

Signification, Objectification, and the Mimetic Uncanny in Claude Debussy's "Golliwog's Cakewalk"

Elizabeth de Martelly



Figure 1: Claude and Chouchou Debussy picnicking (unknown photographer, ca. 1915?).

On October 30, 1905, Emma Bardac gave birth to Claude Debussy's only child, a daughter named Claude-Emma (1905–1919), affectionately known as "Chouchou." According to family friend Arthur Hartmann, Chouchou, who bore a striking resemblance to her father, was remarkably mature, and at five or six years old, she "could not be treated as a child" (Hartmann 2003:62–63). Debussy was a doting father, and the two were inseparable companions until the composer's death in 1918 (Figure 1). He dedicated his 1908 piano suite entitled *Children's Corner* to her, a piece in which he explores the world as seen through a child's imaginative eyes—perhaps even Chouchou's. To be sure, the piece bears Chouchou's specific imprint, with four of the six movements named after her toys: "Jimbo's Lullaby," after her stuffed elephant; "Serenade for the Doll," after Chouchou's favorite doll; "The Little Shepherd," after a toy shepherd boy; and "Golliwog's Cakewalk," after a popular minstrel doll.

Yet, several elements about this suite disrupt the lighthearted musical

depiction of childhood. To begin, Debussy's dedication contains the following message: "À ma chère petite Chouchou, avec les tenders excuses de son père pour ce qui va suivre" (To my dear little Chouchou, with her father's tender apologies for what follows). This request for forgiveness offers an initial clue that there is more beneath the playful surface of *Children's Corner* than meets the ear. But what about this youthful suite, which "exudes charm and tenderness," (Hinson 2007:4) could merit such an apology?

The final movement, "Golliwog's Cakewalk," particularly problematizes the childlike innocence portrayed in *Children's Corner*. This movement has attracted much critical attention mainly for its juxtaposition of a ragtime-inflected cakewalk—a popular music and dance form that was in vogue at the turn of the twentieth century—with parodied quotations of Richard Wagner's "Prelude" to *Tristan und Isolde*. Most notably, Lawrence Kramer has suggested that the combination of these musical materials is the movement's *raison d'être*, as the once-revered Wagner is put into dialogue with a "lowbrow" popular music idiom (Kramer 2004:113). Kramer echoes the familiar Debussy–Wagner topos, where Debussy struggles to escape the shadow of Wagner's influence, asserting that in "Golliwog's Cakewalk," Debussy "smilingly relativizes Wagner into insignificance," putting "*Tristan* cheek to cheek with music *doubly primitive*, being both American and African American" (Kramer 2004:113; emphasis added). However, this interpretation of "Golliwog's Cakewalk" is not entirely satisfying, as Kramer neglects important and perhaps more salient features of the movement. Relegating the history and meaning of the Golliwog doll and the cultural importance of the cakewalk to mere "trifles" (Kramer 2004:113), Kramer deals with neither title element of "Golliwog's Cakewalk" in any depth. But the status of Golliwog and the cakewalk as popular "trifles" makes an examination of their historical residues and functions in Debussy's music especially compelling.

The term "cakewalk" describes a dance form that came to characterize a specific musical genre in mid-nineteenth century United States. Dance historian and musicologist Davinia Caddy's exploration of the cakewalk traces the history of the dance from its roots in African-American slavery, to popular American entertainment, and finally to its arrival on French soil as a white, bourgeois leisure activity (Caddy 2007). After summarizing this trajectory, Caddy plucks the cakewalk from its racial context and considers its emphasis on a particularly strange style of movement as part of contemporary French tastes for "physicality." Caddy uses this term to describe both the bodily postures of the cakewalk and exercise regiments of the same time period. She wishes to avoid reductive racial interpretations of the dance, as she notes that the arena of cultural identity is "unavoidably

complex” (Caddy 2007:291). However, despite her professed desire to avoid racial terms that “enslave,” the concept of physicality has a history of racial connotations, which Caddy either ignores or represses in her discussion (Caddy 2007:300). As such, while her analysis provides considerable insight towards a more complete reading of Debussy’s movement, Caddy fails to recognize the significance of the cakewalk’s mimetic re-contextualization as a transnational white bourgeois phenomenon, overlooking the ways in which this complicates the dance’s signification.

Social historian Eric Lott elaborates upon the cakewalk in the context of nineteenth century American minstrelsy, addressing how contemporary attitudes towards race and class shaped the dance’s various meanings. In *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, Lott emphasizes the importance of historically constructed definitions of race as he describes how these categories were produced in part through theatrical entertainment (Lott 1995). He argues that amid strong anti-Irish sentiment in the mid-nineteenth century United States, working class Irish Americans legitimized their status as “white” through their performances in minstrel theaters by creating social distance from the African Americans they caricatured, while also enacting a complicated investment in the black male body.¹ Lott’s analysis figures the minstrel cakewalk as one strategy for shifting the boundaries around race and class.

In *Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Modern Body*, cultural historian Jayna Brown extends Lott’s research and situates the discussion of the cakewalk in relation to changing gendered and racial identities in turn-of-the-century United States and Europe. Beginning with an account of African-American minstrel cakewalking, Brown describes the ways in which “ideas of the raced body were performed, navigated, and challenged” through this dance (J. Brown 2008:1). African-American women and children, who increasingly performed major roles on post-Emancipation minstrel stages, worked within this theater, adopting “racialized gestural vocabularies to shape and redefine their own bodies as modern” and to critique the white spectacle of blackness—a theme that also permeates Daphne Brooks’s *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850–1910* (J. Brown 2008:3; Brooks 2006). Brown then considers the dislocation of this dance from minstrel stages as she explores the various urban spaces in which African American and white individuals cakewalked as a way of delineating and contesting racial territories in American cities in the final decades of the nineteenth century.

Tracing the cakewalk’s migration to Europe via touring African American performance groups, Brown contends that cakewalking black female bodies “offered nostalgic evocations of agrarian innocence, reas-

suring examples of a happy rural folk, and titillating forms of imagined contact with women from the [African] colonies” while simultaneously creating a means of expressing affluence, leisure, and bodily control for an emerging class of wealthy whites that emulated these performances (J. Brown 2008:7). In stimulating the colonial imagination through a popular activity that became problematically associated with “exotic” Africa, the cakewalk helped construct modern European white subjecthood by reifying perceived cultural difference, geographical distance, and Europe’s economic control over the African continent. Brown’s analysis takes into account how African-American dancers brought the cakewalk to Europe and how these performances influenced the nostalgic, exotic, and colonial meanings Europeans ascribed to the cakewalk as an embodied articulation of imperial power and white European modernity (J. Brown 2008).

However, while these scholars help clarify the complicated history and signification of this dance, they tell only half of the story of Debussy’s “Cakewalk,” because they do not address the composer’s invocation of Golliwog, a caricature of a minstrel caricature. I will synthesize the cakewalk’s cultural history with analyses of how turn-of-the-century racist commodities, such as the Golliwog, reveals a permeable boundary between reified human subjects and fetishized objects within this particular historical trajectory. In *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*, historian Saidiya Hartman considers “the extended servitude of the emancipated” in the years following the formal dissolution of slavery, where various legal and cultural practices maintained the status of black bodies as objects of capitalist commodification (Hartman 1997:9). By “defamiliarizing the familiar,” Hartman illuminates “the *terror of the mundane* and quotidian” embedded in objects like the Golliwog doll, which figured the black body as a “thing” necessitating white paternalistic care and control (Hartman 1997:4; emphasis added). Hartman’s work establishes the relationship between commonplace objects in the post-Emancipation era and their legacies in chattel slavery.

Literary scholar Bill Brown, in the essay “Reification, Reanimation, and the American Uncanny,” examines slavery’s “ontological scandal,” which transformed people into objects to be bought and sold (B. Brown 2005). Revisiting Karl Marx’s notion of commodity fetishism, “where things appear to have lives of their own,” Brown demonstrates how this ontology is congealed within singularized, fetishized objects—namely, early twentieth-century material representations of African Americans—that “perform” the ambiguity between subject and object (B. Brown 2005:180). Drawing on Sigmund Freud’s theoretical work on the uncanny, Brown argues that such racist artifacts embody the residue of a repressed history of slavery,

and these once-common household objects uncannily disclose “the horror of the familiar” (B. Brown 2005:201). As such, commodities like Golliwog dolls bespeak “the hyperactive persistence” of a romanticized American past as they were circulated in other contexts (B. Brown 2005:207). Bill Brown’s analysis maintains a sense of the sheer modernity of the seemingly trivial children’s toy as well as its uncanny haunting by racism.

This scholarship provides a framework through which to analyze the relationship between the Golliwog and the cakewalk as signifiers of American past animated in an early twentieth century French colonial context. I contend that the history of slavery in the United States, mediated and circulated through cultural activities like the cakewalk and material commodities like the Golliwog doll, shaped French citizens’ imaginations of the nation’s colonized African subjects. This process helped enable the black body to become an “exotic object” of white capitalist control. I will examine how Debussy’s particular appropriation of these complex signifiers calls attention to the unstable relationship between the black human subject and the inanimate object in “Golliwog’s Cakewalk” by exploring how layers of mimesis in the histories of the dance and the doll altered their original significations and effected a transformation of African-American humans into fetishized “African” commodities. I argue that Debussy’s “Cakewalk,” itself a cultural commodity that both probes and reproduces these relations, prompts an uncanny experience of slavery’s “ontological scandal” as congealed within a specific material object—Chouchou’s toy.

Golliwog: A History of Commodifying the Black Body

Even as we point to a certain moment in a certain place where it is no longer possible for a person to be a slave (to be someone else’s property, to be [*negotium*] a thing), we nonetheless find, in the post-history of that moment, residue of precisely that possibility—in other words, an ongoing record of the ontological effects of slavery. (B. Brown 2005:192)

When Debussy employed Golliwog in *Children’s Corner*, the doll had already become a favorite children’s toy in many Western European homes. Golliwog, described as a “grotesque creature, with very dark, often jet black skin, large white-rimmed eyes, red or white clown lips, and wild, frizzy hair,” was first introduced as a character in Florence Kate and Bertha Upton’s 1895 book *The Adventures of Two Dutch Dolls* (Pilgrim 2000). In the Upton’s story of toys who come to life and “Taste human joys / And revel in their power,” Peg and Sara Jane, two rose-cheeked wooden dolls clothed in the stars and stripes of the American flag, confront “A horrid sight! / The blackest gnome”



Figure 2: Illustration of Golliwogg (sic) and wooden dolls from *The Adventures of Two Dutch Dolls* by Florence Kate Upton (illustration by Bertha Upton, 1895). The Golliwogg character was so popular that in subsequent printings of the book, the title was changed to *The Adventures of Two Dutch Dolls and a Golliwogg*.

(Upton and Upton 1895:2, 23; Figure 2). After their initial encounter, the dolls learn that in spite of Golliwogg's unsightly appearance, he is a lovable and silly child.² Based upon a doll that the Upton family likely purchased at a minstrel show in the United States in 1880, Golliwogg's earliest illustrations frequently depicted him with paws instead of human hands and feet (Pilgrim 2000). This depiction draws upon popular, prototypical late nineteenth-century notions about race and temperament promoted by figures such as Francis Galton, William Z. Ripley, and Georges Vacher de Lapouge, reinforcing the image of blacks as sub-human but friendly servants. Such stereotypes of childlike and/or animalistic African Americans were ostensibly buttressed through contemporaneous scientific movements like eugenics, which sought to codify racial characteristics to "improve the inborn qualities of a race" (Paul 1995:3). The Uptons' book, the first in a series of thirteen "Golliwogg" publications, was immensely popular in England, where Golliwogg became a "national star" and commercial icon before his popularity spread throughout Europe (Pilgrim 2000). Following the success of the book, many prominent European toy manufacturers began mass-producing Golliwogg dolls.

However, Golliwogg's European ubiquity obscures his origins, which can be traced from American slavery, to blackface minstrelsy, and to the doll, where the image of the happily enslaved black person was translated into a toy product. These three imitative strata separate the Golliwogg doll from his enslaved human referents, filtering his image and subsequent signification

through minstrelsy, a type of theater that enabled a large-scale cultural re-imagining of the past (Lott 1995; Hartman 1997; J. Brown 2008).³ An examination of this historical trajectory reveals how mimetic layers maintained the status of African Americans as dehumanized commodities in the years following slavery. Critically, within this process of commodification runs a theme of white fascination with blackness, or, more specifically, an anxious fascination with a repressed history of the black human body as object (Brooks 2006). These themes come to bear on *Golliwog* as a post-slavery commodity and as the protagonist of “*Golliwog’s Cakewalk*.”

During American slavery, cultural and legal practices sought to reduce enslaved people to the status of owned “things.” For instance, in 1828, a Kentucky court ruled in *Jarman vs. Patterson*, “Whether it be politic or impolitic, a slave by our code is not treated as a person but (*negotium*) a thing” (Quoted in B. Brown 2005:179). With this law, the transformation of African Americans into commodities was made legally concrete. Saidiya Hartman examines the link between the commodity status of blacks and their legal constitution as sub-human, arguing that “the selective recognition of humanity that undergirded the relations of chattel slavery had not considered [African Americans] deserving of rights or freedom” (Hartman 1997:5). But more significant than the legal implications of such laws were the ontological results, what Harriet Beecher Stowe referred to as “the moral horror of slavery,” which rendered the distinction between human and object disturbingly artificial (Stowe 1852). Of particular note in connection with the *Golliwog* were the “picaninny” children born into chattel slavery who often elided the distinction between the sanctified progeny of the white, Christian plantation owner and a multiplication of his labor force (Hartman 1997; J. Brown 2008). Deprived a fully human life and reduced to the status of a commodity, slaves and their children were considered bodily implements in the United States’ expanding economic system.

Blackface minstrelsy, an American theatrical form established in the early 1830s “in which white men caricatured blacks for sport and profit” in its first iteration, offered a very different take on the commodification of black (or blackened) bodies (Lott 1995:3). Notably, African Americans also performed in minstrel theaters; however, white men were minstrelsy’s original actors (J. Brown 2008). During the nineteenth century, especially after Emancipation, the concept of whiteness was being actively produced and negotiated. Irish Americans used the minstrel theater as a means of recasting racial categories and legitimizing themselves as white by projecting a fantasized image of slavery as benign, while also “playing black” for commercial entertainment and personal pleasure (Lott 1995). By the end of the 1840s, blackface minstrel troupes such as the Virginia Minstrels and Christy’s

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Minstrels had grown very popular, and these companies toured the United States and Europe, spreading the circulation of minstrel imagery across the Atlantic. The typical form of the minstrel show was divided into three sections: the first act presented song, dance, and jokes; the middle section culminated in a political “stump speech”; and the final section featured a short play usually set on a Southern plantation with various minstrel stock characters. In minstrel theaters, African Americans were rendered in cartoonish character types that reinforced a conception of their limited humanity, such as Jim Crow, the ignorant, carefree slave; Zip Coon, the buffoonish black dandy who never manages to assimilate into white, bourgeois society; and Mr. Tambo, the jolly musician who is always prepared to sing and dance. With this theater, which registered a complex mixture of “panic, anxiety, terror, and pleasure,” white actors and spectators collectively romanticized American slavery as a rustic idyll filled with jubilant “singing and dancing children” (Lott 1995:6; J. Brown 2008:64).⁴

Minstrelsy was a dynamic cultural form, and its meanings and circulation shifted with the increasing participation of African American actors. In the late 1840s, two African Americans, William Henry Lane (“Master Juba”) and Thomas Dilward (“Japanese Tommy”), performed in blackface with white minstrel troupes. However, in early minstrel shows, African-American actors were the exception rather than the rule, and this remained true until after the American Civil War, when many newly freed slaves were hired for major roles in these shows. With this new cast of actors, the blackface minstrel show grew even more popular, soon becoming “a transnational phenomenon” (Smalls 2003:358). African-American performance troupes toured the United States and took minstrel shows abroad first to London and eventually to other major European cities like Vienna and Paris (Brooks 2006; J. Brown 2008).⁵

Importantly, these touring black minstrel shows coincided with the New Imperialism movement (1876–1912) in what has been called “the scramble for Africa,” where European governments (principally Britain, Germany, and France) divided and aggressively colonized the African continent (Pakenham 1991). As a result, European audiences craved the “exotic spectacle” of “visual manifestations of colonialist/imperialist dreams of control and conquest,” images that reflected the reach of their nations’ political and economic power (Smalls 2003:357). Minstrel performances by white actors in blackface became passé in Europe, as spectators increasingly demanded “authentic” African-American actors who “played themselves” in theatrical re-performances of chattel slavery (J. Brown 2008:141; Deaville 2001). This notion of “playing themselves” highlights two critical conflations regarding the European relation to the touring African-American

performers. First, on a temporal level, there is a slippage between past and present, where black actors were “to pretend to exist in a timeless southern past” of contented slavehood (J. Brown 2008:140). Second is a geographic conflation, as performing blacks recalled the “exotic” colonized Africans for white European audiences.⁶ This imagined contact with colonial Africans, mediated through simulated African-American slavery, played a critical role in shaping European attitudes towards blacks as natural workers tied to the land and requiring imperial management (J. Brown 2008). For instance, in Britain, where Golliwog was developed, “narratives surrounding the child from the system of plantation slavery were folded in with ideas of childlike races from colonies in Africa, . . . supporting Britain’s idea of itself as a stabilizing and beneficent force in the lands over which it ruled” (J. Brown 2008:30). The image of the picaninny, a caricature of an African-American slave child, thus came to symbolize both chattel slavery and the colonized African continent (J. Brown 2008).

The touring minstrel shows, which reached Britain as early as 1848 with “Boz Juba and The Ethiopian Serenaders” before waves of other groups came and toured the rest of Europe, had a clear and direct impact on black actors in France who borrowed elements from American minstrelsy in fashioning their own routines. For example, the turn-of-the-century Parisian circus duo Footit and Chocolat, “the most famous and successful interracial clown team in nineteenth-century France,” drew heavily upon minstrel stereotypes for the characterization of Chocolat, a “dim-witted, passive simpleton” portrayed by Afro-Cuban actor Raphaël Padilla (Smalls 2003:365, 367). Dressed as a Northern dandy with “foolish” middle-class aspirations, Chocolat was the unsuspecting butt of the white clown Footit’s jokes and insults. The duo, with whom Debussy was acquainted (Lockspeiser [1962]1978:137), played a major role in “the racialized spectacle of modern Parisian life,” becoming household names in France (Smalls 2003:354). Images in Footit’s and Chocolat’s likeness were used in commercial advertising to sell a variety of products, some of which were exported from the new French colonies in Africa, including coffee and cocoa (Smalls 2003). This “commodity racism” helped to legitimize “French colonial activities in the name of market capitalism and cultural progress” while obscuring the bloody realities of African colonialism (Smalls 2003:369, 367). Through this process, the image of the friendly-but-foolish black, an image rooted in the United States, was used to stimulate a rapidly growing French economy strengthened by imperial exports from Africa.

The Golliwog contributed to the project of transforming human black bodies into homogenous, mass-produced commodities. As Europe’s control over Africa increased, consumers particularly in Britain and France sought

commodity representations of the “exotic” black figures from the land their nations were colonizing. Initially produced in Britain, Golliwog’s image was a transnational collage of the African-American child slave and the imagined African subject. Such images, perpetuated in popular products like the Golliwog doll, featured prominently in the toy industry and in children’s literature, establishing the colonial relationship as formative to a child’s development (J. Brown 2008:64). Fully dehumanized and distorted, Golliwog appears as “a cross between a dwarf-sized black minstrel and an animal” alongside the moral play narrative of “taming the native child” as an act of Christian charity (Pilgrim 2000; J. Brown 2008:65). Through mimetic stages, the doll’s relation to slavery had been obscured, filtered through the alchemy of minstrelsy, miniaturized and trivialized to the status of a child’s toy. In Golliwog, the ontological horrors of slavery and colonialism congeal, but only as a latent memory buried beneath the doll’s smiling cotton visage.

However, Golliwog’s status as a commodity complicates his signification, endowing him with a life-like aura. While at first sight, the commodity appears “a very trivial thing, and easily understood,” Karl Marx argues that concealed behind the product is a network of social structures: on one side of the commodity are the producers, the human laborers who have created it, and on the other side are the consumers, the people who desire and purchase the commodity (Marx [1867]1906:81). But in a capitalist economy, the relationship between these two spheres is necessarily alienated and indirect, mediated only through the commodity itself. Thus, the commodity is reified as having a certain power independent of humans, as if it possessed intrinsic value detached from the people who produce or consume it.⁷ Through commodity fetishism, Marx’s term for this process, “capitalists deny their own creation and control of the commodity, explaining it as objective, natural reality” (Baptist 2001). As a result, objects approach the status of “independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and [with] the human race” (Marx [1867]1906:83).⁸

With toy commodities that are representations of people, the story is all the more complex. In the essay “A Philosophy of Toys,” French writer and philosopher Charles Baudelaire, whose poems Debussy set to music, describes the toy world as a “whole life in miniature,” where children act upon and through their toys, searching for their “souls” (Baudelaire [1853]1964:199). Baudelaire writes that playing with toys lays the “moral foundation” for how children will interact with people in their adult lives (Baudelaire [1853]1964:199). This relationship between children and their toys complicates the person/thing dichotomy, a slippage made readily visible in the broader Modernist fascination with “the toy come to life” trope in con-

temporary children's stories such as *The Nutcracker* and *Pinocchio*. In these stories, as in *The Adventures of Two Dutch Dolls*, toy commodities disrupt the boundary between subject and object and relinquish their status as things, becoming "independent beings endowed with life" (Marx[1867]1906:83).

Golliwog's story reveals the ways in which material emblems of American slavery continued to be circulated through capitalist networks, helping to establish and legitimize European attitudes towards colonized Africans. In Golliwog, the concepts of fetishized object and objectified human bleed together, converging in a singular history originating in slavery. But if, according to slavery historian Edward Baptist, racist memorabilia are "the product[s] of determined and meaningful self-deception and forgetting," then Golliwog is distanced from this history, allowing the consumer to "pleasure the self with the unacknowledged remembrance of a transgression without blame, an ambiguity controlled and fixed, displaced onto and encoded in the fetish object" (Baptist 2001). Created in children's fiction and materialized as a stuffed toy, Golliwog naturalized the commodity relationship between the young white consumer and the objectified black body as one of "benevolent" ownership and control. The third section of this study will examine how Debussy's composition draws upon these discourses in its musical characterization of Chouchou's toy.

The Cakewalk and "Mimetic Vertigo"

Wrenching their gestures from themselves and hammering the artificial floor with the taps on their patent shoes, they danced, they glided, they reared up, they broke themselves in two, three, four, then they straightened up and bowed . . . And behind them the whole city, the whole of Europe, began dancing. (Cocteau [1935]1988:74)

With its layers of fetishistic imitation, the cakewalk follows a trajectory similar to Golliwog's: from slavery, to minstrelsy, to a fashionable leisure pursuit for wealthy white urbanites. According to Davinia Caddy, by the time the dance reached Europe, it was largely read as a "generic American commodity, sequestered from [its] black roots and from any attendant *feral* or ritualistic overtones" (Caddy 2007:284; emphasis added). On the Parisian stage, the stylish cakewalk, performed in fancy dress and jewels, "was thought to represent a cultured, codified creativity, worthy of Paris's musical elite" (Caddy 2007:296; Figure 3). How a satirical plantation dance could take on connotations of white bourgeois leisure is perhaps difficult to imagine, but the cakewalk was a prime example of the complex significance of slave-era expressive culture.



Phot. Paul Boyer.

T. E. CAKE-WALK

Pl. II

Figure 3: Two women dancing the Parisian Cakewalk (photograph by Paul Boyer, 1903)

In the context of slavery, dancing served the dual function of entertainment and as a means of assessing the physical strength and “spirit” of an individual prior to sale (Tuhkanen 2001). One slave trader remarked that slaves were often forced to dance on the auction block “when their cheeks were wet with tears” in order “to make them appear cheerful and happy” (Baptist 2001). Dancing in this instance was used to ensure that a slave would fetch a decent price in a market that “danc[ed] on strings held by the abstract forces of supply and demand” (Baptist 2001). Narratives like this underscore the ways in which dancing operated as a signifier of the slave market and as a marker of white investment—both monetary and erotic—in the black body’s health and physicality.

Bearing this context in mind, the cakewalk’s genesis as a plantation dance takes on particularly complicated implications, working both within the accepted social boundaries as a form of entertainment and outside of

them as a critical commentary on slavery. According to oral testimonies from ex-slaves, the cakewalk originated in the southern United States as a dance in which slaves imitated the gestures of their white owners and competed for cake (Baldwin 1981).⁹ Its exaggerated movements, which include high steps and an arched back, were intended to reflect the bodily postures of white slave owners' ballroom promenades (Baldwin 1981:201). More than a recreational dance, the cakewalk "was an outlet for satirizing the manners of whites" and, in turn, the very institution of slavery (Baldwin 1981:201). Meanwhile, white audiences mistook the dance as a genuine, though "failed" attempt to emulate bourgeois mannerisms (Baldwin 1981:208). Taking pleasure in what they viewed as "grotesque" performances of white gentility, slave owners invited slaves to perform this dance in competition for cake as entertainment for plantation guests (Hartman 1997).¹⁰

However, as Jayna Brown argues, this plantation setting is not "the sole location of the dance's authentic meaning;" rather, this site represents only one venue in a larger history of the cakewalk's circulation and shifting meanings (J. Brown 2008:130). With the cakewalk's migration to the minstrel show in the mid-late 1870s, the original slave dancers were supplanted by an imitated image of them.¹¹ On this stage, when performed by white actors in blackface, one of the dance's purposes was "to portray cakewalking blacks as buffoons who could never take that final step, no matter how high-kicking, into white culture and high society" (Baldwin 1981:207). Here, the cakewalk emerged as a means for illuminating the nexus between race and class, where working-class whites performed black social and economic disenfranchisement as popular comedy. But, as Eric Lott indicates, white minstrel depictions of black culture were not quite so reductive; integral to these performances was a fascination with blackness, what Eric Lott describes as a kind of "love" (Lott 1995). Cakewalking enabled white actors to perform an objectification of the African-American body in "a dramatic spectacle based on an overriding investment in [that] body" (Lott 1995, 6). These dances provided a conduit for whites to appropriate elements of fetishized African-American bodily physicality and culture, which, according to Lott, troubled white audiences "all the more because they were so attracted to the culture they plundered" (Lott 1995:8). Moreover, minstrel cakewalking enabled white actors and audiences to re-imagine slavery as a time of economic "collaboration" between the races, a jubilant celebration filled with singing and dancing workers.

In the decades following the Emancipation, large numbers of black individuals performed the cakewalk in public spaces beyond the confines of Southern plantations, both on minstrel stages and in other public venues. Importantly, the various meanings ascribed to the dance differed markedly

depending upon who was performing the cakewalk and where these performances took place. Particularly between approximately 1880 and 1910, black dancers staged the cakewalk “in critical territories within the city,” where “ideologies of American wealth were being ritualized” as a means of contesting the racial annexation of urban space (J. Brown 2008:129). Cakewalkers congregated in city centers for dance competitions that drew hundreds of performers from across the United States and “as many as ten thousand spectators” (J. Brown 2008:142). The largest of these cakewalk competitions, held at New York City’s Madison Square Garden, attracted massive crowds of African Americans, their cakewalking a claim to urban space both literally and symbolically.

White dancers soon followed suit by participating in these competitions, and this juxtaposition of dancers had a deep impact on modes of racial and gendered performance at the turn of the twentieth century, but to very different ends (J. Brown 2008). As upper- and middle-class white women’s ideals of modern female bodies shifted in response both to the “first wave” feminist movement and to changes in the industrial workforce, these women sought out leisure activities and exercises that would fashion their bodies as “modern” (J. Brown 2008). The cakewalk, a physically demanding dance, remade the soft, fleshy Victorian body into a thinner, more muscular form, one that signaled health and physical control (Caddy 2007; J. Brown 2008). To be sure, this new image had a specific referent: the muscular build achieved through labor, particularly associated with black “physicality.” For white cakewalkers, “black bodies came to model . . . the ideal bodies of urban sophistication, wealth, and *fantasies of access to that wealth*,” and white audiences were eager to learn the dance that signified democracy, grace, bodily control, and modernity (J. Brown 2008:130; emphasis added).¹² However, “new women” were not to achieve these bodies through work, but through the luxury of leisure and exercise. With the adoption of the cakewalk by white bourgeois women and their male dance counterparts, the dance’s circulation expanded to American parlors and social venues associated with middle and upper class whites.

Meanwhile, African Americans established all-black acting and dancing troupes that performed throughout the West, and when they brought the dance to Europe in the 1890s, this historical layer further removed the cakewalk from its original geographic and social context. One particular stage act popular in European theaters helped establish the significance of the dancing black body in the European white imaginary. Topsy, a child slave originally created in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, became a favorite character in “Tom Shows,” staged nostalgic “antislavery” performances based on Stowe’s novel, which incorporated song and dance

routines. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Topsy is first introduced jubilantly dancing after being ordered to do so by her new slave owners. Embodied by a human actor, however, the theatrical Topsy is arguably more complicated: casting her dance in another light, Topsy's cakewalk portrays her black body as one that is never fully "tamable" or containable (J. Brown 2008:59). In one particular dance routine, Topsy, performed by Ida Forsyne, emerges onstage in a potato sack with her limbs free, back arched, arms waving, and legs running from gunshots until she is finally hit and collapses to the ground. However, Ida Forsyne described this dance not as ending in Topsy's death, but as rolling "over, over and up" at the end of the potato sack cakewalk, as if Topsy had escaped death or had even been resurrected (J. Brown 2008: 61). Jayna Brown describes the white pleasure in this cakewalk performance as bolstering the "fantasy of black subjects' *inhuman* ability to survive bondage, poverty, and peonage," which reinforced the public support of the project to colonize Africa and its resilient, "childlike" inhabitants (J. Brown 2008:61; emphasis added). Tom Shows and other variety acts were popular in several major European cities around the turn-of-the-century, where African American dancers, like Ida Forsyne, toured and further spread the cakewalk's circulation.

So popular was the cakewalk that almost as soon as dance troupes brought it to France, it sparked a national craze, spreading to the bourgeois ballroom, encouraging white participation, and spawning competitions that, at least on the surface, seemed "detached from black cultural production" (Caddy 2007:300). This "detachment" was partially accomplished through a separation of venues in which white Europeans and African Americans danced. While African Americans typically cakewalked on variety stages and in circus acts, white Europeans danced in social settings such as parlors and ballrooms. This public separation of black dancers from the cultural product they helped circulate, coupled with the various layers of cakewalk imitation, seemingly erased the original African-American subjects and replaced them with white dancers, as if the popular consumption of this dance were both appropriate and natural. In the context of this historical trajectory, imitation of the black body in motion functioned as a kind of unconscious suppression of the cakewalk's first dancers, leaving only a vague trace of their history or the original meaning of their dance.

Moreover, the peculiar "physicality" of the dance itself enacted another transformation, as it visually morphed the human body into an object. In contrast to the bodily symmetry of other contemporary dances, the cakewalk "was characterized by agitation and unrest; it not only emphasized the body's angles, but proceeded by juts and starts" (Caddy 2007:301). Davinia Caddy describes the cakewalk's ragtime-inspired syncopated musical accompani-

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ment as unemotional and detached, serving merely to lock “the dancers’ movements to a codified aural pattern” with a “propelling effect, driving physical movement forward with *engine-like regularity*” (Caddy 2007:304; emphasis added). French artist Jean Cocteau emphasizes the perceived exotic nature of the cakewalk, recalling “the strange contortions” of the dancers’ bodies, observing that the cakewalk “accentuates angularities, protrusions, asymmetry, dismemberment, aggression, the urban, and even the machine-like” (Paraphrased in Caddy 2007:300). The overwhelming effect of the dance was a de-centering and fragmentation of the body with a focus on flailing limbs, evoking the image of a marionette controlled by invisible strings (Caddy 2007:301). Thus, with its origins obscured by layers of imitation, the Parisian iteration of the cakewalk came to signal an inhuman physicality, a literal objectification of the body.

“Golliwog’s Cakewalk”: A Convergence of Historical Trajectories

I’d seen nothing like it before. A grinning doll . . . which some mysterious mechanism was causing to move up and down in a loose-jointed, shoulder-shaking, infuriatingly sensuous motion, a dance that was completely detached from the black, mask-like face . . . [The] doll [was] throwing itself about with the fierce defiance of someone performing a degrading act in public, dancing as though it received a perverse pleasure from its motions. (Ellison 1952:326)

In Debussy’s “Cakewalk,” there are no human dancers at all, but a doll is evoked in their stead. Whereas in the popular European incarnation of the cakewalk, the human body is made to look puppet-like, Debussy takes the dance a step further in conjuring Golliwog. Golliwog is no ordinary doll, but one in whom a particularly painful history is congealed and concealed, and in juxtaposing this doll with the cakewalk, Debussy converges two uncanny signifiers of American slavery: histories of human objectification that had been repressed and resignified through historical layers of mimesis.

It would be difficult to argue that the composer consciously intended to bring the Golliwog and the cakewalk into musical conversation specifically to draw attention both to their European re-appropriations as African “exotica” and to their common roots in American slavery. However, whether or not Debussy composed the suite with this in mind, in considering the contemporary cultural discourses surrounding the doll and the dance, the music nonetheless conveys these associations and their parallel histories. This circulation– and reception–focused perspective opens a critical space to examine how these repressed histories of black bodily objectification were

transnationally circulated in popular “trifles” of Debussy’s day—as Golliwog and the cakewalk—and rearticulated in France as exotic, African commodities for white bourgeois consumption. Viewed through this lens, “Golliwog’s Cakewalk” conveys a great deal of information about turn-of-the-century French attitudes towards products of black signification and the ways in which these products worked to support French colonial projects.

Golliwog’s has always been the story of a doll brought to life in the human world, but Debussy’s anthropomorphosis registers more than a playful animation, particularly when parodied quotations from Richard Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* interrupt the movement after the second theme. Lawrence Kramer suggests that Debussy’s interpolation of *Tristan* is a type of grotesque, where Wagner, an institution of European refinement, is debased and trivialized to the level of a popular and “primitive” trifle. However, the concept of grotesque operates more fully on another level embedded not in the Wagner quotations, but in the inhumanness of the stiff and puppet-like Parisian cakewalk. In *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, literary theorist Wolfgang Kayser writes, “Among the most persistent motifs of the grotesque, we find human bodies reduced to puppets, marionettes, and automata, and their faces frozen into masks” (Kayser [1963] 1981:183). As we have seen, this is in fact the story of Golliwog’s production, one that transformed the image of the African-American slave into a common minstrel doll. The Parisian cakewalk adds another layer to Kayser’s grotesque, where white dancers perform a stylized bodily control that bespeaks a history of the physical and economic control of black bodies. Through the cakewalk, French dancers sought to maintain the status of the body, and particularly the black body, as a controlled “thing.” These performances repress the humanity of their referents, instilling in the white dancers “fear of life”—in other words, a repressed fear that the referent African-American/African “objects” of their dance are not objects at all (Kayser [1963] 1981:183).

Sigmund Freud defines the uncanny as “that class of the *frightening*,” that is “nothing new or alien, but something which is *familiar* and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression” (Freud 1919:224–225; emphasis added). An uncanny experience must involve a thing that resonates with familiarity but is experienced in a new, frightening light when a forgotten history surfaces. Indeed, Debussy’s Golliwog is no mere commodity, undifferentiated from a mass of replicated objects—he is a particular doll with whom the composer was intimately familiar, one that was a gift for his daughter. In the finale to *Children’s Corner*, it is Chouchou’s Golliwog who is made to perform slavery’s ontological liminality, uncannily dancing in the threshold between living subject and inanimate object. As Freud further writes of the

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uncanny, “Dismembered limbs . . . [and] feet which dance by themselves . . . have something peculiarly uncanny about them, especially when, as in the last instance, they prove capable of independent activity” (Freud 1919:244). In Debussy’s piece, the doll’s anthropomorphosis precedes the music, starting with the movement’s title, “Golliwog’s Cakewalk,” signaling that the listener is—that Chouchou is—to imagine the Golliwog performing this “strange,” popular dance, a dance that rightly belongs to him.

In “Golliwog’s Cakewalk,” Debussy uses a ragtime-inspired cakewalk as the musical mechanism to activate Golliwog. While the cakewalk’s original musical accompaniment was an unsyncopated two-step march, Debussy’s juxtaposition of the genre with stylistic elements of ragtime was characteristic of the cakewalk’s French iteration (Morgan and Barlow 1992; Caddy 2007). Although ragtime and the cakewalk first developed and circulated independently in the United States, the music and dance genres were later often combined in large dance competitions, where ragtime’s syncopation added a new level of contemporary fashion and energy to the dance (Morgan and Barlow 1992). At the 1900 Paris Exhibition, American composer and conductor John Philip Sousa presented French audiences with what was, for many, their first experience of ragtime and cakewalk music, two burgeoning African-American genres. Sousa arranged the selections himself, combining the cakewalk with rag elements, including a four-measure introduction featuring a repeated rhythmic motif; a turnaround, a chord progression that leads back to the beginning of the main theme called a “turnaround.”

This syncopation, perhaps the most recognizable trait of the ragtime genre, distinguished it from other contemporary dance music and reinforced the “African Americanness” of the cakewalk (Berlin 1980:82). Arthur Pryor, trombonist, assistant conductor, and co-leader of Sousa’s band, recalled the musicians’ discomfort and embarrassment with the syncopation associated with black composition, feeling it was “beneath [the players’] dignity and they couldn’t or wouldn’t give in to it” (Quoted in Blesh and James 1958:75). Pryor’s comment helps contextualize the meanings upon which Debussy possibly drew upon in using ragtime elements in “Golliwog’s Cakewalk.”

Before examining how “Golliwog’s Cakewalk” deploys these elements to bring Golliwog to life, let me first briefly consider another movement from *Children’s Corner*: “Serenade for the Doll.” This movement, the third in the suite, provides a point of contrast in its portrayal of the toy world, suggesting very different modes of animation and consequent ways in which Chouchou might have related to these dolls. Far from the “primitive” and popular cakewalk genre, the serenade is a musical greeting traditionally performed in the evening to honor a guest, situating the doll in the world of refined European tradition. Debussy instructs the player to depress the



Example 1 (mm. 5-9): emphasized ragtime syncopation in right hand.

soft pedal throughout and play “*léger et gracieux*,” which places this doll in a delicate, serene sonic environment. Here, Chouchou’s “favorite doll” is not so much handled as doted upon; she is the beloved but passive recipient of gentle sonic adoration, and the composer’s music suggests that she is to be treated with love and care.

In “Golliwog’s Cakewalk,” Debussy evokes a very different relationship between Chouchou and her minstrel doll. Florence Kate Upton, Golliwog’s creator, recalled playing with a similar doll as a child, where the Upton children treated it roughly, “his unkindly face the target for rubber balls” (Quoted in Pilgrim 2000: unpaginated). Upton’s comment frames Golliwog as a natural target of abuse, and Debussy’s music seems to suggest a similar rough treatment, though less extreme. Unlike the passive doting in “Serenade,” “Golliwog’s Cakewalk” positions the doll as restless, active, and animated from within as he performs the cakewalk. In Debussy’s composition, Golliwog seems to be tossed around, stretched and pulled, made to dance for a child’s pleasure.

The composer draws upon many ragtime and cakewalk conventions in order to make Golliwog dance. Following a four-measure introduction featuring the movement’s main cakewalk theme, Debussy presents another four-measure figure, isolating the characteristic syncopation of this hybrid genre. In the measures of Example 1, the staccato off beats in the right hand propel the music and Golliwog’s dancing body forward. This motion is especially emphasized in measures 6 and 8, where forte sixteenth notes give the syncopated line added energy, with a crescendo that propels the music towards a beat that is continually denied in the right hand and only touched upon for a short eighth note in the left hand. These measures suggest Golliwog twitching to life as Debussy’s music enlivens him.

In Example 2, we see measure 10, which initiates the cakewalk melody, where Golliwog’s animation is awkwardly and unnaturally strict and controlled throughout the first third of the movement. Debussy’s direction “*très net et très sec*” (very clear and very dry) signals an “engine-like regularity,” where Golliwog dances with the Parisian cakewalk’s forced, mechanical jolliness (Caddy 2007:304). Controlled by Debussy’s music like a dancing

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très net et très sec

mf *p* *sf* *p*

p *f* *molto* *f*

Example 2 (mm. 10-17): syncopated cakewalk theme in right hand soprano line

p *plus p* *f* *ff* *p*

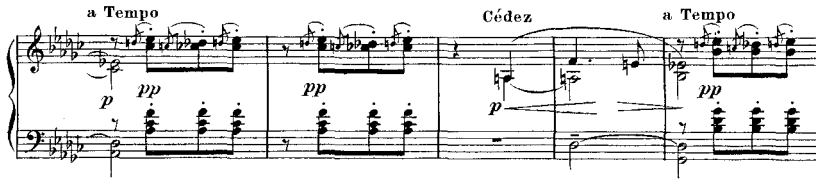
Example 3 (mm. 26-35): the cakewalk melody suddenly dips into the bass (mm. 30-32), where the melody reaches a low B-flat before suddenly returning to the treble clef (mm. 33-34)

puppet, the cakewalk melody unexpectedly plummets an octave lower in m. 30 (Example 3), reaching a low B-flat, three measures later, emphasized with an abrupt forte crescendo to fortissimo. This gesture has a particularly striking effect, especially when in the following measure, the bass casually returns to the treble clef with the return of the quiet, light, syncopated cakewalk melody. Here, the alternating narrow and wide ranges between the right and left hands suggest Golliwog's limbs being stretched, controlled, and contorted like those of a marionette.¹³ Of this image, Kayser writes, "It is as if an impersonal force, an alien and inhuman spirit had entered the soul" of Chouchou's toy (Kayser [1963]1981).

When another version of the syncopated figure from Example 1 returns, the music has undergone several critical changes. In these measures



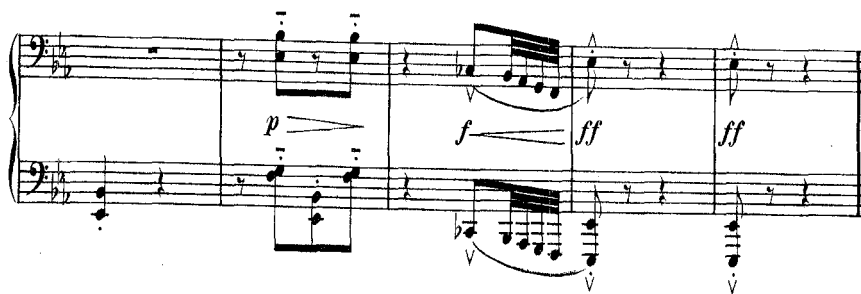
Example 4 (mm. 46-51): altered syncopation with decreased forward momentum



Example 5 (mm. 61-67): the first of four melodic quotations of the “Tristan” chord (mm. 61-63); the cakewalk’s characteristically syncopated grace notes indicate Golliwog’s presence (mm. 63-64)

(Example 4), Debussy undermines the forward momentum by adding tenuto marks over the right hand’s syncopation and omitting the more rhythmically active crescendo of sixteenth notes presented in this figure’s first iteration. Unlike the music in Example 1, here the left hand lands on the downbeat with a full quarter note followed by one and a half beats of rest, further diminishing the forward motion of the ragged cakewalk. These changes seem to evoke an internal resistance to the cakewalk’s propelling force, as if Chouchou’s doll now refuses to capitulate the order to perform this dance.

When parodied quotations from *Tristan und Isolde* interrupt the movement in m. 61, the music takes on a very different mood (Example 5). The famous opening leitmotif from *Tristan* is recalled four times, and following each quotation, Debussy injects the cakewalk’s grace notes, signifying that Golliwog’s body is woven into this music. There are perhaps several ways to interpret this musical centerpiece of “Golliwog’s Cakewalk.” In one reading, the Wagner quotations depict Golliwog’s psychological interiority, where Debussy explores the “inner life” of Chouchou’s doll. In contrast to the rigidity of the movement’s opening, the middle section of “Golliwog’s Cakewalk”



Example 6 (mm. 124-128) a sudden “crash” to the ground depicted musically, as if Golliwog’s body is once again a lifeless object (mm. 126-127)

(mm. 61-92) is marked with frequently shifting tempos, expanding and contracting with “une grande émotion.” Here, Golliwog transgresses the boundary between the physical world of the mechanical cakewalk and the emotionally complicated human world. Through these quotations, Debussy gives Golliwog the melodic means to express a more complex range of emotions, humanizing the doll to some degree.

If we connect this musical moment with the slavery and colonial narratives surrounding the cakewalk and Golliwog, this juxtaposition registers more complicated and potentially troubling associations. The two styles engage in a back-and-forth dialogue with a fluctuating tempo along with alternating syncopated and on-the-beat melodic material. The musical volley between the *Tristan* quotations and the syncopated gestures of the cakewalk presents a tension between two apparently disparate musical styles: where Wagner’s opera is harmonically complex and “refined,” the syncopated cakewalk represents a lowbrow, “wild,” and “animalistic” musical idiom. Here, Debussy frames Wagner and the cakewalk as “humorously” incompatible, from disparate worlds incapable of communicating with one another. Indeed, this tension also evokes extra-musical associations as a confrontation between Golliwog as Africanized “primitive” and Wagner as the epitomized figure of high Western culture. As in “Serenade for the Doll” and the sonic distinctions it makes between Chouchou’s favorite doll and her Golliwog, the *Tristan* quotations establish a cultural and geographical distance between Wagner’s European world and Golliwog’s home, be it black America, Europe, or Africa.

After the fourth and final iteration of the *Tristan* melody, the cakewalk melody resumes control of the piece. At the close of the movement and suite, Golliwog returns to the mechanical world of the European cakewalk. In m. 121 (Example 6), as the rhythm slows, the dynamics fade, and the melody

sinks into the bass clef, Golliwog is slowly de-animated and returned to object status. Golliwog—once again a toy imitation of a slave—crashes to the ground with a sudden fortissimo. Nevertheless, like the conclusion of Ida Forsyne’s “Topsy” cakewalk, in which the finale could be doubly interpreted as both her death and resurrection, “Golliwog’s Cakewalk” suggests a similar ambiguity, when the final chord is reiterated a measure after the doll’s charm has been broken.¹⁴ It is tempting to read this final chord as a moment in which Golliwog symbolically peaks through a musical score that cannot fully contain him, somehow acknowledging the histories that led him to dance the cakewalk in a French composer’s musical suite for his daughter.

Through converging the dance and the doll in “Golliwog’s Cakewalk,” Debussy points to their latent origins in slavery and to their French revivals as “African.” Such repressed histories are made “visible when an object becomes something else, emerges as a “thing” dislocated from the circuits of everyday life or [is] singularized by the dotting meditation of lyric or fiction or film” (B. Brown 2005:183). In animating this particular Golliwog, Debussy separates him from a mass of identical objects; the doll relinquishes his status as a commodity and becomes something more particular, more real than Chouchou’s toy. In “Golliwog’s Cakewalk,” Debussy converges the repressed origins of two signifiers of African-American slavery and African colonialism, uncanny things “which ought to have remained hidden but [have] come to light” (Freud 1919:224). Like Bill Brown, I want to understand “Golliwog’s Cakewalk” as the “revenge of the black collectible come-to-life,” “as the recollection of the ontological scandal perpetrated by slavery,” a history suppressed and resignified by layers of mimesis (Brown 2001:197). Debussy’s musical séance brings the Golliwog and the cakewalk into conversation, allowing the past to speak through these seemingly trivial, modern cultural products.

Conclusion

The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is “knowing thyself” as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces without leaving an inventory. (Gramsci 1971:324)

The concept of modernism, as traced through African-American and postcolonial history, signals at once an optimistic hope that the present can offer something more, as well as an anxious, paradoxical desire to trace a connection with the past while establishing a present point of departure from it. In tracing the hidden histories of seemingly modern forms, we are

always led back in time. Embedded in “Golliwog’s Cakewalk” in its context of French modernism is the imagined notion of the exotic, objectified, dancing African native, mediated through a past by means of a post-American-slavery commodity. The story of “Golliwog’s Cakewalk,” with its perpetuation of racist signifiers in the context of a modernized Western culture, underlies a “desperate, and probably futile, struggle to imagine modernity otherwise,” perhaps as something more stable, more ethical, or more promising and at a greater distance from the past, even if only through illusion and fantasy (Clark 1999:9).

Frederic Jameson theorizes one of the problematics of modernity as the attempt to make sense of a world rapidly expanding by the forces of colonialism and capitalism (Jameson 1991). He argues that modernist writers brought the influence of the “exotic” outside world into their own more familiar contexts as a way of metaphorically condensing an increasingly expanding sense of geography. We might relocate Jameson’s metaphor from geography to chronology, where disparate historical moments are similarly brought into close juxtaposition as a way of dealing with the “shocks” of an accelerating, modernizing world in which commodity exchange with Africa became a part of day-to-day European material and cultural life (Benjamin 1968). Seen through this lens, Golliwog and the cakewalk represent a romanticized version of a familiar, though exotic American past brought into a fragmented, rapidly changing turn-of-the-century French colonial present in order to provide a template for the relationship between European citizens and colonial African subjects. Here, the American past becomes an imagined, romanticized space in which to forge modern relationships with distant Others.

But the past is also never just the past, a dead memory to be resurrected as a present fantasy; it is always a history of living people and the things they created. Thus, in “Golliwog’s Cakewalk,” animation of the inanimate might more broadly signal the animation of an objectified people who were considered to be part of a haunting past with which the people of the Modern era so desperately wished to break free, while simultaneously invoking a re-imagined version of that history. In seemingly trivial objects of day-to-day material life, painful, sometimes horrific stories of enslaved and colonized people are congealed, waiting to be brought back to life and to be acknowledged within our imaginations.

Notes

1. As Eric Lott argues, minstrelsy offered whites an arena in which to act out fetishized, homoerotic desires for the black body while also negotiating the boundaries of race.
2. Subsequent renditions of Golliwog depicted him as “unkind, mean-spirited, and even more visually hideous” (Pilgrim 2000). Nevertheless, this initial characterization is equally racist,

mirroring minstrel depictions of the dim-witted jolly slave who accepts his fate.

3. As many scholars have noted, minstrelsy was an immensely complex arena whose cultural effects remain a nebulous subject of scholarly debate. Nevertheless, minstrelsy's perpetuation after the formal dissolution of slavery served at least in part to re-imagine slavery as more benign (Lott 1995; Hartman 1997; J. Brown 2008).

4. Bill Brown argues, "The nostalgic embodiment of some fantasmatic past [as performed through minstrelsy] compensates for uncertainties about the future place and role of African Americans" (2005:186). Minstrelsy's compensatory nostalgia brings to light the unfulfilled promise of modernity for African Americans, who remained symbolically enslaved and marginalized long after the formal dissolution of slavery. However, black Americans also challenged this type of slavery through acts of resistance (Hartman 1997; Brooks 2006).

5. Although the focus of this study is the constitution of blackness in commodity forms, the ways in which African-American performances of blackness functioned to critique white control over black representation is critical in this process. Daphne Brooks argues that African-American minstrel performances functioned as a way of undermining the spectacle of blackness, where African Americans challenged previously exclusively white depictions of black bodies (Brooks 2006). Saidiya Hartman adds that while on the surface these "small acts of resistance" seemingly differed little from complicity and contented subjection, they diverged radically in terms of how they constituted black subjecthood and agency (Hartman 1997:8).

6. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century in what has been called "The Scramble for Africa," European colonial powers (most notably Britain, Germany, and France) invaded and annexed Africa into territories. However, most European citizens maintained only an indirect relationship with Africa, feeding their curiosity about this continent's inhabitants through cultural and material products that circulated transnationally and transcontinentally. This trend of exotic fetishism's broader cultural impact manifests in contemporaneous art and in operas like Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida* and Giacomo Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*.

7. This notion of value is particularly sticky, controlled as it is by the vague and invisible forces of "supply" (production) and "demand" (consumption).

8. Marx notes that commodity fetishism runs contrary to modernity's focus on rational, scientific progress as achieved through industrialization.

9. Some scholars also note that the cakewalk seems to owe much to the West African dance tradition (see, for example, Krasner 1997).

10. In *Bodies in Dissent*, Daphne Brooks argues that, while on the surface, cakewalking appeared complicit with slavery, embedded in these performances were seeds of resistance (Brooks 2006).

11. It is difficult to specify exactly when the cakewalk became part of the minstrel tradition. In the late 1840s, African American minstrel actor William Henry Lane toured with the Ethiopian Serenaders as "Master Juba" or "Boz Juba," performing what was perhaps an early version of the cakewalk (for a description of this dance, see Dickens 1842). However, the cakewalk as an independent and established dance form did not become a formal part of the minstrel show until the year after a large cakewalk competition was held in celebration of the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial (Baldwin 1981).

12. Key to understanding how the cakewalk acquired meanings of wealth and luxury is the notion that African Americans ostensibly had newfound access to wealth and social mobility in the post-Emancipation era. Nevertheless, access to the class mobility that the cakewalk signified was denied to many urban blacks: "physical closeness does not imply the intent to

share or the realization of natural egalitarianism,” and the illusion of modern urban equality belied the vastly different social and economic classes to which black and white dancers belonged (J. Brown 2008:152, 129). Jayna Brown highlights the paradox of representing modern European white wealth, achieved through industrial and colonial enterprises, with “the creative practices of politically and socially disenfranchised people” from across the Atlantic (J. Brown 2008:136).

13. Recall that the Parisian cakewalk has a similar effect on human bodies, making them appear de-centered and marionette-like.

14. I have come to hear the final chord in m. 128 is Golliwog’s musical “wink.” This wink brings to mind the closing credits of Spike Lee’s 2000 film *Bamboozled*, wherein a collection of turn-of-the-century racist objects are individually animated of their own accord, “frantically dancing or fiddling, bouncing or swinging, . . . grinning and smiling, unable to stop” (B. Brown 2005:207). In the film, the camera zooms toward the face of the final object, a smiling black musician who rocks from side to side. As the camera nears his face, he seems to wink. This final moment is, for me, by far the film’s most haunting, as this object momentarily relinquishes its status as object in order to “bespeak a life of things that is no social life, only the hyperactive persistence of the past” (B. Brown 2005:207).

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