement, garden, and grave has an unexpected historical counterpart in the life and work of Octavia Hill. Today, Hill's legacy is a mixed one. She is widely celebrated for her pioneering work in commons and green space preservation in Britain and for her role as a founder of the National Trust. However, Hill's conviction that the poor should live in cottage-style housing and her emphatic resistance to the rise of high-density blocks of vertical apartments have led her involvement in housing reform to be seen, in Anthony Wohl's words, as "obstructive and opposed to the needs of the day."³³ I examine an early and rarely discussed period of Hill's career in the 1850s—teaching a group of children from London's Ragged Schools how to produce doll's houses and doll's house furniture for sale. I argue that this classroom experience is formative in Hill's later writing about urban housing and open space, offering a palimpsestic understanding of her spatial imagination. Hill's later emphasis on the imperative of moving families out of one-room homes is striking when we consider that she daily taught poor children how to furnish small model houses completely incongruous with their own dwellings. Studies of Hill's work typically focus on the period after 1865, the year Hill purchased several tenement courts in Marylebone. Hill's idea for managing the buildings was to have volunteer rent collectors visit each home, and on gaining admission, offer advice as to hygiene and decoration to the tenants.³⁴ By encouraging temperance and frugality, the genteel lady visitor would effect improvements in family life, and by extension, the life of the court.

Long before her career as a landlady, though, Hill spent four youthful years teaching girls from London's Ragged Schools how to build doll's house furniture. The Ragged Schools were formally institutionalized by the Earl of Shaftesbury's 1844 formation of the Ragged School Union, offering free lessons to children originally deemed too "dirty and unruly" for inclusion in the Sunday Schools.³⁵ In 1840, the *London City Mission Magazine* described the schools as having a missionary function "exclusively for children raggedly clothed."³⁶ Hill's pedagogical beliefs were heavily influenced by her mother, Caroline Southwood Hill. Southwood Hill was a former governess and follower of the educational theories of J. H. Pestalozzi, an eighteenth-century Swiss educationalist

who theorized a philosophy of “natural” development that demanded a holistic pedagogy for children in which moral and physical education went hand in hand.³⁷ Pestalozzi believed that children were best taught through sensory learning and empirical observation of the world around them. One of Pestalozzi’s most significant pedagogical innovations was the object lesson, a method premised on the belief that children might learn from material objects through a natural succession of stages beginning from physical sensation and culminating in moral understanding (Darley 16).

Hill’s classes took place at the Ladies’ Guild, a Christian Socialist crafts workshop begun by Southwood Hill, in 1850, and offering employment to women of “respectable” character.³⁸ In 1852, the Ladies’ Guild expanded and began to employ Ragged School girls, and Octavia, now fourteen years old, was brought in to be their teacher. Hill began work at the Ladies’ Guild during a period of financial crisis for her family, and, herself a child laborer, navigated murky imbrications of work and play. In *The Tidy House*, Carolyn Steedman describes the peculiarly class-inflected nature of play in her reading of Henry Mayhew’s encounter with a young watercress seller in *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851).³⁹ Steedman notes how the watercress girl deftly weaves in and out of perceiving herself as either child or worker by “a striving at the edge of. . . competence to both make sense of, and be part of, an adult world. But, in play, children can control the adult world they represent to themselves; the watercress seller, on the other hand, was not able to do this, for she had already become part of that world. . . The watercress seller had the toys of little girlhood, the miniature chairs, the pretend fireplace with hob, the toy cutlery; but, significantly, she had no doll. She did not need to play at being a mother in order to assimilate that role” (122–23). In considering the unsold doll’s house in Camden, Sala asks, “In the grim realities of existence in a London slum, what room is there for the cultivation of the little elegances of child luxury?” (376). In speculating on “the non-purchase of this doll’s house” he reasons that in a poor part of the city there are “too many rival dolls about—too many rival babies, rather—ragged babies, dirty babies, squalid babies. . . and there was too scanty and too wretched accommodation for them in the miserable tenements occupied by their parents, for any demand to exist for a sham house, with sham furniture and sham babies inside” (376). As Steedman emphasizes, however, even a child as materially deprived as the watercress seller might take pleasure in doll’s house things, but without feeling a need for the doll

itself. It is notable that in all the contemporary descriptions of Hill's little cohort, actual *dolls* never make an appearance in the workroom, though the young workers are often described with reference to younger siblings clinging to their skirts, Sala's "rival dolls"—those emphatically *not* "sham babies."

The doll's house furniture was one of the Ragged School's centerpieces in publicizing their work. In 1853, the *Ragged School Union Magazine* devoted an article to describing the "little bees" at work.⁴⁰ It was exacting labor; all furniture was crafted from bonnet wire that the girls coated with a "simple composition, which entirely hid the foundation, and when well-dried, represented a surface even, and hard enough to burnish on" ("Patent Art-Toys" 150). On this surface, "designs in relief of small figures or flowers were arranged agreeably to taste, and by the application of oil paint, water colours, staining liquid, and varnish, the imitation of woods, cast-iron stone, and even china was produced" (150). The scene of these children producing items that found "ready customers among the juvenile aristocracy and gentry" must have been a curious one ("Little Upholsterers" 129). The *Ragged School Union* describes an archetypal object that the girls might be furnishing in a grandly titled "Tudor Villa" exhibited at the 1851 Great Exhibition by Mary A. P. Smith, the patentee of the bonnet wire furniture. The villa is a substantial and resolutely bourgeois edifice with "drawing-room and conservatory, dining-room, library, smoking, or gun-room, and entrance hall, with two bed-rooms, as many dressing-rooms, [and] boudoir" (150).

What significance would this object hold for the Ragged School girls living in homes deemed "poor and miserable . . . so dirty, the lady-visitor is afraid to enter them" ("Little Upholsterers" 129)? Sala invokes the element of wish fulfillment we might experience in the fantasy of property ownership: "There is a 'psychological law' in my nature which makes me anxious to hold something which (under Heaven) is absolutely and entirely mine."⁴¹ The doll's house instantiates this desire not simply because it must be bought, but because it is a discrete, self-enclosed structure that structurally echoes the self-possessed subject. His home must be "detached," Sala insists, "in order . . . that I may not be driven mad by my neighbor to the right thumping her piano, or my neighbor to the left thumping her children, all day long" (375). For the Ragged School workers, of course, the incursions of a neighbor's piano were a remote concern as compared to the admixture of eating, sleeping, sex, and familial violence all taking place in one room.

Sala's piece invites us to consider working-class childhood in the terms of precocity so central to depictions of Victorian children, but the developmental abnormality I describe is of a different cast. Though the children in Hill's essays on London slum life are certainly burdened beyond their years, her concern is that the circumscription of their early years in fact *prevents* normative development, whether literally because their malnourished and over-worked bodies cannot grow or figuratively as these children lack the capacity to conceive of the self as future-oriented. We have unusually intimate access to Hill's schoolroom experiences in "Ragged Robin," an 1856 article often attributed to Caroline Southwood Hill about the Ragged School workers for *Household Words*. The article opens on the Ladies' Guild workshop, where Octavia, referred to as "Miss O.P.Q.," presides over a group of girls making "choice furniture for dolls' houses," and goes on to methodically document the day that "Ragged Robin," a former classmate, returns to the fold.⁴²

Leckie has described how Edwin Chadwick "saw the promise of Bentham's proposal for controlling the British poor by means of the built environment," and thus it may be tempting to veer solely toward Foucauldian skepticism when considering the work of Victorian reformers (31). Such readings, however, risk occluding the sheer range of ways children were vulnerable to environmental harm. The tactile affection of the Ragged School girls for this "little creature"—taking "her in their arms and pass[ing] her from one to another"—stands in immediate contrast to Robin's agonies upon arrival (418). Robin has been taken far from this small community, and her feelings of longing and deracination are acute enough for her to return to the Ladies' Guild with bloodied feet: "She partially drew up her long dress, and held out her feet, buried in enormous boots. 'I would have come long ago,' she said, with perfect good humour, 'but I had no shoes and no stockings. I wanted so much to come to-day, I could not stay away any longer . . . so I put on Billy's boots. My feet are so sore,' she added, wincing with the pain" (518). The girls bathe her "swollen and bleeding feet," and Robin is enjoined to stay for the kind of "wholesome and sufficient meal" of stewed meat and hot potatoes that was well-nigh impossible to produce in sparsely equipped slum dwellings (418).

Southwood Hill describes Robin's renewed pleasure as she rejoins the community, but the child does not remain for long:

After she had been some time at the school, Miss O.P.Q. found it necessary to send word to her mother that she wished she would keep her daughter

clean, as cleanliness was indispensable. For several days after that the child did not come, and at last the mother sent word that she “would not let her go back to work, because of Miss O.P.Q.’s message . . . Weeks afterwards, poor Ragged Robin came one afternoon with a baby in her arms, and two little ones dragging at her ragged frock . . . Ragged Robin was a very little child, whose growth had been stunted by nursing children nearly as big as herself . . . Miss O.P.Q. was not at home, and, after waiting as long as she could . . . Robin toiled painfully back with her three brothers . . . She was seen no more. She is with many thousands pining and perishing in London courts. (419–20)

Ragged Robin’s body is “stunted” for starkly material reasons: filthy housing, dearth of food, and protracted physical labor. The urban environment disorders Robin’s growing body, but it also disrupts the natural growth of subjectivity. Describing the surge in publication of children’s writing in the 1850s, Carolyn Steedman notes that these pieces of juvenilia were overwhelmingly written by young girls in diary form; moreover, what “many nineteenth-century little girls were asked to practice . . . was the construction of a domestic narrative that solidified and reaffirmed the unfolding of the placid domestic day” (*Tidy House* 72). In tracing the history of seven-year-old Florence Lind Coleridge’s diary (1874), Steedman notes that the “adults who read the accounts of the Coleridge sisters often reminded the children of significant details omitted by them in their narrative, putting right the time sequence of their narrative . . . The chronology they constructed supplied a kind of embedded evaluation of their experience” (74).

Nature is critical in containing threats of temporal unruliness. Time is organized around a distinction between house and garden, and thus implicitly around the movement of the child’s body between the discretely segmented spaces of domesticity and nature. The formal structure of the “Ragged Robin” article resembles the middle-class diary entry in its time-stamped trek through the day of Robin’s arrival. Robin’s body is “stunted,” drawing focus to how children are warped by their homes; their bodies refuse to develop in accordance with their age. “Miss O.P.Q.” implements a daily meal for the girls, having “remarked with sorrow . . . that even sometimes they brought nothing at all; either because their mothers had nothing to give them, or were in an ill humour, and might not be asked for it” (418). Southwood Hill’s chronology renders physical nourishment as directly contiguous with outdoor play, reiterating the Pestalozzian emphasis on holistic education. “After dinner, the children ran down to their gardens, attended their flowers—for they had gardens; and, in

three-quarters of an hour after the time when dinner had begun, they were all happily seated again at their work” (418).

Southwood Hill praises the “discipline of the little factory,” terming it “head-work as well as hand-work” (417). In a setting designed to recalibrate one’s sense of how the spaces and schedules of home are structured, the miniature objects of a bourgeois household seem an apt vehicle. These accounts of the Ragged School workers adhere implicitly to what Hill later represents as a kind of architectural determinism: lived environments regulate bodily and moral experiences, and thus the renovation of homes subtends the renovation of souls. “You cannot deal with the people and their houses separately,” Hill writes, “the principle on which the whole work rests is, that the inhabitants and their surroundings must be improved together. It has never yet failed to succeed” (“Landlords and Tenants in London” 102–03).

Hill’s efforts to organize the lives and bodies of the little “ragged” girls is lastingly imprinted in her writing in two primary respects. The first is in Hill’s preoccupation with the disjointed temporality of working-class life. What emerges explicitly in her essays is Hill’s sense that working-class lives are permanently debilitated by an incapacity to conceive of futurity. Secondly, Hill locates the source of this irregularity in the structure of lived spaces. Throughout her essays, Hill describes the breakdown in temporal boundaries that occurs when lives are lived too closely together. Disruptions of a daily schedule (not being able to sleep because of quarreling neighbors, for instance) are reproduced in a broader isomorphic inability to understand time as linear and consequential, for example when spending money in a public house rather than scrupulously saving. “Ragged Robin” anticipates Hill’s eventual seeking of common land as a surrogate space for the deprivations of slum housing in its detailed account of a field trip taken after “Miss O.P.Q. received an invitation from a friend . . . to take the little upholsterers for a day’s pleasure at a country house” (419). This passage is notable for its structural interweaving of time and nature. As framed by the article, journeying to the countryside is yoked to a geographical movement back in time. The history lesson the girls receive prior to their trip is the story of Caractacus, the first-century British chieftain rendered mythical for his resistance to Roman occupation: “The humble cottage in Britain of Caractacus touched them more than anything; but led to the inquiry how a king came to dwell in a cottage” (419). Immediately following this regal imbuing of the humble country cottage, we see the girls calling “forth shouts of delight” at “rose-covered cottages and corn fields” (419).

We glimpse something of the pleasurable strangeness many of these children might have felt in their first rural venture when we learn of the collectively felt thrill upon passing a windmill: “Its construction was explained to them, and their delight was great, for they had sung a song about a windmill which they say they never before understood” (419). Few of the girls had ever left London; “Not one of them had ever seen corn-fields at harvest time” (419). Yet the harvest season invokes the passage of time in a manner that, though rooted in nature, is deeply melancholy in its echoing motifs. The descriptions of group play are generally jolly and bright; the girls wander through conservatories enjoying “splendid plants” and “bright flowers” until the emergence of “a large dog, wet with rain, exciting great commotion . . . drew some of the party to the lawn to play with him” (419). However, the two instances of individually reported speech hold deathly associations: “One child timidly asked, whether she might pick up some dead rose-leaves to carry home?” (419). Southwood Hill quotes Robin directly when describing the “wild . . . delight” of each girl finding “a bunch of flowers by her plate” at tea time: “Little Robin quietly said: ‘I shall never throw away my flowers.’ ‘But they will die.’ ‘Yes,’ she replied. ‘But I shall never throw them away.’ Poor baby, they soon became her only treasure” (419). One moment in the article resounds as both proleptic and eerily metatextual in its gesture to the oft-lamented scantiness of historical evidence of how children, and particularly poor children, lived: “In the course of the afternoon a son of the house desired to take a photograph of the party. They were arranged,—some standing, some sitting, some with flowers . . . When all was settled, great misfortune got among the chemicals, and the photograph did not succeed” (419).

For Hill, the work of organizing space is most urgent as it relates to childhood development. Her 1871 essay “Landlords and Tenants in London” is prompted by a recollection of visiting “a poor and dingy court in London, when a group of dirty-faced urchins exclaimed . . . ‘What a lot o’ landladies this morning!’” (67). As she looks closer, Hill notes that the environmental vulnerability brought on by building neglect is echoed in the ways the tenants seem to live with a diminished sense of the boundedness of the buildings they inhabit. “The front doors stood open day and night,” and it is the “dark yawning passageways” rather than the rooms that appear furnished (73). Hill’s language is marked by a sense of unsettled boundaries: “Amongst the many benefits which the possession of the houses enables us to confer on the people, perhaps one of the most important is our power of saving them from neighbours who would render their

lives miserable . . . Our success depends on duly arranging the inmates: not too many children in any one house, so as to overcrowd it . . . not two bad people side by side, or they drink together; not a terribly bad person beside a very respectable one” (90).

Hill appears to see her tenants in miniature, taking pleasure in her ability to deftly switch them around so that vices are not compounded or do not infiltrate the homes of the innocent. In “Cottage Property in London” (1866), Hill describes her foundational precept, “Whenever from any cause a room was vacant, and a large family occupied an adjoining one, I have endeavoured to induce them to rent the two. To incoming tenants I do not let what seems decidedly insufficient accommodation.”⁴³ Hill recounts an exchange with one woman “living with her seven children and her husband in one room” who “‘was certain ‘there were many things she could get for the children to eat which would do them more good than another room . . . A half-pleading, half-asserting voice said: ‘Don’t you see I’m right, miss?’ ‘No,’ I said; ‘indeed I do not. I have been brought up to know the value of abundant good air . . .’” (23). “Abundant good air” seems an ambitious characterization here, but Hill’s real concern is to limit the children’s exposure to sex. In keeping with her obsession with futurity, Hill’s central lesson for the poor is that gratification must always be deferred—not merely the pleasures of drink, but even the pressing needs of hunger must be put off in the equipping of progressively oriented selfhood. The first set of cottages that Hill bought in Marylebone bore the dubious title of “Paradise Place,” a vacant promise of unlimited future reward in exchange for present self-denial. There is evidence of similar affective conditioning in the Ladies’ Guild schoolroom: “Their conversation sometimes degenerates into discussions on food, but their patient abstinence is wonderful and pathetic . . . For instance, the drawing-class is held in the evening. When asked to go to it, some who are indifferent may answer, ‘they can’t be starved, and they haven’t had their tea;’ but some are very much in earnest, and if they have not brought their tea, will forget it rather than miss the lesson” (“Little Upholsterers,” 130). This cherishing of the sentimental image of hungry children feels appalling when considering how literally we might interpret the girls’ protests of starvation. For these children, the doll’s houses they furnished became a lesson in organizing time so that they might learn the virtues of deferral.

As in Hodgson Burnett’s story, Hill’s description of fights rising to be overheard from neighbors’ homes is plausibly transposed into a sense of the other elements of marital or sexual life. Hill is especially disturbed by her encounters with a sex worker’s children:

We came upon strange scenes sometimes. In one room a handsome, black, tangle-haired, ragged boy and girl, of about nine and ten, with wild dark eyes, were always to be found, sometimes squatting near the fire, watching a great black pot, sometimes amusing themselves with cutting paper into strips with scissors. It was difficult to extract a word; the money and dirty rent-book were generally pushed to us in silence. No grown person was ever to be seen. For months I never saw these children in the open air. Often they would lie in bed all day long; and I believe they were too ignorant and indolent to care to leave the house except at night, when the boy, as we afterwards found, would creep like a cat along the roofs of the outbuildings to steal lumps of coal from a neighbouring shed (“Landlords and Tenants in London,” from *Homes of the London Poor*, 80–81).

Day and night are switched, and this small pattern of temporal irregularity is nested within a broader lack of differentiation from one day to the next. The inevitable result of this way of life is represented as regression to a feral state. Hill elsewhere represents similarly desultory forms of childhood amusement as the seeds of dysfunction in later life. Hill learns that “Their mother—a most degraded woman—when she at last appeared, proved to be living a very disreputable life, and the only hope for the children was to get them away from her influence” (94). The sections of the day, the biological functions that should be segmented into separate rooms—eating, sleeping, and so on—are collapsed into a single space for these children, but there is a more disturbing prospect of developmental aberration in the possibility that they are witness to their mother’s sexual activity. The consequence of such exposure resides in the specter of incest that hangs over the image of these Heathcliff- and Cathy-like children lying together in bed in an airless room, as though the most primal of sexual boundaries also risks breaching. Anthony Wohl has noted the discrepancy between the concern in medical discourse and Parliamentary reports about incest in working-class homes and the comparative silence of social reformers on the topic. Yet we might see this concern as omnipresent in Hill’s work when we consider it in terms of her spatial imagination.

Though one-room life is clearly detrimental to child welfare, Hill is also troubled by the play happening in tenement courts. In “Four Years Management of a London Court” (1869), Hill writes that the “evils of the streets and courts are too evident to need explanation” (43). The children are “habitually dirty, quarrelsome, and violent,” but Hill’s real grievance is that they “come wholly ignorant of games, and have hardly self-control enough to play at any which *have an object* or require effort. Mere senseless, endless repetition is at best their diversion” (43). Hill describes one such game at length:

Often the games are only repetitions of questionable sentences. For instance, what is to be said of a game the whole of which consists in singing, “Here comes my father all down the hill, all down the hill” (over and over again), and replying, “We won’t get up for his ugly face—ugly face” (repeated *ad libitum*)? Then come the mother, the sister, the brother, to whom the same words are addressed. Finally the lover comes, to whom the greeting is, “We will get up for his pretty face.” This was, perhaps, the best game the children knew, yet, in as far as it had any meaning or influence, it must be bad. (43–44)

Hill’s objection to the sexual knowingness of these verses is inseparable from her agitation simply with the acts of repetition. “Compare it,” she writes, “with a game at trap, arranged with ordered companions, definite object, and progressive skill” (44). Pazzolini principles held that “Endless repetition of particular sayings or principles ensured that the child would grow up hating them—even in religion, where, as Southwood Smith wrote, ‘the constant reiteration of sacred truth, before the experience of life enables the child to understand the words, is one of the causes of the lifelessness of many people’s religion’” (cited Darley 29). Here, the chanting young voices send up the traditional nineteenth-century focus on schoolroom recitation, but intriguingly, they are equally free in their refusal of the alternative Pazzolini-inflected script offered by Hill.

We have another glimpse of children with no “definite object” in “Open Spaces” (1877): “The children, how they swarm! The ground seems alive with them, from the neglected youngest crawling on the hot stones, clawing among the shavings, and potato-peelings, and cabbage-leaves strewn about, to the big boy and girl ‘larking’ in vulgarst play by the corner.”⁴⁴ Hill’s unease with repetitive play is also linked to her frustration with her tenants’ refusal to acknowledge futurity in the form of savings. She makes a point of holding minor jobs for tenants in “times of scarcity, and I try so to qualize in this small circle the irregularity of work, which must be more or less pernicious, and which the childishness of the poor makes doubly so. They have strangely little power of looking forward; a result is to them as nothing if it will not be perceptible till next quarter!” (28–29). Hill neglects, however, to seriously entertain the possibility that very little saving is possible for families accustomed to irregular work for meager wages. For her, the perceived inability to “look forward” is a macrocosmic expansion of all the isolated instances in which the linear structure of the day is broken up, and hours are experienced as a repetitive and undifferentiated stretch of time.

Faced with the material difficulty of finding extra rooms for overcrowded families, Hill began to seek alternative spaces for children in the gardens—and graveyards—of London. The “childish” inability of the poor to look forward has a counterpart in what Hill similarly describes as the “short-sighted cupidity” of various groups of landowners who agreed to sell their land for reasons other than the preservation of green space. Hill is speaking primarily of rural commoners, but she subsequently includes in this category members of the aristocracy who refuse to use their land for public good, and in London, the Quaker Society of Friends, which refused Hill’s offers to buy its land and instead sold to a building company. Common land, she argues, is “a great possession for future times . . . Can we wonder if the eyes of poor men are often fixed rather on the immediate money value to themselves than on the effect of changes for their descendants? Should we stand by, we who ought to see farther, and let them part with what ought to be a possession to the many in the future?” (13). Returning to the central notion of doll’s house as instantiation of self-possession, it is possible to see Hill’s emphasis on common ownership, or at least access, to some kind of public open space as borne out of a similarly compensatory impulse. Hill remarks on her staunch opposition to subsidized housing thusly: “The house is an individual possession, and should be worked for, but the park or the common which a man shares with his neighbours, which descends as a common inheritance from generation to generation, surely this may be given without pauperizing” (200). Hill’s position on subsidized housing is puzzlingly obtuse about the unlikelihood that the costermongers and hawkers that lived in her courts might afford to purchase homes however long they saved. She avoids wrestling with this material reality by arguing for a “common inheritance” that displaces the need for private property.

Hill eventually recognizes that her tenants will never have access to the capacious homes modeled years before in the Ladies’ Guild workroom but continues to explore alternatives to the dehumanizing consequences. In “Space for the People,” in *Our Common Land*, she writes, “Children are crawling or sitting on the hard hot stones till every corner of the place looks alive, and it seems I must step on them, do what I would, if I am to walk up the court at all” (197). The children have a hideous, regressive agency that provokes a fantasy of hostile suppression. To draw these children from the realm of animal to human, Hill searches anxiously for surrogate space. The tenements assail her at times as irremediably awful, “but there is a way in which some compensation for

this evil may be provided . . . I mean the provision of small open spaces, planted and made pretty, quite near the homes of the people, which might be used by them in common as sitting-rooms in summer” (“Open Spaces” 107–08).

Entirely separate from the boundaries of the court, these “small open spaces” are explicitly framed as compensation for the insufficiencies of the domestic sphere. Hill quickly shifts from describing these spaces as being as “common as sitting-rooms,” perhaps recognizing that these spaces are intended precisely for those for whom sitting rooms were rarely trodden. Instead, she begins referring to these open spaces *as* sitting rooms, with a precise sense of where to locate them:

There are, all over London, little spots unbuilt over, still strangely preserved among the sea of houses—our graveyards. They are capable of being made into beautiful out-door sitting-rooms. They should be planted with trees, creepers should be trained up their walls, seats should be placed in them, fountains might be fixed there, the brightest flowers set there, possibly in some cases birds in cages might be kept to delight the children. To these the neighbouring poor should be admitted free, under whatever regulations should seem best. The regulations will vary according to the size of the ground and other local circumstances . . . In the case of very small grounds admission might be given to certain numbers by tickets placed in the hands of guardians, schoolmasters, ministers of all denominations, Bible-women, and district visitors. (111–12)

These “little spots” resemble sitting rooms by virtue of being resting places, but their physical resemblance to literal rooms is striking. There are decorated walls, seats, and even such bourgeois embellishments as birdcages; moreover, one must have permission to enter these small sanctums. Hill repeatedly assures the reader that the spaces “might be really very small,” echoing Kerr’s sense that a house of any size is good enough as long as the primary boundaries and divisions remain firmly intact (201).

The most arresting aspect of Hill’s plan is the type of space being appropriated, though she herself professes “no fear that the holy dead, or those who loved them, would mind the living sharing in some small degree their quiet” (201). While stressing the need for “open air sitting rooms,” Hill was curiously, and vigorously, resistant to the idea of *actual* rooms for the poor being built on such ground. A tremendous grievance for Hill is the Quakers’ refusal to repurpose their burial-grounds in Bunhill Fields as a garden, despite the ground being “of almost more value for the purpose than any I know in London. It is close to

Whitecross Street, which some of you may know as a street quite swarming with costermongers” (123). To sell the land for building use, the Quakers first “employed workmen to accomplish the most ghastly unearthing of the contents of the graves, uprooting five thousand bodies . . . They are selling the land for dwellings for the poor, and are excusing themselves by harping on the need for dwellings” (125). Such comments lie at the heart of Hill’s mixed legacy. Maltz writes that by “favoring small cottages over large blocks, Hill ignored the enormous demand for workers’ housing: even William Morris admitted that one would have to build *up*, using vertical streets to insure green spaces. Hill’s unwillingness to make structural changes to her properties meant that renovations amounted to little more than cleaning and mending” (198). Yet Hill dismisses the Quaker land sale as based on a disingenuous “harping” on the need for more homes.

Children blithely navigating their merry way over graveyards is an image that resonates with Hill’s sense of the imperative of engendering in the poor a relentless sense of futurity; children are to take up their games heedless of the bodies piled beneath them. The doll’s house and outdoors “sitting-room” are surrogate domestic spaces made accessible by the lifting of a wall or ceiling for a cross-sectional view. Throughout her career, Hill encountered children for whom the doll’s house represented, to use Susan Stewart’s terms, “the boundaries and limits of otherness, the inaccessibility of what cannot be lived experience” (65). The impossibility of sensually experiencing the doll’s house, its most apparent and universal feature, would have surplus resonance for the children twisting bonnet wire into shape before returning to homes where they remained busy nursing siblings and cleaning house. Yet these playthings were also objects that obliquely conveyed a sense that lives must have a reciprocally reinforced sense of spatial and temporal organization. Hill’s overarching demand beginning from her time at the Ladies’ Guild through the span of her career is that the working classes must look *forward*, whether by way of the comparatively benign vehicle of saving money or the more troubling insistence that residents of Paradise Place put off adequately nourishing their bodies for the deferred gratification of another room. Sensitive to the ways in which lived spaces produce subjects, Hill strains to provide London children with a surrogate space, her emphasis on the “smallness” of such indicating that these spaces have been winnowed down to their vital elements—four walls, some small effort at decoration, and an assurance against overcrowding.

In the end the rooms need not be indoors and might even be arranged over centuries of graves.

My readings have traced texts that conjure up the deathly associations of working-class childhood, yet I conclude with the proposition that simultaneously embedded in these texts are alternative visions of the radiant, if uncanny possibilities and agential spaces that impoverished children might create with miniature worlds. In Hodgson Burnett's *In the Closed Room*, we recall Judith's loathing of the "Elevated Railroad" that rushes beneath her window. But Judith's dislike, it seems, is exceptional: "The children in the other flats rather liked it. They hung out of the window perilously to watch it thunder past and to see the people who crowded it pressed close together. . . Sometimes in the evening there were people in it who were going to the theatre, and the women and girls were dressed in light colours and wore hats covered with white feathers and flowers. At such times the children were delighted, and Judith used to hear the three in the next flat calling out to each other, 'That's MY lady! That's MY lady! That one's mine!'" (4). Unlike Judith's own suicidal gaze over New York, the miniaturizing aerial view offers joy to these nameless others. Though Judith herself will die, we have herein a moment of play as counterfactual possibility. Children imaginatively transform trains into doll's houses, and in doing so ecstatically proclaim both their selfhood and their idiosyncratic permutations of ownership from within a hostile environment. Situating themselves over the tiny world beneath them, these children suggest that repetition invites revision, however incremental in form. Whether gamboling over graveyard playgrounds or shouting at trains, the ecstatic wishing of children invites us to glimpse moments of play wherein they re-vision property as self-possession, overspilling, and exceeding the constraints of a brutally delimited world.

NOTES

1. Hodgson Burnett, *In the Closed Room*, 3–4. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
2. Such readings also ignore the prominence of the doll's house in Hodgson Burnett's life. As an adult, Hodgson Burnett transformed a Jacobean cabinet into a four-room doll's house, and she was widely known among friends for sitting on the floor and playing with the toy in the company of young visitors (Gerzina 270).

3. Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, 165.
4. Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, 166.
5. See Antrim, *Family Dolls' Houses*; Pasierbska, *Dollhouses*.
6. Armstrong, "Nineteenth-Century Novel," 24.
7. Sala, "On Dolls' Houses," 376. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
8. "So Much for Buckingham Palace," 20.
9. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 150.
10. Barbould, "The Baby-House," lines 1–4.
11. Barbould, "The Baby-House," lines 7–10.
12. Stewart, *On Longing*, 69. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
13. Ewing, *Doll's Housekeeping*, 9. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
14. See Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home*; Logan, *The Victorian Parlour*; and Tange, *Architectural Identities*.
15. Quoted in Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home*, 37.
16. Quoted in Logan, *The Victorian Parlour*, 26.
17. Panton, *From Kitchen to Garret*, 109. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
18. Douglas, "The Idea of Home," 195.
19. Leckie, *Open Houses*, 5 (emphasis in the original). All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
20. Darley, *Octavia Hill*, 27. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
21. Kerr, *The Gentleman's House*, 67.
22. Kerr, *The Gentleman's House*, 67.
23. Kerr, *The Gentleman's House*, 67 (emphasis mine).
24. Dickens, *Christmas Stories*, 321.
25. Pasierbska, *Dollhouses*, 83.
26. Murché, *Object Lessons for Infants*, 50. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
27. Blow, "Mother Play," 851.
28. Blow, "Mother Play," 851 (emphasis mine).
29. Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, 10.
30. Freud, "Infantile Neurosis," 411.
31. Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, chap. 5.
32. Hodgson Burnett, *Racketty Packetty House*, 1–26.
33. Wohl, "Octavia Hill," 125. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.

34. Maltz, "Beauty at Home or Not?," 187.
35. Montague, *Sixty Years in Waifdom*, 37–39.
36. Quoted in Montague, *Sixty Years in Waifdom*, 34.
37. Darley, *Octavia Hill*, 16.
38. Antrim, *Family Dolls' Houses*, 109.
39. Steedman, *The Tidy House*, 122–23. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
40. "Patent Art-Toys," 150–51. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
41. See Sharon Marcus's *Apartment Stories* for a discussion of the detached house as a default model of desirable living in nineteenth-century Britain.
42. "Ragged Robin," 417. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
43. Hill, *Homes of the London Poor*, 26. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.
44. Hill, *Our Common Land*, 109. All subsequent references to this edition are noted parenthetically in the text.

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