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MOVING TOWARD CRITICAL COUNTER-SPACES:
VOLITIONAL MOVEMENTS IN AMERICAN WOMEN'S WRITING, 1839-1900

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Title: Moving Toward Critical Counter-Spaces: Volitional Movements in American Women's Writing, 1839-1900

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Drawing from contemporary spatial theories, this dissertation examines how nineteenth-century women writers use movement in their texts to resist dominant spatial ideologies, re-map physical spaces, and transform social relations. Lefebvre's triadic definition of social space allows scholars to analyze how the material and the ideological construct social relationships. Spatial theories also emphasize that physical movements are significant in spatial transformations because movements initiate ideological change. Yet spatial theories do not provide scholars with the language to talk about movement that distinguishes forced removals and travel from the agency characters and narrators have to move themselves in big and small ways in literary texts.

In this dissertation, I suggest that scholars might use the term *volitional movements* to discuss the agency and subjectivity such movements reveal. A study of *volitional movements* in Caroline Kirkland's *A New Home, Who'll Follow?*, Eliza Farnham's *Life in Prairie Land*, Alice Cary's *Clovernook Sketches, Series I and II*, Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*, Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy*, and Pauline Hopkins's *Contending Forces* provides a lens through which this dissertation can analyze how the physical movements nineteenth-century American women writers depicted in their texts resisted oppressive spatial ideologies and initiated spatial transformations.

Chapter 1 defines the distinction between *volitional movements* and travel. Chapter 2 analyzes how Kirkland and Farnham represent the volitional movements of their narrators by representing women who walk and move throughout the physical and social spaces of the antebellum West. Chapter 3 proposes that Cary's mobile narrator critiques the reproduction of oppressive Eastern social spaces in antebellum Ohio at the same time that she writes poor women, children, and people of color into the national story. Chapter 4 evaluates not only the significance of women's volitional movements that Wilson, Jacobs, Harper, and Hopkins illustrate in their novels but also the significance of their female protagonists' inability or ability to stop and find home. Chapter 5 contends that the study of *volitional movements* has wide implications for literary studies.