

CROSSING BOUNDARIES: TRANSATLANTIC READINGS OF
SENTIMENTAL STRATEGIES IN SELECTED ANTISLAVERY TEXTS

by

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(Under the Direction of Tricia Lootens)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation study examines the sentimental tradition in Maria Edgeworth's *The Grateful Negro*, Herman Melville's *Benito Cereno*, Mary Prince's *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself*, and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. The introductory chapter lays the foundation of my argument. As a rhetoric and convention, sentimentalism provides a public forum for each author's political agenda as well as a "private" one that is revealed as a subtext in their narratives. Also, in the transatlantic nature of my choice of authors, I argue that their texts should be read as complements of each other, not just thematically speaking but also in terms of the sentimental strategies and techniques they use to address slavery, race and gender. Chapter One offers a discussion of Maria Edgeworth, in which I challenge the reading of her novella as an antislavery text. Because of her ambivalence towards abolition, I argue that sentimentality serves to mask an apologist agenda. Consequently, her tale is rendered suspect. The next chapter addresses Herman Melville's novella as a critique of sentimentality and sentimental abolitionist literature. My analysis examines how Melville exploits nineteenth-century racial attitudes and stereotypes of blackness in order to expose the dangers of sentimental discourse and to destabilize the sentimental reader's faith in it. Chapters Three and Four examines the slave narratives of Mary Prince and Harriet Jacobs, respectively. The Prince chapter explores how her narrative can be read within the sentimental tradition and the way she challenges it through her use of language and the addressing of her physical and sexual abuse. The Jacobs chapter examines the sentimental strategies she employs simultaneously to reveal and to conceal the delicate details of the female slave experience. Focusing on the silences and whispers surrounding her sexual victimization and transgressions, I explore how her reticence as a technique allowed her to access the sentimental identities of sentimental heroine and the good mother. In the Afterword, I demonstrate the intertextual relationship between all four works by highlighting the connections between them.

INDEX WORDS: Antislavery Literature, *Benito Cereno*, Harriet Jacobs, Herman Melville, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Maria Edgeworth,

Mary Prince, Sentimentalism, *The Grateful Negro*, *The History of Mary Prince*

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Sheila Elizabeth Sapp. Without my mother's unconditional, loving support and unshakeable confidence in me, I would not be who I am or where I am today.

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INTRODUCTION

Sensibility [or sentimentality] can use discourse but cannot be enclosed by it; one could say, as a corollary to this, that sensibility has no certain boundaries or limitations. It adds a new dynamic to whatever forces, good or bad, happen to inspire each individual. The consequence is that sensibility apparently cannot be depended upon as a stable moral concept.

Stephen Cox¹

In this dissertation study, entitled “Crossing Boundaries: Transatlantic Readings of the Politics of Sentimentalism in Selected Antislavery Texts,” my goal is to examine the use of sentimentalism in a critical context in which it has not been done before. The use of “transatlantic” to describe the readings is not only meant to reflect the geographical and cultural origins of the authors and the texts I analyze in the following chapters, British author Maria Edgeworth’s “The Grateful Negro” (1802), American author Herman Melville’s “Benito Cereno” (1856), African British author Mary Prince’s *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself* (1831), and African American author Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (1861), but also to suggest the crossing of borders in another sense, the notion of cross-cultural exchange and influences of sentimentalism in antislavery writing. While critical studies on sentimentalism in British literary scholarship are more extensive and farther along than those in American literature, there is nothing overtly distinctive between “British” and “American” sentimentality other than the implied difference those labels impose. Though this labeling serves its purpose in canonizing texts and identifying literary traditions, it can prevent us from exploring possible similarities and shared

influences between works and authors that we assume to be dissimilar because of cultural and national difference. In the case of how I examine the rhetoric and conventions of sentimentalism in the works by Edgeworth, Melville, Prince, and Jacobs, all somewhat unlikely chaptermates, I was interested in how the contradictions between the authors made them complements of one another, not just thematically speaking in terms of their subjects but also in terms of strategies and techniques. The fact that the authors are each either British or American, white or black, male or female, privileged or oppressed is not limiting, but rather it allows for a unique and more complex look at the sentimental tradition.

The transatlantic nature of this critical discussion is particularly significant, because the boundary crossing reflects a major point of my argument, which is the fluidity of sentimentalism as a convention. Edgeworth, Melville, Prince, and Jacobs all appropriate sentimentality in addressing the slavery issue, manipulating the rhetoric and conventions to make their own distinct political statements. The discourse Harriet Jacobs draws upon to publicize the plight of the sexually victimized female slave is the same discourse Herman Melville draws upon to challenge romanticized perceptions about blackness and slavery. The discourse Maria Edgeworth draws upon to illustrate the goodness of slaves and the benevolence of slave masters is the same discourse Mary Prince draws upon to detail her rebelliousness and the immense cruelty of slave owners. This adaptability and malleability of sentimentalism shows its borderlessness, allowing space for the interchange of influences, which in turn, creates new space within the dominant discourse. One example is Jacobs's narrative as a merging of the literary traditions of the sentimental novel and the slave narrative; its hybridity constructed a new platform for telling the story of the Southern female slave experience. Consequently, a large part of what my project concerns itself with is reading each of the authors differently than they have been read in order to offer another critical perspective to the existing scholarship on their works as well as to propose an alternate understanding of

how sentimentalism can function in antislavery writing. Considering this, for the purpose of clarification, I want to elaborate on what the term sentimentalism encompasses in the way I am employing it in my argument.

Flourishing during the mid-eighteenth century in England and the nineteenth century in America, sentimentalism is the rhetoric of morality, sympathy, benevolence, spirituality, protest, and reform, both social and political. As both a literary and cultural phenomenon, it is equally didactic and emotive, the combination of which gives sentimentalism its power. The force behind this power in the cult of sentimentality is marked not just by the ability to feel but also by the ability to translate an experience to make others feel, essentially a cross-identification between the author and the reader with the sentimental text as the medium. The effectiveness and accomplishment of this emotional transmission between author and reader occurs when the appropriate sentimental response is elicited from the reader, tears. The catalyst for these tears is more than the sympathy-inducing story itself being told; it is also the *way* it is told, which is in a language that is characterized by an extravagant emotionalism that gives a tale its urgency. A sentimental scene only truly touches the reader when the words describing it do. This is why in my analysis of sentimentalism in the texts I chose, I stress the significance of how each of the authors courts the reader through their use of language, orchestrating what the reader sees and the emotional interpretation of what is seen.

Informing my understanding and reading of sentimentalism are several useful, major critical studies on sentimentality in British and American literary scholarship. Janet Todd's *Sensibility: An Introduction* (1986) provides an excellent overview on the history of sentimental literature and a discussion the basics of the genre's conventions and themes in general. Also helpful are Fred Kaplan's *Sacred Tears: Sentimentality in Victorian Literature* (1987) and John Mullan's *Sentiment and Sociability* (1988). Chris Jones's *Radical Sensibility* (1993) and G.J. Barker-Benfield's *The Culture of Sentiment: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (1992) both address the history of

sentimentality as a political tool of revolution in England. Barker-Benfield's work is particularly notable as a feminist text covering a wider area of subjects in a sentimental context, including gender, religion, literature, art, and economics. Another more recently published important work on sentimentalism in British literature is Jerome McGann's *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (1996). Acknowledging the blurred lines between sensibility and sentimentality but also emphasizing the distinctions between them, noting that "sensibility emphasizes the mind in the body, sentimentality the body in the mind," McGann explores the aesthetics of sensibility and sentimentality in the English poetry tradition.² Taking the critical approach of rereading sentimental texts on their own terms rather than critiquing them by twentieth-century critical standards, McGann argues the significance of sentimental writing as a style of literary value. In *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1760-1860* (1985), Jane Tompkins's stated purpose is to reclaim sentimental texts that she believes have been ignored by critics and excluded from the canon because they are considered inferior to the more critically lauded classics produced during the nineteenth-century. Her study asserts the power of sentimental fiction as a literary style and as a valuable contribution to American writing. Ann Douglas's *The Feminization of American Culture* (1998) counters Tompkins's view on sentimentality, questioning the value and the social consequences of the discourse. And yet another important work on sentimentalism in America is Shirley Samuels's *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America* (1992). Samuels's book is one of the few studies that foregrounds an examination of the slavery problem as a sentimental subject.³

Because of its strong moral impulse, aside from encouraging tears, sentimental discourse also perpetuated nineteenth century societal values and expectations that governed female and male behavior, presenting readers with idealized models of womanhood and manhood. Generally speaking, in order to be considered good wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters, women had to be virtuous, pious, and nurturing, while to

be considered good husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons, men had to be gentlemanly, supporters, and protectors, protectors of both women and more importantly, womanhood. These idealized gender roles were popularized in the sentimental novel, with its stereotyped characters. In sentimental literature about slavery, those gendered stereotypes of the sentimental novel influenced the depiction of slave masters and mistresses as well as slaves. How well one exhibited the standards of one's gender determined the extent of one's goodness, a sentimental term employed in antislavery writing as much as "benevolence." The standards, of course, were difficult for slaves to meet because of the nature of the slavery institution, especially in the case of the sexually vulnerable female slave, and also because of negative perceptions about black people in general. Consequently, in non-fictional and fictional portrayals of slaves, race complicates gender and in turn, complicates sentimentality. Edgeworth, Melville, Prince, and Jacobs's attitudes about race and gender thus inform the sentimental techniques in their antislavery texts, the motivation behind what is revealed or concealed and how this formulates the subtextual agenda of their narratives. Sentimentalism as a tool of the antislavery writer was an instrument of agency, critique, subversion, and complicity.

Chapter One offers a discussion of Maria Edgeworth's "The Grateful Negro" (1802). Edgeworth is primarily considered a children's author, a women's novelist, and a regional (Irish) writer. "The Grateful Negro" is the only one of her works which is defined and read as an antislavery text, a label my analysis challenges by calling into question the agenda behind its writing. Because of Edgeworth's ambivalence towards abolition, evidenced by her personal politics and her anxiety about blackness, the text itself is rendered suspect. Her sentimental strategies only serve to mask a subtext of complicity in sustaining the slavery system that she is ostensibly criticizing. Instead of being anti-slavery, she presents an apologist, proslavery argument, a problem with her story that has mostly gone unnoticed by Edgeworth scholars. In my chapter, I argue that her complicity with the plantocracy is exemplified by her characterizations of the African

slaves in her story, who embody the popular stereotypes of the sentimental tradition: the good Negro and the good Negro's threatening antithesis, the uncivilized, blood thirsty, rebellious slave. In Edgeworth's use of these stereotypes, her anxieties about blackness in a social and cultural context are revealed, best evidenced by the presence of an obeah character, an African cultural figure with which Edgeworth apparently had an almost fetishistic fascination. Positioning the obeah as the other Other, she presents a character encompassing her fears of the economic and social ramifications that the freedom of slaves, gained by revolt or abolition, would mean for the nation. Rather than condemning slavery, "The Grateful Negro" instead proposes an argument appealing to slave masters and owners to practice more benevolence. Benevolence then, I argue, instead of just meaning emotional power as a sentimental force, is a form of social control, a coded word for containment which prevents slave rebellions and transforms "bad" Africans into "good" Negroes. Related to this, I address how in an act of diversion, at the novella's conclusion, Edgeworth hides from her readers the true account of the brutal punishment the rebellious slaves received at the hands of whites, an occurrence detailed in Edwards's narrative.⁴ She does so because for her to include it within her text would mean acknowledging that black people are not the only ones with a supposed propensity for savagery.

Because of what I read as her patriarchal privileging of the plantocracy, I also analyze the gender politics involved in Edgeworth's portrayal of blackness, specifically the feminization of the black male slave protagonist, Caesar, and her ironic subversion of domesticity. In her sentimentalized depiction of the master-slave relationship, the result is the homosocial bonding between a master and his slave is represented as a romantic coupling or a "marriage." Expanding on this idea of marriage, using Eve Sedgwick's romantic triangle formula as a model, I address the homoerotic overtones and the marginalization of the female slave as the displaced prize.⁵ This bonding between two men is further intensified by Edgeworth's feminization of the black male slave, whose

emotional attachment (love) for his master means he must risk his domestic ties with his female lover and sacrifice those with his kinsmen. As a consequence, although Edgeworth draws on her moral authority as a woman to critique slavery and the slave trade because it disrupts domesticity, she subverts her own argument by her privileging of the master-slave relationship over the familial union between slaves. Expanding on this idea, I address how as a result, the black female slave is rendered powerless and devalued as a sexual and romantic companion to the male slave.

One of the questions which begs asking and has yet to be answered is why Edgeworth, who was not an abolitionist writer, nor politically involved in the antislavery movement, as were several of her contemporaries and acquaintances such as Joanna Baillie, Anna L. Barbauld and Hannah More, would appropriate a form so distinctly different from the forms and traditions with which she was more familiar and popularly known. If there had been closer investigations of her novella, her problematic agenda and the motivation behind it would have been revealed. Why have so few asked what is the context behind the text? Much of the current scholarship on Edgeworth's "The Grateful Negro" has either not recognized or avoided confronting the issues that are addressed in my reading of the novella.

Though questioning the intentions of white antislavery writers as potentially suspect is certainly not "new" in the vast amount of scholarship on abolitionist literature, it remains largely a relatively unexplored area in Maria Edgeworth's case. As one of the few critics who have addressed this particular problem in Edgeworth scholarship, George E. Boulukos attributes it to what he calls a "whiggish haste to show the onward movement of history [which] misrepresents the complexities of British thought about slavery. . .stemming primarily from a lack of attention to other positions other than the extremes of the slavery debate" (12). Boulukos's statement is an important one because it speaks clearly to the either/or critical mentality that rejects the discomfiting ambiguity of Edgeworth's position on slavery in favor of ascribing her within a literary tradition in

order to make her “fit.” For example, in her reading of “The Grateful Negro,” Moira Ferguson notes, “Despite Hector’s impulsively attempted murder of Caesar, despite the evil, obeah-practising Esther, . . . despite a footnote almost four pages long denouncing obeah that Edgeworth extracted from Bryan Edwards’s negrophobic *History. . . of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, the text emphatically commends emancipation” (233). Ferguson’s “despites” are problematic, because the “despites” are the issues in the text which complicate its reading. The question is: how can the novella “emphatically” sanction emancipation if Edgeworth subverts it for many of the reasons Ferguson herself recognizes? By negating the significance of the problems rendering the text suspect in order to contextualize Edgeworth within the antislavery movement, Ferguson perpetuates the misreading of the novella. While Ferguson certainly makes an interesting case, it is a dangerous one, because by explaining Edgeworth’s ambivalence outside of the “despites,” she inadvertently redirects attention away from the complicity and racial anxieties which permeate the work. ⁶

Both Boulukos’s comment and Ferguson’s reading raise another question: How *do* we talk about texts that exemplify conventions of the sentimental tradition of antislavery literature in technique, even as the content undermines an abolitionist purpose? Because a critical space currently does not exist (even Boulukos neglects to suggest an alternative), perhaps the proper way to address works exhibiting this problem would be to acknowledge the complexities of naming those texts as antislavery and to avoid making definitive statements which reject a work’s complicated nature. In my own reading of Edgeworth’s “The Grateful Negro,” even though I challenge its reading as an antislavery text, I am hesitant to link her to someone like Thomas Bellamy, who employed sentimental discourse to explicitly support slavery and the sugar trade in the West Indies. As her novella demonstrates, her attitude towards both shifts between moral disdain and economic empathy for slaveowning planters, making it difficult to ascertain unequivocally exactly *what* her position was. My analysis of Maria Edgeworth is not

intended to force her to fit a categorical critical box by labeling her, but to explore why she should not be thus labeled, and how this makes her such an intriguing figure in British antislavery writing. For me, Ferguson's "despites" signal the need to examine more thoroughly the dichotomy between private and public politics as they relate to sentimentality and slavery in works like Maria Edgeworth's.

One primary reason for the lack of challenging analyses of "The Grateful Negro" is perhaps its critical overshadowing by Edgeworth's novel *Belinda*, which was published one year prior. As one of her more commercially successful publications, this novel of manners seems to be of more interest to scholars because of its overt critique of women's rights and Wollstonecraftian feminism. Although the novel's moral focus is on female behavior, colonialism and the slavery problem does present itself in the thematic background. One of *Belinda*'s suitors is a West Indian planter who owns slaves and who consequently serves as an impetus for a discussion on the slavery debate in one scene in the novel. Only recently have feminist readings of the novel begun to shift toward colonialist readings, as critics have begun to reexamine Edgeworth outside of the way in which she is traditionally read, i.e. a children's writer, a regional author. And while this resurgence of interest in Edgeworth is long overdue, the problem is the bulk of scholarship dealing with race and colonial concerns should not solely concentrate on *Belinda*, but also should be refocused onto "The Grateful Negro," where those issues are foregrounded. For example, in her intriguing analysis of the intersection of homoeroticism, miscegenation, and national identity in *Belinda*, Susan C. Greenfield begins her argument by calling attention to how critics have overlooked the novel's connections to British colonialist politics in the West Indies. Ironically, while Greenfield recognizes this void in Edgeworth scholarship, she herself ignores the pertinence and significance of "The Grateful Negro" to her study, relegating it only to a brief discussion in a footnote.⁷ Tellingly, this footnote status of the novella is emblematic of the treatment it has consistently received. Even when the novella *is* addressed, it is not addressed in a

fully developed, in-depth analysis. Well-known nineteenth century British literature scholars such as Anne Mellor, Moira Ferguson, Alan Richardson, and Andrew McCann have all addressed the novella, but in each of their discussions, the analysis is brief and contextualized (unsurprisingly) with *Belinda* or with other works by Edgeworth contemporaries.⁸ Outside of Boulukos, I was unable to discover any articles or book chapters solely devoted to “The Grateful Negro” and the colonialist aspect of the work. My treatment of the novella seeks to rectify this problem.

Chapter Two is an analysis of Herman Melville’s novella “Benito Cereno.” Placing the work within the historical context of the American slavery debate, I address the same issue of sentimental politics in antislavery writing as in the preceding Edgeworth chapter. The difference, though, is in my discussion of Melville’s work, I illustrate how in his ironic inversion of the social order, these politics work on an entirely different level. Rather than a problematic underlying subtext of complicity in this tale of a slave revolt, there is a cautious awareness on the part of the author of both the complexity and the loaded nature of the subjects being dealt with (slavery, race, gender) that Edgeworth’s novella lacks. By having the Melville chapter follow the Edgeworth chapter, my intention is for Melville’s chapter to serve as a comment on and a complement to the problems found in Edgeworth’s use of sentimentality. Reading his novella as a critique of sentimentalizing slavery, I argue that there is an implicit attack on abolitionist rhetoric and the sentimental reader. Functioning on two levels, it is an antislavery argument and it is anti-sentimental antislavery literature. On the latter issue, few Melville studies have deeply explored how benevolence and sentimentalism work in his tale. In becoming unmasked in the novella as a moral shield behind which ethnocentrism and racism are hidden, sentimentalism serves as Melville’s critique of white abolitionist politics as well as the complicated way many white abolitionists perceived blackness and slaves, which is through the lens of what historian George M. Frederickson has termed “romantic racialism.”⁹ Speaking to this, Sarah Robbins has

observed in her argument reading Melville's novella against Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "Capitalizing on the emerging highbrow attacks against sentimental stereotypes, 'Benito Cereno' simultaneously appropriated and critiqued flawed white behaviors and attitudes towards blacks initially made familiar by Stowe's text" (554). In a story in which masquerading exploits the tension between what is and what is not, my argument is that Melville positions the character of the Yankee Captain Amasa Delano as an abolitionist of affect to call into question the hidden politics of those allegedly antislaveryites like Edgeworth.

In his manipulation of sentimental discourse to expose the hypocrisy and complicity it masks, I argue that Melville de-romanticizes (and de-Romanticizes) the Negro slave, challenging the socially and politically "safe" trope of the "good Negro" in his characterization of the African Babo. Like Captain Amasa Delano, Babo serves as a critique of sentimentality in abolitionist writing. By unmasking Babo's good Negro act for the performance that it is, Melville dismantles the character as a sentimental stereotype in American Romantic literature and by extension, in white American thought. In his antislavery story, the good Negro does something literally out of character, both denotations of the word intended. In the sentimental tradition, good Negroes never *act* on their supposedly inherent savagery; their passivity and self-control is the very thing that defines them as "good." Positioning this character as unstable, Melville forces his audience to reevaluate their perceptions about blackness, slaves, and the master-slave relationship in a way most abolitionist literature of the period neglected to do. In his portrayal of Babo, Melville works outside of the tradition in order to revise and reform it from within. And though, as I address in the chapter, Melville has been criticized for creating a character whose brutality seemingly reinforces negative stereotypes about blackness, this criticism ignores the complexity and subtleties in his depiction of Babo. With Melville's portrayal of Babo echoing Toussaint L'Ouverture, Nat Turner and the *Amistad's* Cinque, each intelligent slaves who led bloody rebellions, it is dangerous to

dismiss Babo solely as stereotype. Babo's ability to reason, which the white protagonist Delano tellingly lacks the capability of doing, is what marks him as dangerous to white sentimental readers; a slave revolting may have been a social nightmare in itself, but one *thinking* was frightening because it meant reexamining their beliefs about the intellectual capabilities of black people. Also, the ability to reason is as a humanizing factor as the ability to feel. Significantly, it is the specter of Babo's decapitated head, that "hive of subtlety," atop a pole that serves as the novella's powerful concluding image. The reader is not reassured that all is well. Melville resists tying up the troubling loose ends of his story in a neat, sentimental bow. I theorize that Babo's famous silence at the end, then, which has been another point of critical debate, is also Herman Melville's. At the tale's conclusion, by having Babo remain silent, Melville resists privileging the white moral authority of sentimentalism in his refusal to appropriate the voice of the slave at the critical moment in which his reader expects it.

In my analysis of gender as it relates to sentimental discourse in Melville's text, I examine how, in his inversion and subversion of the hierarchal racial/social construction of the master-slave relationship, he also reverses the racialized gender attributes traditionally associated with those roles. Typically, in sentimental renderings of plantation life, the black male slave is feminized in relation to his white master. In "Benito Cereno," instead of the feminization of the black male slave, the white master is feminized. Stripped of his power, Cereno is stripped of his masculinity. Melville signifies this powerlessness and emasculation through his portrayal Cereno's debilitating illness, hysteria. Because his hysteria means emotional and physical dependence (forced as it is) on Babo, there is an intimacy between the two men that even in his sentimentalizing, Delano finds disconcerting. As with Edgeworth's "The Grateful Negro," the homosocial bond between master and slave is presented as a marriage or a romantic coupling. Connecting this idea and Cereno's feminization to the textual tension Melville places on Delano increasingly perceiving the interactions between Babo and

Cereno as unsettling and unnatural, points to the homoerotically charged nature of their relationship. Unlike the homoerotic relationships between John Claggart and Billy Budd in Melville's "Billy Budd" and the interracial one between Ishmael and Queequeg in *Moby-Dick*, which have been noted and examined, the homoerotic implications in the relationship between Babo and Cereno has largely gone uninvestigated. I believe this is, in part, because the politics of race and slavery in "Benito Cereno" work as a critical magnet drawing scholars toward those issues rather than the less deeply explored, less explicit gender and sexual dynamics in the novella. Related to homoeroticism, I investigate Melville's intriguing use of color in his juxtaposition of Babo's blackness and Cereno's whiteness to intensify the erotic element of their relationship. It is significant that in Delano's observations of Babo and Cereno's physical closeness, he comments on this proximity in connection with their contrasting skin colors, which is Melville tapping into the fear and taboo of miscegenation. Leslie Fiedler has noted of American literature that it is not murder alone occurring between blacks and whites that strikes fear but the additional threat of miscegenation which produces what he calls "the full gothic shiver" (412). Produced by blending black and white, the color gray has ominous racial implications and significance in the novella. In addition gray, as well as the decaying ship, symbolizes the gothic element which also subverts the idealism of sentimentalism in "Benito Cereno." While Guy Cardwell is one of a few critics who have addressed the juxtaposition of the color gray to the master-slave relationship and how its relation to race symbolically heightens the ominous setting of "Benito Cereno," he never draws a conclusion to the *meaning* of Melville's racially informed color imagery.¹⁰ My own reading connects Melville's use of the color gray to the issue of miscegenation and racial contamination that threatens the social order of the ship and white society.

In chapters Three and Four, I shift from discussing sentimental discourse in fictional antislavery literature to addressing it in the factual slave accounts of Mary Prince and Harriet Jacobs. This shift is another way in which my discussion crosses a boundary.

My purpose is to contrast the employment of sentimentalism by the two white authors I address who can be considered as “outsiders” writing about slavery with two black writers who as “insiders” non-fictionally employed sentimentalism. In doing so, some of the questions I wanted to explore were: What is the difference in the appropriation of sentimental conventions and rhetoric writing from the position of sentimental subject/object? What are the difficulties in investing in a discourse that one has to write against, in that there are aspects of slavery that can not be sentimentalized, as one is writing within it? What sentimental strategies are used to cross boundaries in order to transform oneself from a sentimentalized, stereotyped being into a complex human being who exists outside the polarities of “goodness” or “badness?” Though empowering, while sentimentalism provided former slaves with a way to tell their stories in a way that enabled them to gain sympathy, it did not allow the whole truth of their experiences to be told. Cautious of offending their audience and possibly thwarting their political purposes, slave narrative authors used sentimentalism to expose and mask the more unsavory aspects of enslavement, often using the language to cloak the most delicate of un-sentimental subjects - the sexual abuse of slaves by their masters and mistresses. One of the central ironies of sentimental discourse in antislavery literature is that while it enabled white and black abolitionist writers to address the physical brutality of slavery directly, the sexual brutality of slavery could only be addressed in an indirect and guarded manner. Specifically for female slave authors, sentimental rhetoric not only protected the moral and domestic sensibilities of their audience, in turn it also served a personal purpose in that it allowed them to shield their own characters, their womanhood, from public scrutiny. In nineteenth-century England and America, the duality of being a slave and a woman therefore meant, to quote Emily Dickinson, to “Tell all the Truth but tell it slant.” The manipulation of sentimental conventions, to some extent, soothed their anxieties by providing the illusion of the preservation of self, even though that self was on public

display as well as the sanctity of their womanhood, and even though their sexual abuse marked them as fallen women.

There are several reasons why I chose Mary Prince and Harriet Jacobs's narratives to address in my discussion of sentimentalism in antislavery literature, the foremost being my personal interest in cultivating Prince scholarship in both British and African American studies. In British literary studies, Prince's narrative has long suffered critical neglect: most notably, only Moira Ferguson has completed extensive research on her.¹¹ Prince is glaringly absent from the majority of general scholarship on black British writers and slave narratives. There is rarely a chapter included in critical collections solely analyzing Prince's text. For example, in *Discourse of Slavery: Aphra Behn to Toni Morrison*, an edited collection of cross-century transatlantic critical essays covering a variety of writers, Prince is excluded, whereas Jacobs is included. (One recently published notable exception is Helena Woodard's *African-British Writings in the Eighteenth Century: The Politics of Race and Reason* in which she includes a chapter on Prince's narrative.¹²) In African American literary anthologies and criticism, Prince is largely nonexistent, most likely because of her status as a British author. Unlike Olaudah Equiano, an African slave who spent part of his bondage in America and Europe, and whose account *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789) appears excerpted in two recently published anthologies of African American literature *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (1997) and *Call and Response* (1998) as well as in British literature anthologies, Mary Prince never touched America's shores. Nevertheless, despite this circumstance, just as Equiano's narrative has long been acknowledged by African Americanists as a significant work in the tradition of the American slave narrative, despite its emphasis on his European experiences, a place should also be made for Prince, particularly in black feminist or womanist scholarship. Because *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave Related by Herself* is one of the earliest narratives written by an enslaved woman of

color on both sides of the Atlantic, African Americanist feminists should have a vested interest in exploring and developing the bonds between Mary Prince and Harriet Jacobs.

By giving voice to the abuses female slaves suffered, both women empowered themselves through shaping their respective experiences to create a distinctive identity. Unfortunately, while feminist scholars have examined how during the era of the “cult of true womanhood,” Jacobs tore away the veil of the sexual vulnerability and abuse of black women, few have addressed how Prince lifted it thirty years earlier in the same censoring climate in England. In the subtext of Prince’s account, her encoded sexual abuse by two of her masters revealed in a first-person account an aspect of the British slave system seldom acknowledged. Therefore, in many ways, Prince should be considered as a literary foremother to Jacobs. While it is true their experiences differ somewhat because of the nature of British slavery and American slavery, there is enough of a commonality between them that the fact there is hardly any scholarship linking these two writers together continues to be surprising. Because, for the most part, only British literature scholars have recognized Prince’s importance as a black feminist figure, I believe there is an opportunity as well as a responsibility for African Americanist feminists to enter into the existing dialogue and increase the amount of Prince scholarship. By reading Mary Prince with and against her American counterpart, what is gained is a more inclusive critical environment in the collective legacy of black women’s writing.

Further expanding on my call for cross-scholarship to strengthen the weaker areas in some critical studies, I want to assert the importance of introducing Harriet Jacobs and her narrative to nineteenth century British literature scholars. Whereas in African American criticism there is a failure to recognize the significance of Prince’s literary merits, in British Romantic studies, there is a failure to recognize how early African American writers besides Phillis Wheatley have been influenced by English literary traditions. For example in Helen Thomas’s newly published *Romanticism and Slave*

Narratives: Transatlantic Testimonies, she includes a discussion on Wheatley's poems and letters, but she does not include Harriet Jacobs's writings, which I think speaks to how unaware British Romanticists and Victorianists are of how important to their studies an author like Jacobs could be.¹³ In the case of Jacobs, she should be an African American writer of interest to nineteenth-century British literature scholars because her slave narrative is written in the tradition of the sentimental novel, an English literary tradition.¹⁴ In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, a "fictionalized" autobiography, Jacobs employs literary techniques common to the form, such as structuring her tale in episodic thematically titled chapters, including "characters" in her story who are real people whose identity she cloaks by giving them fictional pseudonyms (In order to protect her family and her own identity, Jacobs herself authored her work under the pseudonym Linda Brent.), and its thematic focus on sympathy and domesticity as well as its didactic moral purpose. But it is also how Jacobs revises the tradition and form, which should make her an intriguing figure for British literature scholars. As a black female slave, Harriet Jacobs's positioning of herself as a sentimental heroine reminiscent of Richardson's victimized Clarissa challenges the racial and class construction of the character prototype. Jacobs inscribes blackness and black womanhood onto a literary form meant for the moral education of white middle to upperclass women. In addition, the very nature of the subject of her narrative, the sexual abuse of female slaves, also challenges the sentimental novel model by overtly addressing subjects which were either only discussed in the thematic background of sentimental novels written by white women (slavery) or encoded or completely silent on (sexual victimization of black women). Foregrounding both, Jacobs's story is an act of social and literary defiance made even more emphatic by her re-writing of the sentimental novel's formulaic ending. Jacobs's narrative does not end either in her marriage or death, but in the fallen woman's survival. By tying Jacobs into the English literary tradition and addressing how, as an African American author, she was influenced by the sentimental novel and connecting her to Mary Prince, nineteenth

century British literature scholars can enhance their own scholarship which suffers from a lack of representation of literature written by women of color during the period.¹⁵

In comparing Prince and Jacobs, my intention is to contrast the differences in the ways they deal with their sexual anxiety through their use of sentimentality. Delicate things Jacobs conceals from her sentimental reader, Prince leaves no question about. What is gained from this comparison of their construction of their sentimental selves is a greater understanding of the way female slave authors interpreted and related their experience. I am particularly excited about my discussion of Mary Prince's narrative, because I am proposing a new way of reading her text. In the Prince chapter, I seek to prove that her work can be read within the sentimental tradition, for it exhibits strong sentimental aesthetics largely overlooked, especially in her account of her religious conversion and her voice. The sentimentalizing of her spiritual journey from "depraved slave" to "redeemed freedwoman" is in direct contrast to the unguarded language she uses when addressing slave whippings. Rather than discreetly veiling the public stripping of black bodies before being whipped, Prince emphasizes nakedness throughout her narrative, revealing bare bodies, and by extension sexual degradation, to her readers from which sentimental discourse worked to protect them. This exposure is because her anxieties primarily lay in her interest in being judged foremost as a Christian. Therefore in her manipulation of sentimentalism to fit her religious agenda, her attention is redirected from hiding the sexual, allowing it to be revealed. I would like to say here that it seems religious fervor and conversion plays the same role as benevolence in sentimental discourse - containment.

Two of the more overlooked issues raised by the narrative I also address in my Prince argument are the ideas of "sisterhood with a difference," reflected by her portrayal of her relationships with her slave mistresses, and the heteroerotic and homoerotic sadistic nature of the whippings she receives at the hands of her owners. Of the former, threaded throughout the narrative is an implied indictment of white women for their

complicity in the exploitation and abuse of the black female slave. Interestingly, the majority of Prince scholarship has not fully explored this aspect of *The History of Mary Prince*, instead focusing somewhat more on her victimization by her white male slavemasters or on discussing the politics of the act of her writing the text itself. While I, too, look at those particular aspects of Prince's text, I believe it is also important to examine how Prince depicts British women becoming as morally degraded by slavery as male slave masters. With an encoded sense of betrayal, she speaks to how even though the differentiating factors of race and class allowed white women a sort of distance in identifying with the black female slave, this detachment did not mean they escaped tainting.

In addition, as earlier noted, I also examine the emphasis Prince places on the nakedness of the slaves, including herself, while being whipped, as anti-sentimental and how her descriptions of her slave owners's behavioral responses implies they were deriving an unnatural pleasure from it. Bordering on the pornographic, the heteroerotic and homoerotic element of the whippings is often glossed over in Prince criticism probably because it unfortunately remains an uncomfortable and largely taboo subject for some scholars to write about. Exploring the sensitive particulars of her text only supplements Prince scholarship by challenging the more conservative readings of it and by doing so, consequently opens up other avenues for dialogue in the current discourse.

In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs, like Prince, manipulates sentimental conventions to articulate her experience. While Prince's sexual abuse is encoded, Jacobs's revelation of the sexual abuse of female slaves by their masters is not, in the sense that her political purpose in writing her narrative is to expose it. In her story, Jacobs relates how she wards off the repeated sexual attentions by her master, engages in a relationship with a white neighbor which produces two children, and hides in the garret of her grandmother's home for seven years until she is finally able to escape North. While my synopsis certainly does not do justice to the narrative's content, one can see

even in the briefest description how much her story resembles the adventures of a heroine in a sentimental novel, while still remaining within the slave narrative tradition. Because the motive of sentimentalism is not only to enable the reader to experience the suffering of the sentimentalized victim, but also through this vicarious suffering to identify with the victim, by positioning herself as a darker version of a sentimental heroine (both darker racially speaking and in tone), Jacobs creates a protagonist with whom middle class white women can identify. But even as she uses the literary conventions of sentimentalism to forge bonds between black and white women, she is acutely aware of the gulf that separates them. Before she embarks on retelling the “perilous passage” in her life, she makes an appeal to those “happy women whose purity has been sheltered from childhood, who have been free to choose the objects of your affection, whose homes are protected by law,” to “not judge the poor desolate slave girl too severely” (54).

Even though throughout the narrative, she purports to reveal the indelicacies of her experience, she does and she does not: she implies what happened without really revealing the sensitive particulars. Using sentimental discourse as a shield, Jacobs shields herself behind the (self-)censorship the sentimental values of her audience demand. By avoiding the specifics, she symbolically attempts to reclaim her virtue even though the experience she is relating taints her. While overall Jacobs has been applauded for her exposure of the sexual subjugation of female slaves and challenging the tenets of true womanhood, the fact that she neglects to reveal any details is often downplayed. For example, in her article, Harryette Mullen locates Jacobs within the oral tradition of the slave narrative, and reads Jacobs’s narrative as an empowering act of verbal self-defense and defiance. Comparing Jacobs’s text to Frederick Douglass’s *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Mullen argues Jacobs gives voice to the female slave often silenced in male slave narratives. However, while she inarguably does engage in an act of literary and feminist significance by articulating the black female slave experience, Jacobs does not shout; instead she whispers. In an argument based on Jacobs’s rejection

of silence, Mullen does not address Jacobs's own guarded silence regarding the details of her sexual experience. And in her reading of Jacobs's narrative, Karen E. Beardslee does not even address the sexual harassment Jacobs suffered nor her sexual transgressions, issues which are central to Jacobs's experience and the narrative.¹⁶ Others, like Karen Sánchez-Eppler, Franny Nudelman, Anne B. Dalton and Bruce Burgett, have explored the silences and verbal contradictions on the sexual issues of the narrative, recognizing them as an overlooked critical area in Jacobs studies. Specifically, Nudelman and Burgett examine the role sentimental rhetoric plays in Jacobs's cloaking.¹⁷

Those who primarily read Jacobs as rejecting, as opposed to revising, sentimentalism and its conventions means ignoring Jacobs's problematic investment in it to articulate her experience. As Franny Nudelman has noted, "The narrative's formal and political import, therefore, can best be comprehended not by overlooking or excusing its conventionality, but by examining the sources and consequences of its conventionalityWhat makes [her] text remarkable is that it combines the conventions of sentimentality with the utterly unconventional use of these structures by a black female narratorEmploying the conventions of abolitionist sentimentality, Jacobs reveals the logic and the limits of that discourse" (942-943). In my analysis, examining her use of sentimentalism, I explore how Jacobs struggled between not wanting to be seen as the slave victim represented in white abolitionist literature, but needing to be seen as a victim to win sympathy to promote a cause which depended on such depictions for political effectiveness. (In the publishing of her story, Jacobs asserted her interest was not in winning sympathy for herself. In her preface, she claims not to "care to excite sympathy for [her] own suffering" but for those "two millions of women at the South, still in bondage.") Her conflict and entrapment are exemplified by the way she manipulates sentimental conventions to reveal/re-veil the more delicate and difficult aspects of her experience. This being said, the intent of my argument is not to negate the power of Jacobs as an author or her text but to view both from a different vantage point. While it

is difficult not to re-tread critical ground already broken by influential Jacob scholars such as Jean Fagan Yellin, Frances Smith Foster and Hazel Carby, I believe my analysis distinguishes itself in its examination of sentimental silences in Harriet Jacobs's text.

In the following chapters, my analysis of all of the authors's works is heavily textual, because I want to establish the validity of my argument in the context in which I am reading them. An advantage of the close textual readings is that they allow me to investigate deeply the way the strategies and techniques of sentimentality at work in their texts. Structurally, while the chapters are meant to be paired as thematic complements of each other, e.g. Edgeworth/Melville and Prince/Jacobs, with each chapter a contained argument within itself, I also envisioned them as breaking down barriers intertextually. For example, Prince's narrative in its depiction of the brutalities of West Indian slavery is as much a comment on the problems of sentimentality in Edgeworth's text as I argue Melville's "Benito Cereno" is. To demonstrate the intertextual relationship between them, in the concluding chapter, I will briefly address the links between and among all four works.

NOTES

¹ Cox, "Sensibility as Argument" in *Sensibility in Transformation: Creative Resistance to Sentiment from the Augustans to the Romantics* ed. Sydney McMillen Conger (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1989) 75. Cox's essay is highly critical of sentimentality, which he condemns for its artificiality. He notes that "in certain texts, it adapts itself so well that one is justified in wondering if there is much to it except an artificial rhetoric -- very little 'heart,' but a great deal of manipulative 'language'" (63). In my own discussion of sentimentality, this issue is raised in my analysis of Melville's "Benito Cereno."

² McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 7.

³ See Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (New York: Methuen, 1986); Kaplan, *Sacred Tears: Sentimentality in Victorian Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987) and Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). See also Jones *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (New York: Routledge, 1993) and Benfield, *The Culture of Sentiment: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992). Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1760-1860* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985); Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1998); Samuels, *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford UP, 1992).

⁴ As I will discuss in chapter one, Maria Edgeworth's "The Grateful Negro" is based on West Indian planter Bryan Edwards's *The History, Civil and Commercial of the British West Indies*, a pro-slavery account written as a travel narrative. With regards to reading Edgeworth's novella as an antislavery text, one can see how her use of Edwards as a source is problematic and complicates her private and public politics towards slavery.

⁵ Although in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* Sedgwick does not analyze the role of race as one of the factors in the emotional and social bonding between men, the definition and formula she puts forth in her argument nevertheless applies to the charged subtext of desire in many representations of the interracial homosocial bonding between a master and slave.

⁶ See Ferguson's brief analysis on "The Grateful Negro" in "Sentiment, Suicide, and Patriotism" *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 231-234. For George E. Boulukos's argument, see Boulukos, "Maria Edgeworth's 'Grateful Negro' and the Sentimental Argument for Slavery." *Eighteenth Century Life*. 23.1 (1999) 12-29.

⁷ While Greenfield solely addresses *Belinda*, she is the only critic, thus far, to analyze the issues of miscegenation, homoeroticism, and gender and sexual politics as they relate to colonialism in Edgeworth fiction that I will be addressing in my reading of “The Grateful Negro.” See Greenfield, “‘Abroad and at Home’: Sexual Ambiguity, Miscegenation, and Colonial Boundaries in Edgeworth’s *Belinda*” in *PMLA* 112:2 (1997) 214-228.

⁸ Obviously, given their critical purposes in the construction of their arguments, it is understandable why these scholars’s assessments of the novella are not lengthy. The overall point remains that there is a lack of extensive critical analyses on the story. Although Mellor’s analysis of Edgeworth’s “The Grateful Negro” is brief, she does address one of the major problems I will be examining in my extended argument. Of the novella, Mellor notes, “Explicit in this story is Edgeworth’s conviction that the enlightened members of the ruling class, whether white slaveowners or, by extension to Ireland, the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, have the right as well as the obligation to control the lower classes” (79). See Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 78-80. In his discussion on representations of the obeah figure, Alan Richardson talks about African cultural and spiritual beliefs and the impact they had on British writing. Richardson addresses the presence of the obeah in Edwards’s *History* (Edgeworth’s primary source) and Edgeworth’s *Belinda* and “The Grateful Negro,” contextualizing them with other British texts. Specifically, in his analysis of “The Grateful Negro,” Richardson examines Edgeworth’s associations between the obeah and black insurgency, noting her “manipulation of the Obeah theme to preach counterrevolution and discredit sudden emancipation themes.” (186). See Richardson, “Romantic Voodoo: Obeah and British Culture, 1797-1807” in *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santería, Obeah, and the Caribbean*. eds. Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gerbert (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997): 171-194. In his reading of Edgeworth’s *Belinda*, Andrew McCann addresses what he sees as the intersection of domesticity, conjugality, and non-identity (Otherness) within a capitalist discourse in the novel. He argues the text is an example of Edgeworth’s “enlightenment idealism” (75), suggesting the author has “abolitionist sympathies” (56). While I do not agree with his assessment of Edgeworth having “abolitionist sympathies,” I do agree with his opinion of the her depiction of the relationship between “The Grateful Negro”’s Caesar and Mr. Edwards, which he compares to a similar relationship in *Belinda*. Emphasizing Caesar’s gratitude and loyalty towards his master, McCann calls Caesar’s feelings “a direct extension of conjugal love” (68). In his argument, McCann also addresses the portrayal of the obeah in the novella. See McCann, “Conjugal Love and the Enlightenment Subject: The Colonial Context of Non-identity in Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda*” in *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* (1996): 57-77. Both Richardson and McCann’s analyses of the novella, though concise, are significant because Edgeworth’s depiction of the obeah is central to understanding the racial and colonial politics at work in “The Grateful Negro.”

⁹ Defining romantic racialism, Frederickson writes, “benevolent reformers tended to see the Negro more as a symbol than as a person, more as a vehicle for romantic social criticism than as a human being with the normal range of virtues and vices. A critical observer might also wonder how deeply and unequivocally white humanitarians really

identified themselves with the stereotype of the submissive black. Meekness might be a virtue, but was it in fact the only virtue or the cardinal one for those who celebrated its presence in the Negro?" (109). Frederickson, "Romantic Racialism in the North" in *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1971) 97-129.

¹⁰ In his reading, Guy Cardwell talks about the color symbolism of white and black in "Benito Cereno," as it relates to Babo and Delano. However, though he recognizes the obvious racial implications of how Melville uses color in the story, Cardwell neglects to make the connection of the symbolism of the color gray as a metaphor for the "race-mixing" between white master and black slave. Even when he explicitly comments on the mixture of black and white creating the color, Cardwell associates gray with the physical appearance of the *San Dominick* and the weather obscuring Delano's first view of the ship. He also glosses over the mulatto figure in the story, Francesco, neglecting to fully address the issue of miscegenation that Melville's portrayal of this character raises. Cardwell, "Melville's Gray Story: Symbols and Meaning in 'Benito Cereno'" in *Modern Critical Views: Herman Melville* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986) 67-76.

¹¹ As the editor, Ferguson recently wrote the introduction for the revised edition of Mary Princes's narrative. Also, in her well known critical study *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834*, Ferguson concludes the last chapter of her study with an analysis of Prince's text. I believe her decision to close her book with Prince speaks volumes of what an important literary figure she is to Ferguson, and should be to other nineteenth century scholars. See both Prince, *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave Related by Herself*, ed. Moira Ferguson (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1997) and Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 281-298.

¹² Plasa and Ring, eds. *The Discourse of Slavery: Aphra Behn to Toni Morrison* (New York: Routledge, 1994). For Woodard's chapter on Mary Prince, see Woodard, "Reading *The History of Mary Prince: The Politics of Race and Gender*" in *African-British Writings in the Eighteenth Century: The Politics of Race and Reason* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994) 133-148.

¹³ Thomas also neglects to include Mary Prince. See Thomas, *Romanticism and Slave Narratives: Transatlantic Testimonies* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000)

¹⁴ One interesting article that links Harriet Jacobs to the British Romantic literary tradition is written by Andrea O'Reilly Herrera. Connecting Jacobs to a Charlotte Brontë novel by playing on the novelistic tendencies of Jacobs's text, Herrera identifies them as important works illustrating the quest for female identity and agency amid the dominant ideologies of domesticity and womanhood in the nineteenth century. See Herrera, "'Herself Beheld': Marriage, Motherhood, and Oppression in Brontë's *Villette* and

Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*" in *Family Matters in the British and American Novel* eds. Andrea O'Reilly Herrera, Elizabeth Mahn Nolten, Sheila Reitzel Foor (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State Univ. Popular Press, 1997) 55-77.

¹⁵ Another major work written by a woman of color during this period was written by Mary Seacole, a free-born Jamaican who published *The Wonderful Adventures of Mary Seacole* in London in 1857.

¹⁶ Mullen, "Runaway Tongue: Resistant Orality in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Our Nig*, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, and *Beloved*" in *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth Century America* ed. Shirley Samuels (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992) 244-264. In her article, Beardslee talks about Jacobs's experience as it relates to slave culture i.e. domestic/familial bonds, spiritual songs, trickster figures, Christianity. While her reading offers a different way of seeing Jacobs, it could be detrimental to those unfamiliar with Jacobs's story. Rather than "erasing" the sexual psychological trauma Jacobs endured, Beardslee might have addressed how those perilous events affected Jacobs's role in the slave culture. See Beardslee, "Through Slave Culture's Lens Comes the Abundant Source: Harriet A. Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*" in *MELUS* 24.1 (1999) 37-58.

¹⁷ See Sánchez-Eppler, "Righting Slavery and Writing Sex: The Erotics of Narration in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents*" in *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1993) 83-104. Also see Dalton, "The Devil and the Virginia: Writing Sexual Abuse in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*" in *Violence, Silence, and Anger: Women's Writing as Transgression* ed. Deirdre Lashgari (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1995) 38-61. I call attention to Franny Nudelman and Bruce Burgett because both critics in their respective arguments emphasize Jacobs's calculated strategical rhetorical use of sentimental discourse. I find Burgett's reading of Jacobs particularly intriguing because he contextualizes his analysis of her narrative with an 1815 pornography case (*Commonwealth v. Jesse Sharpless*) tried in Pennsylvania. Tying together issues of obscenity, pornography, and censorship, Burgett uses the Sharpless case as a backdrop for discussing Jacobs's use of the conventions of sentimentalism related to her making her private sexual trauma public. For Franny Nudelman's discussion on Jacobs, see Nudelman, "Harriet Jacobs and the Sentimental Politics of Female Suffering" in *ELH* 59.4 (1992) 939-964. For Burgett's article, see Burgett, "Obscene Publics: Jesse Sharpless and Harriet Jacobs" in *Genders* 27 (1998).

CHAPTER 1

THE SENTIMENTAL MASK OF ANTISLAVERY

IN MARIA EDGEWORTH'S "THE GRATEFUL NEGRO"

Have you seen any of the things that have been lately published about the negroes? We have just read a very small pamphlet of about ten pages, merely an account of the facts stated to the House of Commons. Twenty-five thousand people in England have absolutely left off eating West India sugar, from the hope that when there is no longer any demand for sugar the slaves will not be so cruelly treated. Children in several schools have given up sweet things, which is surely very benevolent; though whether it will at all conduce to the end proposed is perhaps wholly uncertain, and in the mean time we go on eating apple pies sweetened with sugar instead of honey. At Mr. Keier's, however, my father avers that he ate excellent custards sweetened with honey. Will it not be rather hard upon the poor bees in the end?

Maria Edgeworth in a letter to her cousin Sophy Ruxton'
March 9, 1792

My selection of this particular Maria Edgeworth quotation to serve as an epigraph to this chapter exemplifies the two crucial points in my argument as to why Edgeworth's "The Grateful Negro" (1804) is a problematic text, the author's ambivalence towards abolition and slavery and her complicity with the plantocracy. Often read as an antislavery text, the tale is not as strongly politically against slavery as Edgeworth scholars have previously thought. In large part, this is because the aspects of the text that challenge reading it as antislavery are masked by Edgeworth's conventional use of sentimentalism to address slavery. Few scholars have gone behind the sentimental techniques she employs, and the consequence is that they either gloss over or completely

ignore troubling aspects of her novella in order to fit the work within a category in which it does not comfortably belong. Oftentimes, what seems is not what is. Even though “The Grateful Negro” exhibits the same problems often found in sentimental abolitionist literature by white writers, such as the privileging of whiteness, racially stereotyped characters, and the moral and religious superiority of the author, in Edgeworth’s tale, they take on different overtones. They reveal an author who is conflicted, writing from a position of racial and colonial anxiety that formulates the apologist subtext of her novella. Toni Morrison’s comment on the affects of blackness on the writer’s imagination is applicable to Edgeworth here: “A writer’s response to American Africanism [and Africanism] often provides a subtext that either sabotages the surface text’s expressed intentions or escapes them through a language that mystifies what it cannot bring itself to articulate but still attempts to register.”²² The “slavery as a necessary evil” reformist theme in Edgeworth’s story does not advance the politics of British abolitionism, but instead an ambiguous agenda.

In the letter to her cousin Sophy Ruxton, Edgeworth’s question of whether abolitionist tactics to boycott sugar “will at all conduce to the end proposed” not only reflects her slight apprehension about abolitionism, but also serves as a thinly veiled critique of abolitionist methods, a critique made somewhat more explicit by Edgeworth’s concluding comment on the subject. Referring to the British abolitionists urging the country to substitute honey for sugar as a sweetening agent, she wryly asks, “Will it not be rather hard upon the poor bees in the end?” This rhetorical question displacing the suffering of the African slaves onto the “poor bees” suggests Edgeworth viewed the boycotting of sugar as an unrealistic, ineffective political tactic. Besides expressing her skepticism of the sugar boycott, her comment also addresses the nature of colonial consumption. The “poor bees” will become the next suffering victims exploited and subjugated to meet economic demands. Although Edgeworth apparently was trying to make an ironic point, her parallelism of the plight of slaves on West Indian sugar

plantations to that of bees and the production of honey is highly problematic, for it trivializes the suffering of the African slaves. Considering the nature of the subject she is addressing, her tongue-in-cheek analogy seems somewhat inappropriate and insensitive. It is natural for bees to make honey, but it is unnatural for black men and women to work as an enslaved labor force on sugar plantations, which is the central issue in the abolitionist argument against the trade of sugar and West Indian slavery.

As one of the few scholars who have examined how sentimental discourse masks a colonialist agenda in “The Grateful Negro,” George E. Boulukos addresses this problem of Edgeworth’s parallelism of the African slaves with bees. He observes, “Her satirical image of the ‘poor bees’ absorbing the brunt of the boycott suggests her reluctance to equate purchasing slave-made products with responsibility for distant conditions of production. Furthermore, in the image of the bees, she ironically suggests a question: if we start worrying about slave production, where will it end? In making this satirical move, she suggests an equivalence between enslaved African laborers and mere insects; after all, she implies, that if one worries too much about slaves, one might well end up worrying about cruelty to bugs.”³ Interestingly, while Boulukos notes the problem in Edgeworth’s symbolic equation of bees to slaves, he does not widen his critical focus to see how Edgeworth’s colonial complicity is revealed in this same passage from her letter. If he had done so, the reason behind the reluctance Boulukos argues Edgeworth may have felt towards associating buying slave-made products to the conditions that produced them becomes clear.

If Edgeworth’s questioning of the sugar boycott is anti-abolitionist in her “poor bees” critique of their techniques, then the fact the Edgeworth family “in the meantime go[es] on eating apple pies sweetened with sugar” is yet another subversive act undermining the antislavery cause. Despite being aware of the political implications of their sugar usage, the Edgeworths, in continuing to sweeten their apple pies with sugar, become participants in the exploitation of slaves on West Indian sugar plantations. Maria

Edgeworth's reluctance to make the connection between the abuse of slaves and sugar was because it would mean confronting her own (and her family's) complicity. During the sugar boycott at the height of British abolitionism, abolitionist rhetoric and literature used sugar as a metaphorical trope in which sugar was linked to the blood of African slaves; the literal ingestion of sugar was the symbolic ingestion of their blood and bodies. In her article "Women and the Politics of Sugar, 1792," Charlotte Sussman notes, "By rejecting contaminated sugar, then, consumers are not only rejecting slavery, but also separating themselves from the foreign environment in which slave labor occurs. In this literalization of the widespread metaphor, sugar is the medium by which the body of the African slave penetrates the English domestic space through the mouths of unsuspecting consumers. To isolate themselves from the perforated body of the slave. . . British consumers [were] asked to refuse to swallow unknown substances."⁴ Consequently, by her consumption of sugar, Edgeworth becomes tainted, or what in the same argument Sussman terms as "colonially contaminated."⁵ Strengthening this idea of Edgeworth's colonial contamination and complicity is the lack of an excuse for the family's use of sugar, ironically evidenced by her own admission that her father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, "averts that he ate *excellent* custards sweetened with honey" (emphasis added). If the "excellent custards sweetened with honey" is read against the family eating "apple pies sweetened with sugar," then how could the family really justify their use of sugar during the call for its boycott? The substitution of honey as a sufficient sweetener is not disproved but validated by her father's estimation of the custards as "excellent."⁶ Would not, then, their apple pies be just as sweet with the substitution of honey?

While her "poor bees" analogy and her refusal to boycott sugar give an indication of the trouble with Edgeworth's politics, her visit to a slave ship seven months later after the comments she made to her cousin reveals yet another problem in the author's relation to slavery. To the same cousin, in a letter dated October 17, 1792, Edgeworth writes, "We went on board a slave-ship with my brother, and saw the dreadfully small hole in

which the poor slaves are stowed together, so that they cannot stir. But you probably know all of this.”⁷ Although her account of the visit reflects sympathy for the plight of the “poor slaves,” Edgeworth’s dismissive concluding comment of her visit, “But you probably know all of this,” is a bit disconcerting because it signals what she does not say. Edgeworth does not relate any emotional response to what she has seen and seems to be largely unaffected by the experience. There are no sentimental tears expressing how moved she was, nothing to register moral outrage or being upset by the sight. The fact that she chooses not to give any substantive descriptive details, or to elaborate further on her slave ship visit, is what makes it seem as if the event had little impact on her, especially since in the same letter Edgeworth goes into considerably more detail about an earthquake account, a glasshouse visit, and her meeting with the Hoare family (Edgeworth family friends) in London. In some ways, then, the way she relates this visit to the slave ship is similar to her parallelism of the slaves and the bees in the earlier letter to her cousin. Because of the lack of importance she affords the slave ship visit in comparison to the other events of her trip, the suffering and the plight of slaves is negated. It is as if the horrors of the Middle Passage that the ship evokes, and the overall traumatic conditions of the lives of slaves, are relegated to being just another casual sightseeing stop. Given the social commentary one would expect in an account of a slave ship, it is difficult not to view Edgeworth and her relationship to slavery and abolition without some trepidation.

Edgeworth’s attitudes towards slavery and abolition in her private correspondence inform an analysis of “The Grateful Negro” because they reflect problematic issues in the text. This sentimental story of a slave morally caught between his master and his fellow slaves demonstrates the same complicity and ambivalence towards slavery and abolition as her letters reveal. Though it can be argued that it is a bit dangerous to place so much weight on only two comments in her letters as background evidence for a critical argument, they are a starting point of understanding why “The Grateful Negro” is such a

complicated statement on race, slavery, and abolition. The sugar boycott-“poor bees” letter and Edgeworth’s slave ship excursion lay the foundation for presenting the case of “The Grateful Negro” as a suspect text written by an author with a questionable agenda. Why would an author who refused to abstain from sugar during the height of the boycott, and who was skeptical and critical of abolitionist politics, a little more than a decade later publish an antislavery tale ironically set on a West Indian sugar plantation? Popular for her children’s literature, sentimental women’s and Irish regional novels, what motivated Edgeworth to address a subject outside of her traditional ones? What was it about the “poor slaves” that captured her imagination years later that did not inspire her when she visited the slave ship?

Based on West Indian planter Bryan Edwards’s account of a slave revolt in his widely read proslavery narrative *The History, Civil, and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (1794), “The Grateful Negro” was published in a collection of Edgeworth’s children’s stories entitled *Popular Tales* (1804).⁸ In the novella, Edgeworth portrays the tale of an African slave named Caesar who must make a moral decision between betraying his kinsmen, the Koromantyns, who have been enslaved on the island of Jamaica and are conspiring to rebel against the whites, or betraying his master, a benevolent West Indian planter Mr. Edwards (modeled on his namesake Bryan Edwards), whose sympathy saves Caesar from the slave auction block and prevents Caesar’s separation from his beloved fiancée Clara. Compounding Caesar’s dilemma is his close relationship with Hector, his friend and Koromantyn countryman, who is the leader of the slave rebellion, and a Koromantyn obeah woman named Esther, who is the mastermind behind the insurrection. Following the tradition of sentimental antislavery fiction, in her depiction of Caesar, Edgeworth uses him as a sentimental emblem of the African slave’s capacity for gratefulness or “goodness.” Caesar’s relationships with Mr. Edwards, Clara, Hector, and Esther become the moral gauges, or benchmarks, against which his gratefulness is measured. It is Edgeworth’s portrayal of these relationships that reveal the

subtext of proslavery complicity and racial and gender politics threaded throughout the novella.

Edgeworth's stereotyped depictions of the African characters in "The Grateful Negro" are, unsurprisingly, where these problems are most evidenced. Addressing this issue as it specifically relates to white British women writing abolition, Moira Ferguson observes in *Subject to Others*, "Women mediated their own needs and desires, their own unconscious sense of social invalidation through representations of the colonial other, who in the process become more severely objectified and marginalized - a silent or silenced individual in need of protection and pity who must always remain 'under control.'" I would add to Ferguson's observation that these representations of the other seem to be even more compromised by those women writers who strongly identified with patriarchal authority. Rather than functioning as an avenue through which oppressed female writers gained authority and agency in the appropriation of the voice and body of the slave, instead, for patriarchally influenced women writers writing abolition, the other becomes a symbol of their allegiance to rule of the fathers. Female empowerment is subverted by this complicity. In Maria Edgeworth's case, her deep investment in the patriarchy is reflected by the gender politics at work in her portrayal of the sentimentalized relationships between the master and his male slave and the male slave and his female companion. As she sentimentalizes blackness and slavery in her novella, the domestic realm yields to the masculine domain of the plantocracy. Patriarchally compromised, the gender politics informing the characterization of Edgeworth's black male and female characters and their relationship to the white characters become a way to keep the slaves enslaved.

One aspect of these gender politics is the feminization of the black male slave. While several scholars have observed the protagonist Caesar's feminization in "The Grateful Negro," they fail to elaborate on *how* he is feminized or to conjecture what his feminization means as it relates to Edgeworth's depiction of the sentimental bonding

between him and his master Mr. Edwards. It is particularly the latter issue that is most intriguing, for although it is suggestively there, few scholars have recognized how their seemingly platonic master-slave relationship takes on romantic overtones. For example, Andrew McCann comes close to recognizing the homoerotic potential of the relationship between Caesar and Mr. Edwards, calling their relationship “a direct extension of conjugal love,” but he does not expand on this idea or explain what made him make this association.¹⁰ Only Moira Ferguson has come close to identifying the homoerotic element in the story. Still, even she neglects to make the connection by not taking her analysis a step further and naming it. Referring to Caesar’s refusal to participate in the slave revolt, Ferguson queries whether Edgeworth may be mocking Caesar’s “non-collaborative leadership by naming him after an assassinated Roman emperor disappointed in love.”¹¹ The fact that Caesar shares a name with an emperor embroiled in a tragic love affair is more telling with respect to his relationship with his master Mr. Edwards than with respect to his rejection of his kinsman Hector, which is the context in which Ferguson discusses it. Ferguson’s own description of the emperor as being “disappointed in love” suggests there is more to the connection between Edgeworth’s Caesar the tragic African slave and Caesar the Roman tragic lover than meets the critical eye. In my own analysis of the relationship between Caesar and Mr. Edwards, I will address the hint of a homoerotic charge in their sentimental bonding. This homoerotic tension in the bonding between master and slave plays a significant role in illuminating the proslavery subtext of the novella. Caesar’s feminization and the homoeroticism in the novella solidify the symbolic marriage between Caesar and Mr. Edwards that serves to sustain the plantocratic order.

In her patriarchal privileging of the relationships between men, Edgeworth compromises the female slave characters, Clara and Esther. As Caesar’s fiancée, Clara is symbolically rejected in Caesar’s wedding to his master. He risks her love for the love and gratitude he has for Mr. Edwards. Clara, Caesar, and Mr. Edwards become linked

together by this interrelated involvement of their lives. Because of the way Edgeworth intertwines the characters, my argument is that the three form a romantic triangle, an angle that has yet to be explored. But it is not a female character, Clara, who is the romantic object (prize) at the focal point of this triangle; but rather, it is the feminized Caesar.¹² Because she is displaced by her master, Clara's womanhood is devalued and disempowered, and she is put in a position where her love for Caesar is in conflict with his love for his master. Both Clara and Mr. Edwards need Caesar's devotion. Through Clara's devaluation as Caesar's romantic companion, Edgeworth undermines her own argument against slavery by jeopardizing Clara as Caesar's domestic partner. Like many female writers, in presenting a sentimental argument against slavery, in the novella, Edgeworth cites the fragmentation of the slave family as one of crueller aspects of the institution. However, even though she argues for the preservation of domestic bonds, in privileging the union of Caesar to his master, Edgeworth sanctions the severing of domestic bonds in order to sustain colonial authority and plantocratic order. With Clara identified as Caesar's fiancée, Edgeworth's jeopardizing of their intended marriage weakens the domestic power of her argument. It is clear that Edgeworth sees the willingness and ability of a slave to risk familial bonds as the ultimate sentimental sacrifice; for her, this willingness is what, in turn, makes a slave heroic and "good."

While the slave's sentimental sacrifice of domestic bonds for colonial good is implied by how gender functions in the novella, it becomes explicitly realized when examined within a cultural context. Edgeworth's portrayal of Caesar's relationship to his kinsman Hector, who can be read as a cultural character representing Africa and the African, demonstrates the colonialist impulse in the work. If Clara is replaced by Hector in the formulaic structure of the homosocial triangle, the significance of Caesar's bonding with his master then exposes yet another way Edgeworth colonizes blackness within her text. Just as Caesar rejects and betrays Clara, his romantic tie, he must reject and betray Hector, his cultural tie in order to cement the bond between him and Mr. Edwards.

Caesar must sacrifice his Koromantyn identity. Edgeworth's breaking of the familial bond or kinship between Caesar and Hector is signified by the change in Caesar's character. Having experienced a sentimental conversion induced by his master's benevolence, throughout the story Caesar shifts from being culturally identified as an African to being identified as a "grateful Negro." This shifting of Caesar's identity reflects how Edgeworth socially perceives blackness, with "African" signifying savage, uncontrolled cultural other as volatile outsider, and "Negro" signifying civilized, contained cultural other as integrated insider. As "good Negro," Caesar embraces his enslavement and betrays the confidences of his people, the Koromantyns, by warning Mr. Edwards of the impending revolt. Although Caesar's betrayal of his kinsmen is troubling for obvious reasons, the consequence of his betrayal is even more so. By betraying his people, Caesar saves the Edwards sugar plantation and his master, whose wealth comes from the exploitation of slaves, from economic destruction. At the novella's conclusion, Edgeworth emphasizes this preservation of the plantation, not the sentiment that slaves should be freed, as her moral lesson for slaveowners. Reflecting this, Caesar is not rewarded his freedom by his master, but is merely reunited with Clara, a union that will ensure the production of more economic property, in the form of their children, for their master. In "The Grateful Negro," Maria Edgeworth assumes a proslavery reformist position that can not be exactly read as decidedly against slavery.

Earlier I posed questions as to what may have motivated Edgeworth to write a sentimental tale about slavery. Whereas the characters Caesar, Clara, and Hector can be read as symptomatic of Edgeworth's complicity and anxiety about blackness, it is the obeah character Esther who represents the cause. Esther epitomizes Edgeworth's feelings of uneasiness towards black cultural and political power, which are tied to her fear of slave rebellions. The obeah, whose fictionalization is prevalent in British literature, fulfilled the role of priest or priestess in the practice of a pagan religion among slaves. A powerful figure in the slave community, for the British, the obeah evoked an unsettling

fear of the unknown. Addressing the influence of the obeah on the literary imagination of British Romantic authors, Alan Richardson observes that “for the British mind during the Romantic period, Obeah held much the same connotations as Voodoo inspires (at least popularly) now: a mysterious cult of obscure African provenance, associated with fetishes, witchcraft, and poison, with secrecy and midnight ritual, with magic potions, eroticism, and revenge.”¹³ Andrew McCann has observed that “Obeah signifies a legitimation crisis for colonial society. It raises the issues of effective management and counterinsurgency as inseparable, and demands not so much the modernization of the slaves, as the modernization of the relations of production in which they exist.”¹⁴ In her depiction of the Koromantyn obeah Esther, one can see how Edgeworth’s gender and colonialist politics converge in one monstrous character. Unlike Clara, as a female character, Esther is not disempowered, but exercises female power with such aggression that she is masculinized and Amazonian. In her ability to (mis)rule the Koromantyns, Esther becomes an emblem of black militancy that needs to be contained within the text and outside of it. In his brief analysis of “The Grateful Negro,” Richardson connects Edgeworth’s novella specifically to the San Domingo (Haiti) revolt in 1791. Although he only addresses the revolt in a historical context simply as a backdrop to her text, the San Domingo events inform the text much more. Indeed, as I will argue, Edgeworth may well have written her novella as an alarmed response to Toussaint L’Ouverture’s San Domingo rebellion and to his subsequent declaration of himself as the country’s leader in 1802. Edgeworth composed her sentimental antislavery tale the same year L’Ouverture’s ascended to power, which I believe is not coincidental but telling.

At the opening of “The Grateful Negro,” Edgeworth depicts a sentimental scene displaying one of the central forces of sentimentality -- the power of benevolence. When the benevolent planter Mr. Edwards first meets Caesar, a slave on a neighboring plantation, the reader is presented with a literary representation of one of the more familiar sketches portraying the suffering of slaves in antislavery writing, which is that of

the tragic slave figure being sold away and distraught family members grieving at the unfortunate slave's feet. In order to pay off his master Mr. Jeffries's debts, Caesar is headed for the slave auction block and being sold away from his weeping fiancée Clara. Through the voice of the narrator, Edgeworth regards this tableau as emblematic of the most cruel and offensive aspect of slavery. The narrator observes:

It is common in Jamaica for the slaves to have provision-grounds, which they cultivate for their own advantage, but it too often happens that, when a good negro has successfully improved his little spot of land, when he has built himself a house, and begins to enjoy the fruits of his industry, his acquired property is seized upon by the sheriff's officer for the payment of his master's debts, he is forcibly separated from his wife and children, dragged to public auction, purchased by a stranger, and perhaps sent to terminate his miserable existence in the mines of Mexico, excluded forever from the light of heaven! And all this without any crime or imprudence on his part, real or pretended. He is punished because his master is unfortunate! (547)

The disruption of the slave's building of a domestic center provides emotional motivation to act politically. Learning Caesar is to be separated from his fiancée, Mr. Edwards is moved by Caesar's plight, and in an act of benevolence, he decides to purchase both Caesar and Clara in order to keep their union intact. Mr. Edwards, who embodies the sentimental stereotype of a good master, functions throughout the story as a symbol of white moral authority. He is described as a "gentleman [who] treated his slaves with all possible humanity and kindness. He wished there was no such thing as slavery in the world; but he was convinced, by the arguments of those who have the best means of obtaining information, that the sudden emancipation of the negroes would rather increase than diminish their miseries" (547). From this description, it is not difficult to ascertain that Mr. Edwards also functions as a thinly veiled reflection of Edgeworth's own political beliefs and illustrates the influence of the real Bryan Edwards on Edgeworth's position.

When the threesome arrives at Edwards's plantation, the first deed Mr. Edwards does is to reestablish Caesar and Clara's previous domestic situation. Mr. Edwards gives

Caesar a provision-ground, a cottage, promises never to sell him away and informs him that all his earnings belong to him (Caesar). Caesar responds to his new master's kindness by having an emotional reaction: "his feelings were at this instant so strong that he could not find expression for his gratitude: he stood like one stupefied! Kindness was new to him; it overpowered his manly heart; and, at hearing the words 'my good friend,' the tears gushed from his eyes. Tears which no torture could have extorted! Gratitude swelled in his bosom; and he longed to be alone, that he might freely yield to his emotions" (549). Mr. Edwards's gesture causes Caesar to experience a sentimental conversion. (It is not until shortly after his conversion the reader learns that Caesar is an informed conspirator in the slave rebellion among Jeffries's slaves, in which the plan was to massacre all of the whites on the island.) While this scene illustrates the effective power of benevolence, it also demonstrates Caesar's feminization. Even though Edgeworth genders Caesar's heart as "manly," the "tears gush[ing] from his eyes," as a display of his emotionalism, feminize him. The tears of Caesar's "feminine" display of emotionalism are the only overt example in the story of how he is feminized, which explains why his feminization has often been alluded to in criticism but has never fully been explained. The more substantive evidence of his feminization, though, is not in Caesar's tears but is suggested by the role he assumes in his relationship with Mr. Edwards. As an emotional being, Caesar is very much the feminine counterpart to his master's masculine reason, which further symbolizes their marriagelike partnership. Because Caesar's feminization and the slight charge of homoeroticism in his relationship with Mr. Edwards is through subtextual implication, one has to look beneath Edgeworth's sentimentalizing of the master-slave bond to discover the something deeper that lies there, which as earlier noted, some scholars neglect to do. The feminizing in the sentimental scene marking the moment of Caesar's transformation is highly significant, then, for it also indicates how outside of their homosocial bond, Caesar and Mr. Edwards

become homoerotically bonded. The overwhelming feelings he has for Mr. Edwards will ultimately threaten Caesar's heterosexual attachment to Clara.

Having now experienced gratitude, Caesar feels he must intervene and stop the rebellion planned among the slaves on the Jeffries plantation. (The narrator informs us that Mr. Edwards's slaves have no knowledge of the rebellion. Because he treats them with such kindness, they would never think to rebel against such a master.) Mr. Jeffries serves as Mr. Edwards's opposing counterpart; his poor behavior as a master is why his slaves are planning to revolt. Edgeworth's description of Mr. Jeffries's beliefs echoes the racism often found in proslavery arguments to justify the institution of slavery. The narrator notes, "Mr. Jeffries considered the negroes as an inferior species, incapable of gratitude, disposed to treachery, and to be roused from their natural indolence only by force: he treated his slaves, or rather suffered his overseer to treat them, with the greatest severity" (546). The weight of Edgeworth's indictment of Mr. Jeffries rests on his inaction, his indifference to the cruelty of his overseer Durant, who "did not scruple to use the most cruel and barbarous methods of forcing the slaves to exertions beyond their strength" (547). Unlike the benevolent Mr. Edwards, despite feeling sympathy for his abused slaves, Jeffries "shut his heart against such conviction" because he "required, as he said, from his overseer, produce and not excuses" (547). In the privileging of economic interests over benevolent interests, the consequence of Jeffries's indifference is insurrection, and his racism only ensures his blindness to the transformative powers of benevolence. By believing slaves to be inferior and incapable of gratitude, he cannot see Caesar as the potential "good Negro" among the conspirators. In contrast, as Jeffries's moral opposite, Mr. Edwards is rewarded for his benevolence. His slaves are not mutinous but happily content in their condition, which Edgeworth illustrates in a brief festival scene where Mr. Edwards's slaves dance and eat to their master's and his family's delight. Casting benevolence as insurance, a preventative measure of social agency, Edgeworth therefore emphasizes it as essential to shift the African slave from

colonial threat to accomplice, as illustrated by her depiction of Caesar's literal change of heart. Transformed, Caesar "now considered a white man his friend" and "would devote himself for the defence of a friend" (550). One of the weaknesses in Edgeworth's text is this immediate transformation of Caesar. As a result, despite Edgeworth's attempts, there is no suspense in the story. Thematically, Caesar so quickly embodies the sentimental stereotype of a good Negro that the reader never really questions whether he will make the appropriate decision as Edgeworth sees it and betray his countrymen.

Now that he considers his master his friend, Caesar pleads for his kinsman Hector to show mercy and to abandon the planned insurrection. Hector rebukes Caesar as a traitor and declares him a coward for pleading to save the lives of the people who have enslaved them. Concerned that Caesar may become an obstacle in his plans, Hector enlists the aid of the obeah Esther, the instigator of the revolt. Presuming Caesar's weakness is his lover Clara, through her, Esther issues a warning. Clara tells Caesar if he does not follow Esther's orders and abandon his intentions to stop the slave rebellion, Esther has threatened him with death. Clara begs Caesar to abandon his plan to thwart the slave rebellion, pleading, "I ask you to save your life! I ask you, for my sake, to save your life, while yet it is in your power!" (552). In this scene, Edgeworth establishes the opposition between Clara and Mr. Edwards. Caesar must choose between his master's life and his fiancée's wishes. The fact that the situation is in Caesar's power is meaningful, because possession of power, in a variety of forms (racial, female, colonial, sentimental), plays an integral role in understanding Edgeworth's complex agenda in "The Grateful Negro." As the issue of power relates to Caesar, on one hand, Edgeworth seems to want her readers to see Caesar as powerless, in the sense that as a slave, he is a tragic victim of circumstances. This powerlessness is illustrated early in the story when he is to be separated from Clara in order to be auctioned off to pay for Mr. Jeffries's debts. On the other hand, Edgeworth emphasizes the fact that Caesar possesses the power of moral choice, one of several didactic lessons threaded throughout the story. The

conflict between his power and powerlessness occurs in the scene in the novella in which he rejects and betrays Clara, because whatever power Caesar does exercise in his status as slave, he never uses it to the ends for Clara's sake or the Koromantyns, but solely for his master's.

Determined in his resolve not to betray his master, Caesar tells Clara, "I should be unworthy of your love if I were capable of treachery and ingratitude" (552). The irony in this statement is Caesar *is* capable of treachery, because he rejects Clara and betrays Hector. The hypocritical nature of the character Caesar is a result of Edgeworth's privileging of the plantocracy's needs over domestic and cultural bonds. Esther eventually entraps Caesar by commanding Clara to request a clandestine meeting in the woods with her. Thinking he is going to a romantic rendezvous, when Caesar arrives, he finds his "beloved Clara" lying still on the ground in the midst of a thicket (554). Enraged by the sight of Clara in a deadly trance, Caesar attacks Esther and grabs her by the throat. In this particular episode of sentimental drama, it is worth noting that the only instance of Caesar exhibiting the violent traits that Edgeworth suggests lie dormant in enslaved Africans is enacted against a female character of color. Perhaps this violence towards a woman may have been seen as acceptable to Edgeworth because of the way she genders Esther as masculine. Unshaken, Esther warns him, "Destroy me and you destroy your Clara. *She is not dead; but she lies in the sleep of death*, into which no power, but mine can restore her to the light of life. Yes! look at her pale and motionless! Never will she rise from the earth, unless, within one hour you obey my commands's" (emphasis added) (554). Caesar rebukes Esther, lamenting, "I wish for death. *Clara is dead!*" (emphasis added) (554). This pivotal scene involving Caesar and Esther in a battle between male will power and female supernatural power, with Clara as the passive object-victim at its center, exemplifies how Caesar chooses his bond to his master over the one to his beloved fiancée. Rather than cede, his response to Esther's ultimatum reveals his willingness to forfeit Clara's life for that of his master's.

Caesar's actions are unsurprising because of the imbalance in how Edgeworth characterizes Caesar and Clara's romantic attachment to each other early in the story. At the beginning of the novella when Caesar is about to be sold, it is Clara who is weeping and pleading for Durant to spare Caesar from sale. Caesar does not speak in his own defense and stands unmoved. The first words he speaks, in both the scene and novella, are directed towards Mr. Edwards when he asks, "'Will you be my master? Will you be her master?'" (548). Throughout the story, the strong emotional attachment Clara displays for Caesar, Caesar does not display for Clara, but instead for Mr. Edwards. The tears Clara weeps for Caesar when she fears he is to be sold away are in contrast to the sentimental tears Caesar sheds when he feels gratitude for his master. Even when she "dies," Caesar never sheds tears for Clara. So, though Edgeworth attempts to position Clara as his romantic partner and crucial to Caesar's decision, she undermines this attempt, for both Clara and their domestic union are devalued. When Esther places Clara in a deathlike state, Caesar has the opportunity to save Clara's life but does not. His declaration "Clara is dead!" signifies his choice not to. When Esther reminds him, "But you can restore her at a single word," Caesar momentarily hesitates. His hesitation may be meant to reflect the internal conflict and the difficulty of the decision he is being asked to make but it remains nonetheless complicated. Although he pretends to submit and to participate in the rebellion in order to trick Esther, his submission does not dismiss the fact that while he is conflicted, Clara, as his future wife, plays a secondary role in his affections to that of Mr. Edwards. Before Caesar decides to feign his acquiescence, "The conflict in his mind was violent; but his sense of gratitude and duty [read: to Mr. Edwards] could not be shaken by hope, fear, or ambition: nor could it be vanquished by love [read: for Clara]" (554). Reflecting the problematic use of his power and Edgeworth's privileging of the master-slave bond over the domestic one between slaves, the intent behind Caesar's submission is not to save Clara, but to find a way in which to save his master first. Her "death" frees him of his bond to her.

The wedding of Caesar's life and fate to Mr. Edwards intensifies the homoerotic tension in the relationship. Pretending he must retrieve his knife from his cottage, Caesar hastens away from Esther to warn his master of the revolt: "Caesar ran with the utmost speed along a by-path out of the wood, met none of the rebels, reached his master's house, scaled the wall of the bed-chamber, got in at the window, and wakened him, exclaiming, 'Arm! Arm yourself, my dear master! Arm all your slaves! They will fight for you, and die for you; as I will be the first'" (555). What is most intriguing about this scene is Caesar's act of entering the bed-chamber, the most private room of his master, an act which becomes highly symbolic because it suggests intimacy. If this intimacy is read in context of the cloaked homoerotic element of their relationship, then Caesar's entrance through the window becomes a symbolic act of penetration, reflecting the consummation of their homoerotic bond. Arguably, with respect to Caesar's feminization, this particular scene in which Caesar climbs a wall and enters his master's bed-chamber can be read as his assuming the masculine role of protector/hero (and penetrator) in his relationship to Mr. Edwards. Still, Caesar's appropriation of the more masculine role in this scene is momentary. Having successfully alerted his master and securing a promise Hector will be pardoned, Caesar leads Mr. Edwards and his party to Esther's hut where the conspirators have gathered. To force their surrender, one of Mr. Edwards's party sets Esther's hut aflame, and the Koromantyns rush out and attack. In the ensuing chaos, Caesar calls out to Hector to stop, but, frenzied by the battle, Hector stabs Caesar: "[t]he faithful servant staggered back a few paces: his master caught him in his arms. 'I die content,' said he. 'Bury me with Clara.' He swooned from the loss of blood, as they were carrying him home; but, when his wound was examined, it was not found to be mortal" (555). When he falls back into his master's arms (a symbolic embrace?) and makes his final pronouncement, it is almost reminiscent of a dying scene where a sentimental heroine bids her lover a final, tragic farewell. Caesar's statement that he "die[s] content" refers to the fact he has fulfilled his duty and saved Mr. Edwards's life, only then does he

think about Clara. Caesar's request to "bury [him] with Clara," no matter how it is read, as a last dying wish, sounds like an afterthought. Even at his "death," his concern for her is secondary, echoing the previous scene in the thicket when Clara's life is in jeopardy, and he chooses to save his master first. And more importantly Edgeworth herself, as narrator and author, in quickly tying up the loose ends of the novella, illustrates the lack of Clara's importance as Caesar's companion and as a female character. After Caesar learns Clara is alive, Edgeworth abruptly concludes the romance for the reader noting, "Caesar's joy! - We must leave that to the imagination" (555).¹⁵ Significantly, Edgeworth does not allow Clara and Caesar to have a concluding embrace to represent their romantic reunion and the preservation of their domestic bond. This seems unusual, given how Edgeworth exploits the sentimental drama of their near separation and Clara's sleep of death to touch her reader. The only union sealed by an embrace, symbolic as it is, is the one between Caesar and Mr. Edwards.

Whereas Caesar's sentimental sacrificial rejection of Clara and his bonding with his master demonstrate Edgeworth's gender politics, her characterization of Caesar's kinsman Hector reveals how the reformist subtext in the novella is influenced by Edgeworth's anxieties about blackness. Caesar's allegiance to his master and the acceptance of his enslaved status symbolizes blackness integrated and contained, or in other words, made "safe," which is reflected by his title as a "grateful Negro." His "gratefulness" is meant to civilize (and humanize) him in a way Hector, who represents cultural identity and anti-colonial dissidence, can never be because of his connection to Africa. In her characterization of Caesar and Hector as paradoxically opposites and doubles, one can see a distinction Edgeworth makes in how she perceives blackness socially. In her text, Negro becomes a code word for colonized object/subject and African becomes a code word for blackness represented as uncivilized savage. It is important to address that while Edgeworth uses the terms African and Negro interchangeably throughout "The Grateful Negro" to describe both Caesar and Hector, she merely uses the

terms as racial identifiers of their blackness. In Edgeworth's sentimental stereotyping of Africans as emotional beings, the difference between their temperaments is what marks the distinction between what makes Caesar a "good Negro" and Hector a savage African, meaning that "African" and "Negro" become more than racial identifiers; they become highly charged words for volatile savage ("African") and subjugated other, stripped of national and cultural identity ("Negro"). Edgeworth may identify Caesar as African but she does not see him as "African" and she may identify Hector as Negro but she does not see him as "Negro."¹⁶ Edgeworth establishes Caesar and Hector as social, and moral, opposites by contrasting their emotional traits. As the narrator observes, "Revenge was the ruling passion of Hector: in Caesar's mind, it was rather a principle instilled by education. The one considered it as a duty, the other felt it as a pleasure. Hector's sense of injury was acute in the extreme; he knew not how to forgive. Caesar's sensibility was yet more alive to kindness than to insult. Hector would sacrifice his life to extirpate an enemy. Caesar would devote himself for the defence of a friend"(550). The disparity between the emotional constitutions of Caesar and Hector as Africans is what Edgeworth suggests makes one less prone to "savagery" than the other, which in turn means one has more of a capacity for gratefulness or "goodness."

In order to emphasize how different they are as social beings, Edgeworth stresses their similarities, positioning Hector as Caesar's double. Their similarity is found in their same tribal origin as Koromantyns and their shared experiences as slaves. Relating the history of their relationship, the narrator notes, "These friends were bound to each other by the strongest ties. Their slavery and sufferings began in the same hour: they were both brought back by the same ship. This circumstance alone forms, amongst the negroes, a bond of connexion not easily to be dissolved. But the friendship of Caesar and Hector commenced even before they were united by the sympathy of misfortune; they were both Koromantyns" (549). Most assuredly, Edgeworth plays upon this "bond of connexion" to intensify her dramatization of Caesar's emotional conflict over the moral choice he must

make, in much the same way she uses the romantic/domestic bond between him and Clara for the same reason. While the comparison/contrast between Caesar and Hector may be Edgeworth's attempt to make Caesar a more complex character, it serves to underscore the proslavery reformist position pervading the work that Edgeworth assumes. By characterizing Hector as Caesar's double *and* "African" opposite, Edgeworth makes Hector symbolic of what Caesar would have become if not for Mr. Edwards's benevolence - an *ungrateful* African slave, which would position him as social threat to the plantocratic order on the West Indian plantation.

As a former slave of Mr. Jeffries, Caesar had foreknowledge of the revolt and would have been a participant if it had not been for Mr. Edwards's kindness and sympathy. Caesar's newfound gratitude causes him to feel guilty, and it is revealed that he has knowledge of what is being planned among the slaves on the Jeffries plantation: "They were all leagued together in a conspiracy, which was kept profoundly secret. Their object was to extirpate every white man, woman, and child in the island. Their plans were laid with consummate art; and the negroes were urged to execute them by all the courage of despair" (549). Because of his new "friendship" with Mr. Edwards, the "bond of connexion not easily to be dissolved" between Caesar and Hector as friends and kinsmen is broken. The breaking of this bond illustrates how treacherous and hypocritical Caesar is when his relationship to and protection of Mr. Edwards is threatened. Because of Edgeworth's construction of the "Mr. Edwards versus Hector" decision Caesar must make, the problem of Caesar's principle ("[he] would devote himself for the defence of a friend, and Caesar now considered a white man as his friend") becomes apparent. One can understand how Caesar's rescue from a bad master and the auction block justifies his devotion to Mr. Edwards. But what of his devotion to a *black* man as his friend, countryman, and fellow slave? Symbolic of Africa, Hector becomes an emblem of both the national and cultural ties Caesar must sever as well as of that part of him, his innate "savage," he must reject.

While Caesar places emphasis on his indebtedness to his white master, for whom “he would sooner forfeit his life than rebel against,” Hector continuously alludes to his tribal origins and loyalty to his kinsmen (550). Instead of identifying with his enslaver by remaining linked to Africa, Hector represents national and cultural loyalty and authority, both of which are paradoxically endorsed and denounced by Edgeworth. Symptomatic of the author’s ambivalence and caution towards abolition and her anxieties about blackness, these conflicting feelings are perhaps best exemplified by Edgeworth having the rebellious Hector share the name of the courageous Hektor from Homer’s The Iliad. By naming the leader of the slave rebellion in “The Grateful Negro” after Homer’s tragic Trojan hero, Edgeworth seems to suggest she sees Hector’s cause to free the Koromantyns from enslavement as noble. As a citizen of Troy, Homer’s Hektor’s sense of duty as the Trojan army commander and his obligation to his people and community are what make him heroic. But, in her depiction of him as a murderous, rebellious slave in his pursuit of his cause, her perception of Hector, and how she wants her readers to perceive him, is ultimately one of danger.¹⁷ His loyalty to Africa and the Koromantyn people indicates Hector’s inability to become a “good Negro.” In Edgeworth’s portrayal of him, as long as he remains bound to Africa and his countrymen, the implication is that Hector cannot experience, “in a transport of gratitude,” the transformative power of white benevolence that Caesar does.

Therefore, exemplifying the stereotype of the “bad Negro,” Hector threatens the sentimentalized myth of happy plantation life, represented by Mr. Edwards’s celebrating and content slaves, with violence and rebellion. When first Caesar approaches Hector to plead that the slave rebellion be stopped, he finds Hector in the midst of a dream. As he enters Hector’s hut, he overhears Hector cry out in his sleep, “Spare none! Sons of Africa, spare none!” Accidentally awakening him, Caesar asks him of what he has been dreaming and Hector responds, “Why did you awaken me from my dream? It was delightful! The whites were weltering in their blood!” (550). Hector’s delightful dream

is the colonialist nightmare of the vengeful bloodthirsty African, a fear Edgeworth draws upon to strengthen her warning that a slave's capacity for gratitude is predicated upon his or her master's benevolence. Hector is an especially frightening realization of this fear, because of how revenge and murderous thoughts consume him. The narrator says of him that "Hector breathed vengeance" (550). Edgeworth taps into the suspicions of her audience. The message is that if slaves are not conspiring a bloody mutiny during their waking moments, then they are having "delightful dream[s]" about it. But it is perhaps Hector's reference to the Koromantyns as "sons of Africa" that makes him a potential threat to the plantocratic order in a way his predetermination towards violence does not. His allegiance to Africa and his identification of himself and his countrymen to their status as "sons of Africa," as opposed to their current status as slaves of British West Indian planters, reflects his inability to be socially integrated and culturally identified as a "grateful Negro." Rather than accepting his enslavement, Hector resists white authority and the identity of conquered object, which is the identity Caesar assumes in his love for his master. As a "son of Africa," and not Europe, he asserts his national identity. It is this political militancy and social inability to reconcile himself to his condition that feed Hector's hunger for rebellion, as much as his indifferent master Mr. Jeffries's and the cruel overseer Durant's poor treatment of him.

Wanting to save his master, Caesar, now a converted son of Europe, begs Hector to abandon the planned rebellion, but Hector silences him, saying, "I cannot listen with patience to one who, between the rising and the setting sun, can forget all his resolutions, all his promises! who by a few soft words, can be so wrought upon as to forget all the insults, all the injuries he has received from this accursed race; and can even call a white man friend!" (550). He goes on to dare Caesar, "'Betray us if you will! Betray our secrets to him whom you call your benefactor: to him whom a few hours have made your friend! To him sacrifice the friend of your youth, the companion of your better days, of your better self!'" (550). Hector's references to Caesar's "better days" and his "better

self” serve as a reminder to Caesar of their previous life in Africa and the freedom they experienced there, which I find makes this particular passage in which Hector condemns Caesar an intriguing one. In this scene giving a black character the voice of moral authority, Edgeworth offers a critique of Caesar and his actions within his own cultural context and calls attention to his hypocrisy from Hector’s perspective. Hector mocks Caesar’s conversion by “soft words” (sentimentalism) and labels him a “coward,” questioning the value of gratitude of one who would betray a friend (550). These comments, and Hector’s comparison of the time Caesar has known his master to the time he and Caesar have known each other, illustrate how Caesar privileges the master-slave bond over the “defence of a friend” pledge that he espouses as his guiding principle. Addressing this issue, Ferguson opines, “At least emotionally, the narrator (Maria Edgeworth?) does not see entirely eye to eye with Caesar. Does she even, one wonders, wryly mock his non-collaborative leadership by naming him after an assassinated Roman emperor disappointed in love?”¹⁸ Even though the confrontation between Caesar and Hector indicates Edgeworth’s textual awareness of Caesar’s hypocrisy in her characterization of him and his betrayal of his kinsmen, she downplays both by refocusing the emphasis onto how conflicted he is. As Ferguson suggests, Edgeworth may not see “eye to eye” with him, but the emphasis she places on his conflicted feelings and guilt becomes almost a way Edgeworth absolves Caesar of his treachery for her readers and herself. Ultimately, his betrayal of Hector and the Koromantyns is justified because he does it for the “right” reason, which is, of course, to protect his benevolent white benefactor.

After the confrontation episode, Caesar severs his ties with Hector, the other Koromantyns, and symbolically, by extension, Africa. Significantly, immediately following Caesar’s detachment from the African community comes a scene in which Edgeworth reaffirms the strength of the emotional bond between him and his master. After his late night meeting with Hector, Caesar goes to the fields to work the next

morning. Later, he returns to his cabin to find his master pruning branches that have overgrown and are overhanging his (Caesar's) cottage. Mr. Edwards asks him why he has not pruned the branches himself and learns it is because Caesar does not own a knife, he hands him his, saying, "Here is mine for you. It is very sharp . . .but I am not one of those masters who are afraid to trust their negroes with sharp knives's" (552). Seeing evidence of Mr. Edwards's trust seals Caesar's decision to protect his master. Caesar's reaction to this display of how his master's trust affects him is just as sentimentally profound as it is after he is saved from the auction block. He becomes even more resolved to save Mr. Edwards:

Caesar received the knife without uttering a syllable; but no sooner was Mr. Edwards out of sight, than he knelt down, and in a transport of gratitude, swore that, with this knife, he would stab himself to the heart, sooner than betray his master! The principle of gratitude conquered every other sensation. The mind of Caesar was not insensible to the charms of freedom: he knew the negro conspirators had so taken their measures that there was the greatest probability of their success. His heart beat high at the idea of his liberty; but he was not to be seduced from his duty, not even by this delightful hope; nor was he to be intimidated by the dreadful certainty that his *former* friends and countrymen, considering him a deserter from their cause, would become his bitterest enemies.
(emphasis added) (552-3)

The slave owner entrusting an African slave with a weapon that could possibly be used as a weapon against his or her enslaver gives even more power to sentimental benevolence. In tempting Caesar to betray him, Mr. Edwards tempts the limits of practicing benevolence. McCann has fittingly called Mr. Edwards's gesture suicidal and goes on to note that "Caesar, in sympathy, similarly vows his commitment to this model of virtue, preferring death to betrayal, though it is revealing that the authority of the European character enables an unconscious performance of self-sacrificing virtue, while the African is obliged to a kind of performative excess [. . .] This exchange consolidates an affiliative bond that erodes recalcitrant cultural difference and transports Caesar into a realm that allows him to assume identity with the plantation owner."¹⁹ Edgeworth's adjectival usage

of the word “former” to describe Caesar’s relationship to the Koromantyns in this passage calls attention to how Caesar now distances himself from the dangerous Africans and signals his complete rejection of his tribal identity. “Former” illustrates both his acceptance of his new identity as a “grateful Negro” and his alliance with his enslaver, which is also symbolically reflected by the novella’s concluding image of a wounded Caesar falling back into Mr. Edwards’s arms.

When Mr. Edwards and his men set fire to the hut where the rebellious slaves have gathered, chaos ensues. As the Koromantyns rush out of the hut, Mr. Edwards yells to Hector, “Yield! You are pardoned, Hector.” And Caesar, repeating after Mr. Edwards, calls to Hector, “You are pardoned, *my friend!*” (emphasis added) (555). Nevertheless, a passionately enraged Hector stabs Caesar, who is caught by the arms of his master. Caesar’s reference to Hector as “my friend” *after* he has betrayed him and the Koromantyns by warning his master of the rebellion is interesting, because it can be read as Caesar’s attempt to realign himself and regain his kinship with the Koromantyns. The earlier language of detachment and rejection is now one of association and alliance. His “*former friend*” now safely becomes “*my friend.*” But because his acculturation and transformation into a “grateful Negro” is completed by his act of betrayal, Caesar cannot reclaim his former identity as a Koromantyn African or reestablish cultural ties. This fact is made apparent not so much by Hector stabbing him, an act that demonstrates, as Hector sees it, that there no longer exists a bond of brotherhood or kinship between them, but by the fact that after Caesar is wounded, he falls back into Mr. Edwards’s arms. Consequently, as another example in “The Grateful Negro,” the same scene that affirms his marriage to Mr. Edwards when read within a homoerotic context can also be read as reflecting Caesar’s assigned role in the plantocracy. He is no longer a “son of Africa” but a “faithful servant”(555). The image of Caesar being caught by his master’s arms restores plantocratic order and authority. Therefore, even though Edgeworth tries to present the relationship between Mr. Edwards and Caesar as one of sentimentalized friendship,

within the realm of colonialist discourse, theirs can be only the relationship between property to owner, savage to civilizer, and subjugated object/subject to conqueror.

Interestingly, Edgeworth excises from her fictional account the punishment of the rebellious slaves that is related in the real account on which she based her story. Her version of the events following the uprising ends with the reunion of Clara and Caesar, and the cruel plantation owner Mr. Jeffries being forced to return to England, because he has lost his money and plantation as a result of the revolt. In Bryan Edwards's account, after the revolt, he relates how several of the slaves involved in the rebellion were severely punished. One was chained to a stake and burned alive, while two others were publicly hung. While the threat and execution of acts of black savagery are thematically foregrounded in "The Grateful Negro," acts of white savagery are written out. Edgeworth's choice to circumvent the unsentimental outcome reveals a racial double standard. This is not just outside the text, but also within it, for there are no incidents of barbarity on the parts of the white British West Indians in the story. Like her dismissive comment "But you know all this" about the slave ship, brutalities go unremarked on and omitted. The physical abuse often detailed in abolitionist fiction and non-fiction is only alluded to in Edgeworth's story. What makes this notable in the "The Grateful Negro" is that the West Indies plantations were even more notorious for the excessive and sadistic brutalities committed against slaves than was the American South. While she may have censored white savagery, in the sense that she might have considered it too indelicate, her silence works for her in another way, because for Edgeworth to address the burning and charred body of a slave would mean to acknowledge that Hectors are not limited to those only of African heritage.

While Hector, like Caesar to a lesser extent, represents the potential danger of black power uncontained, the character of the Koromantyn obeah woman Esther in "The Grateful Negro" is the embodiment of this fear realized, making her one of the more intriguing characters in the novella. The obeah is the other other, as Alan Richardson

observes in his article “Romantic Voodoo: Obeah and British Culture, 1797-1807.” Arguing that the obeah was seen by Romantic writers as a purely African phenomenon in origin, Richardson observes, “[It] is marked as doubly alien: both inassimilable to European experience . . . , and representing a foreign, ‘savage’ African intrusion upon the partially tamed Caribbean.”²⁰ What defines and distinguishes Esther from the other African characters in Edgeworth’s tale are her status as an obeah and the cultural and female power as an African woman that this status allows her to wield. In this representation of dual power, Edgeworth’s reformist agenda and gender politics become converged in one character and as a consequence, Esther is rendered monstrous. As an obeah, she is far from a sentimental figure. In her positioning of Esther as a social monster, Edgeworth illustrates how poisonous obeahs are to be considered within the slave community. Obeahs, powerful symbols of African culture and spirituality, were deemed dangerous because their influence and supernatural powers could potentially corrupt “good Negroes” with thoughts of revolts and murder, or encourage already bad slaves to commit such acts. By characterizing the obeah as a woman gone mad with power, Edgeworth intensifies Esther’s otherness and indicts female agency and black militancy, linking the two together as social terrors. Moira Ferguson has also recognized these dual anxieties in Edgeworth’s character Esther, noting, “This monstrous European depiction of villainous female subalternity, embodiment of dual British worries about women in general and slave insurrectionaries in particular, sites male radicals in a more favorable light.”²¹ But in addition to demonstrating Edgeworth’s problems with the power of the other, her portrayal of the obeah figure gives a clue to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter: what might have motivated her to write “The Grateful Negro?” With the obeah as an emblem of leadership, power and rebellion, in Edgeworth’s portrayal of Esther and the incendiary role she plays in the slave revolt in “The Grateful Negro,” one can see the looming shadow of Toussaint L’Ouverture’s revolt behind the veil of sentimental antislaveryism in Edgeworth’s tale.

The obeah Esther achieves the power that gives her agency as a woman and an African from using things from nature for unnatural purposes: “Esther, an old Koromantyn negress, had obtained by her skill in poisonous herbs, and her knowledge of venomous reptiles, a high reputation amongst her countrymen. She soon taught them to believe her to be possessed of supernatural powers; and she then worked their imagination to what pitch and purpose she pleased” (551). The intent behind Esther’s malevolent machinations is to punish the white colonizers on the island. In her quest for revenge, Esther is as bloodthirsty, vengeful, manipulative, and war-hungry as Hector, but she has more power than he, for she controls Hector: “It was she who had stimulated the revengeful temper of Hector almost to a phrenzy” (551). Ruling from her hut in the woods, as Ferguson argues, Esther is “a transcendently evil female figure [who] mitigates customary male villainy whereas Caesar and Edwards are repositories of humility, kindness, charm, and other desirable female qualities.”²² Although Esther is a symbol of perverse womanhood because she is masculinized and demonized, she is also unwomanly because she is unsisterly, another crime against womanhood. She not only manipulates and exploits the male characters, but she also uses her powers to take advantage of Clara. Twice in the novella Esther exploits Clara’s womanhood. She uses Clara as a messenger to send a warning to Caesar, exploiting Clara’s romantic relationship with Caesar. Afterwards, she uses Clara to lure Caesar into the woods and poisons her, placing her into a near fatal comatose state in order to force Caesar’s submission. Esther’s exploitation of Clara is yet another example of how Edgeworth makes Clara a passive female character, in that she is easily exploited and manipulated for the gains of others. Edgeworth does not imagine Clara, as an African female character, as a potential social threat in the way she obviously perceives the obeah priestess Esther. Like the characterization of Caesar and Hector, Clara and Esther are opposing doubles of “good” and “bad.”

With Clara as the antithesis of Esther, the issues of female power and race are not linked in Edgeworth's depiction of the character Clara in the way they are in her characterization of Esther. Perhaps this is because it is questionable to what extent Edgeworth considered Clara as African. Although Clara's tribal origin is Eboe (or Ibo), unlike the other African characters Caesar, Hector, and Esther, her cultural ties to Africa are not emphasized by Edgeworth as much as her romantic/domestic ties to Caesar as his fiancée are. Her Africanness or blackness is downplayed, which becomes apparent in a telling textual "slip" that occurs in the scene where Clara is poisoned by Esther in the woods. Clara is described as lying "*pale* and motionless" (emphasis added) (554). The description of her appearance as "pale" is in opposition to her being African, since we can assume the color of her skin would prevent such an appearance. The paleness would be more appropriately ascribed to a white female heroine, or even a mulatto one. This emphasis on Clara's paleness is not meant to suggest Edgeworth envisioned Clara as white, but rather, to stress how Edgeworth models her more on the white sentimental female characters she created for her novels. Related to this, the adjectival reference to Clara as pale is the only allusion to the physical appearance of any of the African characters in the novella. There are no descriptions of the other characters' pigmentation, hair texture, or facial features. Addressing this subject in the works of other sentimental authors, Karen Sánchez-Eppler argues that "Making a black hero involves not only dyeing the tradition figure of the hero to a darker hue, but also separating blackness from the configuration of traits that in the bodily grammar of sentimental fiction signals revulsion [. . .] These features [of blackness] revolt, moreover, not only because they fail to conform to white criteria for beauty but, more interestingly, because they threaten to overturn sentimental fiction's stable matrix of bodily signs."²³ In addition, besides not giving them any physical attributes identifying their ethnicity, Edgeworth also does not even bestow upon her characters African names, though she identifies them as Koromantyn or Eboe. Interestingly, in her other works that feature African characters in

marginal roles as secondary characters, she assigns them African, or at least African-sounding, names. For example, in the novel *Belinda* (1801) and the play “The Two Guardians,” (1817) she names the African slave characters, Juba and Quaco respectively. Maybe, because the power of sentimentalism lies in the reader empathizing with the suffering subject, Edgeworth felt that by giving her characters Anglo-European names in the novella, her audience could better identify with them; it is another way of “whitening” the other.

Returning to the subject of Edgeworth’s critique of female power in her linking of it with race, what is particularly interesting in her portrayal of the obeah figure was her decision to make the obeah a *female* character, a gendering act that has gone unnoted. While an obeah practitioner could be either a priest or priestess, the sex of the obeah in Edgeworth’s tale is one of the more significant departures Edgeworth makes from Bryan Edwards’s account of the slave insurrection. In his account, Edwards names a male Koromantyn, who is not an obeah but a former chief, as responsible for the rebellion on which Edgeworth models the events in her own story.²⁴ One has to question why Edgeworth recast the villain as an obeah and a woman in her fictionalized version. More than likely, she chose to make the instigator of her rebellion an obeah, because it was such a potent symbol of insurgency in early British literature, as Richardson has observed. And by choosing to portray the obeah as a woman, Edgeworth could also make a distinction between her text and Edwards. She obviously felt some degree of authorial anxiety in her usage of Edwards’s *History* as her primary source, remarking in a footnote addressing Mr. Edwards’s reformist stance on slavery that “these ideas are adopted - not stolen” as a defensive measure to counter any herself from accusations of plagiarism (547). Therefore, in recasting the obeah as a woman in her version, Edgeworth could assert textual authority over her own work. However, while fear of plagiarism may be one of the motivating factors of why Edgeworth departed from Edwards’s text, there is another reason behind Edgeworth’s editorial choice that lies encoded in her portrayal of

the obeah. By examining the connection between Esther and Edgeworth's problems with female power more closely, what can actually be seen in Edgeworth's re-sexing of the obeah is a subtle critique of the radical feminism emerging during the period.

With the publication of *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), her most renowned work, Mary Wollstonecraft became emblematic of the revolutionary spirit of eighteenth and nineteenth century England.²⁵ She argued for women to be seen as reasonable beings and equals to their male counterparts, famously metaphorically linking the oppression of women to slavery. To her critics, of whom Maria Edgeworth was one, she was a subversive symbol of how too much power and autonomy distorted the female character. Her views were the antitheses to tenets of cult of true womanhood, and she herself was considered a scandalous woman, especially after the publication of William Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798), which confirmed the negative opinions of her critics about her character. In her popular novel of manners *Belinda*, Edgeworth presents the character Mrs. Harriet Freke, who as G.J. Barker-Benfield suggests is modeled on Wollstonecraft and meant to serve as a critique of unbridled female power and Wollstonecraftian feminism in the novel.²⁶ Read as the anti-Belinda, Belinda being the novel's sentimental heroine representing Edgeworth's ideal example of womanhood, Mrs. Freke is depicted as a social monster who emotionally, and in the case of her nemesis Lady Delacour literally, scars everyone, both male and female, who comes within contact of her. She is labeled in the novel as a "man-woman," which is both a reference to her unwomanly behavior and her preference for wearing male attire.²⁷ While the crimes Mrs. Freke commits against womanhood in *Belinda* are too numerous to address here, there is one particular episode I would like to examine involving Mrs. Freke and an African slave. This scene of Edgeworth's novel invites an intriguing connection between her depiction of Mrs. Freke as a monstrous woman and "The Grateful Negro"'s Esther.

In *Belinda*, Juba, the faithful servant of Belinda's suitor, the West Indian planter Mr. Vincent, engages in a dispute with one of Mrs. Freke's servants. Overhearing the argument, Mrs. Freke threatens several times to make Juba pay for his insubordination. Shortly thereafter, Juba falls into a melancholic state. The cause of which is later discovered by Mr. Vincent and Belinda. In order to frighten Juba, they learn Mrs. Freke used phosphorous to draw the figure of an obeah woman within sight of Juba's window, and Juba is terrified because he thinks the obeah has appeared to exact revenge for his having once stolen an egg as a child. Edgeworth writes this scene for comic effect by making Juba a caricature in her mocking of his superstitious fear of the obeah. Despite the humor with which she approaches it, the brief scene demonstrates Edgeworth's fascination of the obeah and operates as a critique of African spiritual beliefs. Using science, the enlightened Belinda reveals the obeah's fraudulence for the primitive heathen Juba. But more importantly, the scene suggests the same link between the monstrosity of female power and the African cultural symbol of the obeah in the same way it does in Edgeworth's portrayal of the Koromantyn obeah Esther. It is quite a powerful statement to portray a white female character practicing, both meanings intended, black magic. So by racializing female power, Edgeworth intensifies what she perceives to be the unnaturalness of it. Since the obeah is already a racialized figure, in "The Grateful Negro," Edgeworth merely changes the sex to affect the same purpose.

Belinda is often cited as an example of Edgeworth displaying more progressive views about race, because in its first publication the African slave Juba marries a white English farm girl. Certainly, for Edgeworth to include an interracial marriage in her novel was daring. However, in 1810, when she revised *Belinda* for inclusion in a collection entitled *British Novelist Series* edited by her friend Anna L. Barbauld, Edgeworth removed the interracial romance from the story. Explaining the reason why she did so, she wrote to Barbauld, "My father says that gentlemen have horrors upon this subject, and would draw conclusions very unfavorable to a female writer who appeared to

recommend such unions; as I do not understand the subject, I trust to his better judgement.”²⁸ Edgeworth’s demurring comment gives an indication of why she is such a complex figure, especially when addressing the issues of race and slavery. In acquiescence to patriarchal authority, she confirms her status as a submissive, obedient daughter, and, her subsequent act of revision subverts her initial one of liberality.²⁹ Given this, it is unsurprising that the character Juba is troubling. Embodying negative stereotypes about blackness, he is made a caricature by Edgeworth; his superstition and ignorance are intended to make him comic for the entertainment of her audience. In addition, unlike the noble slaves in “The Grateful Negro,” in the novel *Belinda* Juba speaks in dialect. In one scene, fearing the obeah he pleads to his master Mr. Vincent, ““O, massa, Juba die! If Juba go back, Juba die! . . . But me will go, if massa bid - me will die!””(200). Even more problematically, Juba shares the name of his master’s dog. Also, according to one scholar, Juba is actually a female African name, which would make Juba another example of how Edgeworth feminizes male slaves in her depiction of them as “good Negroes.” Even by briefly addressing the problems in *Belinda*, which was published a year before “The Grateful Negro,” one can see Edgeworth’s ambivalence and how it compromises the political statements she makes in her fiction.

Besides representing Esther’s monstrosity, Edgeworth’s demonization of Esther also allows her to denounce the religious practices of African slaves by condemning the obeah. Although I have not focused on this particular aspect of “The Grateful Negro,” because I feel it is implicit in sentimental antislavery literature, there is a religious subtext that informs Edgeworth’s argument in the story. As Ferguson suggests with her description of Esther as “Eve-like,” the woods where Esther dwells are a corrupt Eden.³⁰ In the novella, this Edenic imagery also works on another symbolic level, in that the happy plantation of Mr. Edwards is paradise threatened by the corruption of rebellious slaves who are quite literally snakes in the garden. Considering Edgeworth’s tale is supposed to be anti-slavery, one would think, then, that she would have positioned

slavery as the corruptive agent in her symbolic Eden, but instead it is African spirituality. Through her portrayal of the obeah she issues a strong warning about the social consequences of slaves practicing tribal religions. It is clear in “The Grateful Negro” that not only does the obeah offend Christian sensibilities, but also that African heathenism makes the slaves more susceptible to the sin of rebelling against their masters. When the character Esther is first introduced, in the lengthiest footnote in the novella, Edgeworth offers her reader a brief history of the obeah in which her condescension is evident, beginning with her comment that “The enlightened inhabitants of Europe may, perhaps, smile at the superstitious credulity of the negroes, who regard those ignorant beings called *Obeah* people, with the most profound respect and dread” (551). Edgeworth refuses to give the obeah any legitimacy (similar to her critique in *Belinda*) as a religious practice, instead depicting it as witchcraft.

Described as a “hag,” “sorceress,” and “fiend” throughout “The Grateful Negro,” Esther is evil incarnate, and Edgeworth uses witch imagery in order to accentuate Esther’s wickedness. When Caesar, Mr. Edwards, and the search party arrive at Esther’s hut to confront the rebel slaves, they come upon a sinister scene: “Mr. Edwards looked through a hole in the wall; and by the blue flame of a caldron, over which the sorceress was stretching her shrivelled hands, he saw Hector and five stout negroes standing, intent upon her incantations. These negroes held their knives in their hands, ready to dip them into the bowl of poison” (555). Besides establishing the characterization of the obeah as a witch, Mr. Edwards’s voyeuristic gaze into Esther’s hut gives him insight into what is hidden from white eyes as well as the substantiation of its reality, the image of slaves conspiring. It is Hector’s dream and a white plantation owner’s nightmare come to life. The poison Esther brews becomes symbolic for how the obeah poisons the minds of Africans with thoughts of revolution and literally “brews” trouble among the slaves and for whites. So, although Edgeworth implies that the African slaves’ lack of Christianity leaves them vulnerable to moral corruption, the anxiety behind her depiction of Esther as

a religious threat is also one of a colonialist nature. In other words, because the African slaves feared the obeah more than they feared their white enslavers, how much of the Christian concern for the African soul was actually the fear of losing control over the enslaved African body?

For Edgeworth, this is why Esther is especially fearsome. The power she wields as an obeah woman, she does not use for feminist ends (as evidenced by her exploitation of Clara), but in the cause for her people, her tribe. Like Hector, Esther remains politically and culturally bound to Africa and acts out of nationalism: her mission is to free her countrymen and exact revenge and justice on the whites who have enslaved the Koromantyns on West Indian sugar plantations. Edgeworth strengthens this idea of Esther as the leader of the Koromantyns through her naming of the obeah character. In naming her obeah Esther, Edgeworth evokes a biblical allusion to queen Esther who saved her people, the Jews, from the mass genocide decreed by her husband King Ahasuerus at the jealous Haman's behest. Edgeworth's Esther's devotion to her tribal origins is exemplified in the climatic encounter between her and Caesar in her hut, where she does not speak in terms of her own gains, but what the Koromantyns will achieve. She tells Caesar, "'Your friends, your former friends, your countrymen, will be in arms in a few minutes; and they will bear down everything before them! Victory! Wealth! Freedom! and Revenge! will be theirs!'" (554). While one might think Edgeworth may appear to evince empathy for Esther, given her naming of her, she does not. Comparatively, while her naming of Hector suggests his nobility despite his ruthlessness, any potential for nobleness in the characterization of Esther is undermined by Edgeworth's negative feelings about female power and obeahs. Posed as a triple threat as an African woman, an obeah, and chief plotter of the rebellion, Esther can only be deemed as ominous. She is the fictional embodiment of the greatest fear of those involved in the exploitation of slaves, which is under centralized leadership, the power of the

enslaved to assemble into an organized, collective group against the whites to reclaim ownership over the African and black body.

Manifesting itself in her reformist agenda and racial and gender politics, the impulse Edgeworth has to render blackness safe in the novella is a response to this fear of black militancy and rebellion. Consequently, the sentimental call for benevolence in “The Grateful Negro” is not emancipatory but a preventative measure of control and containment. Though one could make a case for arguing that Mr. Edwards’s (and Edgeworth’s) pardon of Hector at the story’s conclusion can be read as Edgeworth’s sanctioning of rebellion under extenuating circumstances (a bad master or cruel overseer), the fact of the matter is that after the revolt all the slave characters, Caesar, Clara, Hector, and Esther, remain enslaved. The plantocratic order of things is restored. Edgeworth’s tale, then, does not “emphatically commend emancipation” as Moira Ferguson has suggested, even though, as she points out, “Hector represents collective self-determination, vindicated politically, if not emotionally.”³¹ If anything, Edgeworth’s anxieties and political conservatism reflect how she strongly disapproved of rebellion as a means of emancipation, preferring instead the reformation of the institution and the gradual freeing of the slaves. George E. Boulukos argues this same point, noting, “Edgeworth was certainly not committed to antislavery. She found the extreme positions on either side of the issue distasteful - - she rejects emancipation as a practical solution, but on the other hand, she is disgusted by the immoral, unreflective position of the character Jeffries. Clearly, to her, slavery was undesirable and unpleasant, but it was also necessary to contain the irrationality, and the tendency to vengeance of the African descended people.”³² Edgeworth herself as narrator asserts this position through the beliefs of the character Mr. Edwards: “He wished that there was no such thing as slavery in the world, but he was convinced, by the arguments of those who have the best means of obtaining information, that the sudden emancipation of the negroes would rather increase than diminish their miseries. His benevolence therefore confined itself withing

the bounds of reason. He adopted those plans for the amelioration of the slaves, which appeared to him the most likely to succeed, *without producing any violent agitation or revolution*” (emphasis added) (547). The problem with Edgeworth’s own acquiescence to and dependence upon “those who ha[d] the best means of obtaining information” is that the “those,” i.e. West Indian planter Bryan Edwards, had an investment in gradual abolition.

The motivating terror informing Maria Edgeworth’s writing of “The Grateful Negro” appears to have been the August 22, 1791 rebellion on French-ruled San Domingo led by Toussaint L’Ouverture. In 1801, in a letter to Napoleon Bonaparte, recognizing himself as leader of San Domingo, Toussaint declared himself Captain General of the island. The following year, Bonaparte sent an army to regain control of San Domingo and to depose Toussaint. If allowed to remain in power, Toussaint would have stood as a dangerous symbol to slaves (and their enslavers), throughout the world not only of insurrection as a successful means for emancipation, but also as an example of strong black leadership and national identity. In 1802, despite a tense political relationship with France, in order to protect its own economic interests in the West Indies, England aided Bonaparte’s invasion of San Domingo by allowing the French army’s ships to cross the Atlantic without intervention.³³ After several extended battles, Toussaint was eventually captured and imprisoned by the French. Still, the impact of the events were significant and far-reaching. The revolt and the subsequent war to overthrow Toussaint undoubtedly affected Edgeworth and prompted her to offer her own commentary on the slavery debate. In her analysis of “The Grateful Negro,” Ferguson says, “At no point does ‘The Grateful Negro’ suggest that Hector resembles Toussaint L’Ouverture, although contemporaries would inevitably have recalled the heroes of that revolution in any text thematizing revolt.”³⁴ Ferguson is right. Hector does not resemble Toussaint in Edgeworth’s novella; it is *Esther* who does. Esther’s militancy, the pride of national identity she exhibits, and her leadership status among the Koromantyns makes

her, in my opinion, Edgeworth's fictionalized female version of Toussaint. It is revealing that the timing of the Toussaint revolt and his ascension to power coincides with the novella's composition, because although it was not published until 1804 as part of the *Popular Tales* collection, "The Grateful Negro" was originally written in 1802.³⁵ 1802 was the crucial year in which France, with the tacit aid of England, fought to retrieve control of San Domingo back from Toussaint.

Knowing how the novella was received upon its publication by critics and her contemporaries would certainly help shed additional light on the success and intent of Edgeworth's text. Unfortunately, little information exists. The literary magazine *The Edinburgh Review*, established in 1802, contains a review of Edgeworth's *Popular Tales*, but the review does not make any specific references to "The Grateful Negro." Instead, the editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, Frances Jeffrey, whom Edgeworth biographer Marilyn Butler calls Edgeworth's "first serious reviewer," addresses the entire collection (339). Jeffrey does not single out any single piece to critique. Of the collection as a whole, he writes, "This is an attempt, we think, somewhat superior in genius, as well as utility, to the laudable exertions of Mr. Thomas Paine to bring disaffection and infidelity within the comprehension of the common people, or the charitable endeavours of Messrs. Wirdsworth [sic] & Co. To accommodate them with an appropriate vein of poetry. Both these superfluities which they might have done very tolerably without."³⁶ Although Jeffrey's review of Edgeworth's collection should be noted for its high praise of a female author, it does little to reveal any impact Edgeworth's novella "The Grateful Negro" may have made on the English public. One explanation for this could be that since the novella appeared as part of a collection of moral tales in which the primary audience were adolescents, there is the likelihood the narrative was overlooked in favor of the more "child-centered" tales at which she excelled and for which she was popularly known. If the novella had been penned by a woman writer more politically associated with British abolitionist literature during the period, such as Joanna Baillie or Hannah More, there

might be considerably more contemporary reviews. The lack of attention “The Grateful Negro” received in the nineteenth century is a comment on its reception then and how it today still remains underexamined in current Edgeworth scholarship.

Maria Edgeworth’s “The Grateful Negro” raises questions about the way sentimentality can mask textual ambiguities that are the result of an author’s political ambivalence towards race and slavery. Her novella demonstrates that the sentimental rhetoric and conventions of antislavery can become suspect signifiers that we can misread and misinterpret. After all, what allows Edgeworth to wear a sentimental mask of antislavery is that the reader participates in the sentimental fantasy. This symbiotic relationship between the author and reader is what makes sentimentalism as a discourse and a literary phenomenon so complex -- and treacherous. The sentimental reader trusts the author to tell him or her how to feel, how to interpret the sentimental signs. In the case of Edgeworth, because of the way she constructs her story and characterizes Caesar, it is hard to discern that her true sympathies might not lie with exploited and abused West Indian slaves. As a counter to Edgeworth, this is why Herman Melville’s “Benito Cereno” is compelling response to and commentary on the problematics of sentimentality in antislavery writing. What Edgeworth avoids because of her anxieties and patriarchal allegiance, Melville explores. The private politics Edgeworth shields behind the rhetoric of sentimentalism are what Melville systematically rips away. As a transatlantic rebuttal, his novella, also based on the true account of a slave revolt, confronts head on the problems in Edgeworth’s text, as well as critiques sentimental readers, taking them to task for their sentimental gullibility by making them victims of a narrative fraud.

NOTES

¹ Hare, Augustus J.C. ed. *The Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth*. Vol. 1. (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1984) 23.

² Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Harvard UP, 1992) 66.

³ Boulukos, "Maria Edgeworth's 'Grateful Negro' and the Sentimental Argument for Slavery" *Eighteenth Century* 23.1 (1999) 21.

⁴ Sussman, "Women and the Politics of Sugar, 1792." *Representations* 48 (1994) 56.

⁵ In her argument, Charlotte Sussman addresses the political role women as the center of the domestic household played in the sugar debate. She argues women were specifically called upon for their moral and social responsibility to control their family's ingestion of the contraband sugar. She writes, "Gender identity and national identity are...linked, anchored by a quality of sympathy. Abolitionist rhetoric thus consciously calls on female sensibility to safeguard the home from colonial contamination, to preserve that home as a symbol of purified English identity, and to ensure that the domestic sphere remains distinct from the colonial arena" (61). Although I have used Sussman's term in a slightly different context to define the problematics of Edgeworth's sugar use and politics, I think the phrase "colonial contamination" best explicates the idea of how Edgeworth becomes complicit and tainted by her sugar use. Since Edgeworth herself assumed the role of domestic head of the Edgeworth household some time after her mother's death and in this role did not insist the family abstain from sugar, she rejects the moral responsibility bestowed upon her by abolitionist.

⁶ In another letter to her cousin Sophy Ruxton, Edgeworth's lack of political and moral accountability regarding the family's sugar use is further indicated when Edgeworth recounts a visit the family had with abolitionist Anna Laetitia Barbauld and her husband John Aikin. Edgeworth pokes fun at Aikin's zealous commitment to the sugar boycott. She writes, "We met at Clifton Mr. and Mrs. Barbauld. He was an amiable and benevolent man, so eager against the slave-trade that, when he drank tea with us, he always brought some East India sugar, that he might not share in our wickedness in eating that made by the negro slave" (69).

⁷ Hare 28.

⁸ Obviously, Edgeworth's selection of a proslavery account as a primary source on which to base her story illustrates how problematic reading "The Grateful Negro" as an antislavery work is. However, throughout my argument, I have chosen not to emphasize her reliance on Edwards's narrative, although I will briefly refer to it when appropriate. My intention is to focus my critique on Edgeworth's text.

⁹ Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 4.

¹⁰ McCann 68.

¹¹ Ferguson 247.

¹² My reading of the Caesar, Clara, Mr. Edwards relationship as a romantic triangle is informed by Eve Sedgwick's discussion of the erotic triangle in her study *Between Men*. Using the work of René Girard as a resource, Sedgwick contends that in literature, in the romantic rivalry between two male characters for the affections of a woman, the true bond being endorsed is the potentially erotic one between the two men. It is potentially erotic because the bond is not necessarily homosexual or homoerotic, although it is strongly homosocial and consolidates male power. Though Sedgwick's formula of the triangle does not include race, I found it useful in addressing my reading of the intense bond in a master-slave relationship and the homoerotic tensions such a bond can produce. See Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985) 21-27.

¹³ Richardson, "Romantic Voodoo: Obeah and British Culture, 1797-1807" *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santería, Obeah, and the Caribbean* eds. Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gerber (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1997) 173.

¹⁴ McCann, "Conjugal Love and the Enlightenment Subject: The Colonial Content of Non-identity in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*" *Novel: A Forum of Fiction* (1996): 65.

¹⁵ I could not help but be reminded of Edgeworth's dismissive comment of her slave ship visit with this, as curt, conclusion of the Caesar and Clara romance.

¹⁶ I think it is telling the title of the novella is "The Grateful *Negro*," as opposed to "The Grateful *African*." While one could argue about Edgeworth's intent behind the entitling of a particular work, in my opinion, in this specific case, it speaks volumes.

¹⁷ Though Edgeworth's intention is to clearly associate Hector with Homer's noble Hektor, a classical namesake for a fictional black character can also be problematic. In *Black People in Britain 1555-1833* (New York: Oxford UP, 1977), Folarin Shyllon briefly talks about the fashionable practice of British slave owners giving their African slaves and servants classical names and says while it is difficult to determine the motivation behind this phenomenon suggesting as an answer, it may have "arose from a cruel inclination to mock at them [slaves] by contrasting their grand appellations with their abject fortunes" (16).

¹⁸ Ferguson 247.

¹⁹ McCann 69

²⁰ Richardson 190.

²¹ Ferguson 247.

²² Ferguson 247.

²³ Sánchez-Eppler, “Bodily Bonds” *The Culture of Sentiment* ed. Shirley Samuels (New York: Oxford UP, 1992) 102.

²⁴ In his account of the rebellion, Bryan Edwards writes, “It is not wonderful that such men should endeavor, even by means the most desperate, to regain the freedom of which they have been deprived; nor do I conceive that any further circumstances are necessary to prompt them to action, than that of being sold into captivity into a distant country. I mean only to state the facts as I find them. Such I well know was the origin of the Koromantyn Negro of the name Tacky, who had been a chief in Guiney [Guinea]; and it broke out on the Frontier plantation in St. Mary’s parish, belonging to the late Ballard Beckford, and the adjoining estate of Trinity, the property of my deceased relation and benefactor Zachary Bayly, to whose wisdom, activity, and courage on this occasion, it was owing that the revolt was not as general and destructive as that which now rages in San Domingo (1791).” The events of the revolt on which Edgeworth bases her own tale are those that specifically occurred on the Trinity estate. Although Edwards does not explicitly state that Tacky was a male Koromantyn, throughout his account whenever Edwards refers to a slave who is not male, he states the sex as female as well as uses the gendered pronoun *her*. From this, it is safe to deduce Tacky was indeed a male slave. See Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial of the British West Indies* (London: G. B. Whitaker, 1819) 75.

²⁵ It is hard not to notice how prominently the year 1792 figures in this argument. 1792 is the date of both of Edgeworth’s letters to her cousin, the year British abolitionists attempted to organize the sugar boycott, and the publication year of Wollstonecraft’s most influential book.

²⁶ See G.J. Barker-Benfield’s *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 388-391.

²⁷ For an analysis of Harriet Freke as a “man-woman” and the issues of lesbianism and transvestitism arising from this portrayal, I recommend Susan C. Greenfield’s article “‘Abroad and at Home’: Sexual Ambiguity, Miscegenation, and Colonial Boundaries in Edgeworth’s *Belinda*” *PMLA* 112.2 (1997) 214-227.

²⁸ Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972) 495.

²⁹ Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace and Beth Fowkes-Tobin both explore the problem of Edgeworth’s deference to her father in both her professional and personal life. Kowaleski-Wallace, *Their Father’s Daughters: Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth and*

Patriarchal Complicity (New York: Oxford UP, 1991). Fowkes-Tobin, "Conserving Patriarchy" *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 36.1 (1995) 91-96.

³⁰ Another example of biblical symbolism is Edgeworth's portrayal of Caesar. His having to overcome temptations and his willingness to sacrifice his life for his master make him Christlike.

³¹ Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 233.

³² Boulukos, "Maria Edgeworth's 'Grateful Negro' and the Sentimental Argument for Slavery" *Eighteenth Century* 23.1 (1999) 21.

³³ My synopsis of the surrounding events of the Haitian revolution is culled from an extensive discussion on the history of Toussaint L'Ouverture by Martin Ros. See Martin Ros's *Night of Fire* translated by Karin Ford-Treep (New York: Sarpedon, 1991).

³⁴ Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 247.

³⁵ In their anthology *British Literature 1780-1830* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1996), editors Anne K. Mellor and Richard E. Matlack date the original composition of the novella as 1802.

³⁶ Frances Jeffrey's review is quoted from Marilyn Butler's *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972) 339-40.

CHAPTER 2

HERMAN MELVILLE AND THE CRITIQUE OF
SENTIMENTAL ABOLITION IN “BENITO CERENO”

It bewilders all the relations of human responsibility, if we expect the insurrectionary slave to commit no outrages; if slavery has not depraved him, it has done him little harm. If it be the normal tendency of bondage to produce saints like Uncle Tom, let us all offer ourselves at auction immediately.

Thomas Wentworth Higginson¹

Reading Herman Melville’s “Benito Cereno” as a critique of sentimental discourse in antislavery literature means understanding the social and literary climate in which it emerged and the author’s personal history that informs it. While the slave trade was legally banned in America on January 1, 1808, at the time of the novella’s appearance in *Putnam’s Monthly* in 1855, slavery, as an institution, remained within the nation’s domestic borders. As a young boy growing up near the Hudson River in New York, Melville was familiar with the slavery issue and the political controversy surrounding it. The abolitionist movement was fervent in his region of the country, and many states in the North, including New York, became free states. With the North positioned as a symbol of freedom, and the slave states of the South positioning it as a symbol of oppression, the slavery question polarized the nation. For northern abolitionists, slaves were seen as exploited, subjugated victims and in the South, where the production of one of its most valuable crops, cotton, depended on slave labor, for

southern slave owners, they were seen as an economic necessity. Although the slaves themselves could participate in the moral arguments against slavery, there was little they could do in the way of legal rights, because they had none. At the center of political tensions and legal decisions, their power was limited, their fates largely subject to the determination of others. The adolescent Melville's thoughts on slavery, abolition, and slaves are not known. Perhaps in his youth and innocence, he was somewhat unaffected until he embarked on his first voyage as a cabin boy, which was when he would find himself profoundly impacted by the plight of slaves.

In the summer of 1839, Melville was on a ship bound for Europe. As Laurie Robertson-Laurant suggests in her biography of Melville, it was in Europe that he first began questioning the validity of popular perceptions of race and American slavery. Overseas, Melville, who was nicknamed "Tawney" by his family and friends because of his summer-tanned dark skin, learned the implications of what it truly meant to be "tawney."² When his ship pulled into the port city of Liverpool, England, he found himself changed by the sights (76-77). In his novel *Redburn* (1849), a fictionalized autobiographical account of this first voyage, there are two significant scenes in which Melville relates in the voice of protagonist Wellingborough Redburn how affected he was by his experiences in Liverpool, a city which had formerly been a major slave trading port. In one passage, Melville as Redburn describes visiting the Merchants's Exchange and viewing a statue of Lord Nelson. While the passage is quite lengthy, it must be cited fully, because excising any aspect of it would negate its significance in revealing Melville's feelings about slavery. Around the statue's base, he observes:

four naked figures in chains, somewhat larger than life, are seated in various attitudes of humiliation and despair. One has his leg recklessly thrown over his knee, and his head bowed over, as if he had given up all hope of ever feeling better. Another has his head buried in despondency, and no doubt looks mournfully out of his eyes, but as his face was averted at the time, I

could not catch the expression. These woe-begone figures of captives are emblematic of Nelson's principal victories; but I could never look at their swarthy limbs and manacles, without involuntarily being reminded of four African slaves in the market-place.

And my thoughts would revert to Virginia and Carolina; and also to the historical fact, that the African slave-trade once constituted the principal commerce of Liverpool; and that the prosperity of the town was once supposed to have been indissolubly linked to its prosecution. And I remembered that my father had often spoken to gentlemen visiting our house in New York, of the unhappiness that the discussion of the abolition of this trade had occasioned in Liverpool; that the struggle between sordid interest and humanity had made sad havoc at the fire-sides of the merchants; estranged sons from sires; and even separated husband from wife. And my thoughts reverted to my father's friend, the good and great Roscoe, the intrepid enemy of the trade; who in every way exerted his fine talents toward its suppression; writing a poem (*'the Wrongs of Africa'*), several pamphlets; and in his place in Parliament, he delivered a speech against it, which, as coming from a member for Liverpool, was supposed to have turned many votes, and had no small share in the triumph of sound policy and humanity that ensued.

How this group of statuary affected me, may be inferred from the fact, that I never went through Chapel-street without going through the little arch to look at it again. (222-223)

The sight of the statue's pedestal, which sets off a series of thoughts linking European slavery to American slavery in the South, white prosperity to black persecution, and the images of chained slaves at the slave market to the politics of abolition, overwhelms Melville. Connecting with the shackled figures before him, he indicts slavery and empathizes with those in bondage, recognizing the tragedy and inhumanity of the slave system. Also significant in the passage is that in his recollection, wherein the statues' figures are transposed with images of the suffering slave, Melville does not sentimentalize the scene as he politicizes it. Whereas the sentimental abolitionist writer might have taken the opportunity of this moment to pull at the heartstrings and conscience of the reader, Melville does not. He does not appropriate the voices of the chained figures in order to articulate what it is he imagines they feel. Instead, they remain silent and become not objects of pity, but objects of reflection, his, and by extension, his reader. With his succinct concluding comment on the statue, in which he does not expound on his emotional reaction, Melville chooses to let the reader deduce what he felt

as a spectator rather than *telling* him or her, avoiding indulging in sentimental rhetoric, the common language of feeling.

In the same novel, Melville juxtaposes the image of slavery the statue evokes with the state of freedom of black people in England, exemplified by their right to marry white people. He expresses his initial astonishment at observing interracial couples, composed of black sailors and white British women, walking about together unaccosted in Liverpool and openly challenging the taboo of miscegenation. Once again thinking of America, he remarks:

In New York, such a couple would have been mobbed in three minutes; and the steward would have been lucky to escape with whole limbs[. . .] Being so young and inexperienced then, and unconsciously swayed in some degree by those local and social prejudices, that are the marring of most men, and from which, for the mass, there seems no possible escape; at first I was surprised that a colored man should be treated as he is in this town; but a little reflection showed that, after all, it was but recognizing his claims to humanity and normal equality; so that, in some things, we Americans leave to other countries the carrying out of the principle that stands at the head of our Declaration of Independence. (277-278)

Forcing him to confront and to accept how his own racial beliefs were informed by prevailing social attitudes, the interracial couples and the freedom with which the black sailors moved about the city become symbols to Melville of the injustice of American racism and slavery. His sentiments are clearly reflected by the concluding lines of the passage. Melville's qualification of equality as "normal" in his adjectival use of the word calls attention to the abnormality of America's laws towards its black population. By "normal equality," Melville means rightful privilege. The final statement he makes on the issue that America "leave[s] to other countries the principle that stands at the head of [its] Declaration of Independence" addresses the irony he sees in his homeland's hypocrisy. Given that America declared and fought for its independence from England as a rejection of tyranny, America not practicing the rhetoric it preached indicated to Melville the fraudulence of the nation's moral and political laws.

Later, when he returned home to America after several years on various ships, and married, subsequently settling in Massachusetts, Melville's sympathies towards slaves and his distaste for slavery created a dilemma, for the writer found himself personally affected by the conflict over the Fugitive Slave Law that had been passed as a part of the Compromise of 1850. This federal law decreed that fugitive slaves found or captured in free states were to be returned to their owners and delivered back into slavery. Abolitionists were outraged by the passing of the law, because it was a major setback for their cause. The most controversial figure at the center of the conflict was Judge Lemuel Shaw, a federal judge in Boston, who also happened to be Melville's father-in-law. Presiding over Boston's Supreme Court, Judge Shaw gained notoriety when he became the first Northern judge to uphold the Fugitive Slave Act as lawful in 1851 in the Thomas Sims case. After Shaw's ruling, Sims, a fugitive slave from Georgia, was returned to his master and later nearly whipped to death as punishment for running away. Although the Sims case had to offend Melville's sense of justice, the Anthony Burns case that followed in 1854 would have had a particular impact on Melville because of the violence surrounding it. Violence as a means of rebellion interested Melville and appears as one of many themes in his fiction. Burns, a fugitive slave from Virginia, was captured by a slave-catcher in Boston and brought before the court. Many black and white antislavery activists, including William Lloyd Garrison and Henry David Thoreau, were incensed and delivered speeches denouncing all involved in the legal persecution of Burns. Though speeches, articles, and pamphlets rallied supporters for Burns's case, for others, words were not effective enough. During Burns's trial in May 1854, which was presided over by Judge Edward G. Loring, abolitionist Thomas Higginson led an attack on the court house in an attempt to rescue Burns from imprisonment. Wielding hatchets, Higginson and several of his followers rushed the courthouse steps and a riot broke out. Although the rescue attempt failed, the incidents during the Burns trial serve as a testament to the inflammatory passions on both sides over the slavery issue. For the remainder of the

hearings, there were armed guards outside of the Boston court house, and Judge Shaw, who was hearing a murder case during the Burns's hearings, requested a police escort to and from the courthouse. While Shaw was not involved with the ruling, Judge Edward G. Loring invoked Shaw's 1851 precedent in his own ruling when he decided against Burns.³

Given Melville's moral repulsion for slavery, he could not have agreed with a law sending fugitives back into slavery nor Shaw's 1851 decision, or Loring's in 1854 to uphold it. His predicament was that he could not freely say so; he was cautious of publicly criticizing Shaw's ruling. Having lost his biological father at an early age, for Melville, Shaw was not only his father-in-law but also a sort of substitute father and benefactor. One illustration of his admiration of his father-in-law is the fact that the first novel Melville published, *Typee* (1846), he chose to dedicate to Lemuel Shaw. Because of his close relationship to Judge Shaw, Melville's silence, even in his private correspondence written during this period, is unsurprising. Unable publicly to directly address his political stance on the controversy surrounding the slavery debate, Judge Shaw, and abolitionism, Melville chose a safer, more familiar route -- his fiction. In her full-length study on slavery and race in Melville fiction, Carolyn Karcher has addressed the political and personal conflict Melville felt about slavery; she believes writing about it allowed Melville to "achieve an uneasy truce between his conformist and rebellious selves."⁴ "Benito Cereno" is inarguably his most explicit commentary on the controversy. Significantly, Melville's choice to use the factual account of Captain Amasa Delano, a Massachusetts native, as his source makes quite obvious how the events in Massachusetts affected him and in part, inspired the writing of "Benito Cereno."⁵

Besides the building tensions between the North and the South over the slavery question, by the middle of the nineteenth century, there was a growing sense of immediacy to resolve the slavery debate not only for political reasons but also for social reasons. The Boston riot had already illustrated there was a propensity towards violence

over the issue, and there was yet another increasing and unsettling phenomena that was cause for even more concern emerging -- slave revolts. Toussaint L'Ouverture's rebellion in Haiti (then known as St. Domingo) in 1799, the revolt heard around the world, sent a reverberative warning, lasting for years, of the constant threat of violent insurrection. What made Toussaint's rebellion especially frightening was that unlike previous attempted uprisings that were quelled, it was one of the bloodiest and it was successful, ultimately culminating with his declaring himself the country's ruler in 1802. Although the island would later be recaptured by Napoleon and Toussaint deposed and imprisoned, the message was sent. Slaves could not be contained. Particularly in America, the threat pervaded the nation's consciousness. American slaves could use Toussaint as a model in their own push for freedom. The Haitian slave revolt showed the natural measures an oppressed people would take to overthrow their oppressors. Incidentally, it also did not help that in its own rejection of England's tyranny, America itself had set up the paradigm of rebellion as a means to gain independence.⁶ Following the precedent of the Haitian rebellion, there soon were slave uprisings in America, one of the most effective and more frightening ones for the country being Nat Turner's revolt in 1831. Claiming to be guided by God, Nat Turner, with several followers, indiscriminately murdered more than fifty white people in Virginia. Scholar Iyunolu Osagie, observes that through Turner "The [American] slaveholding society soon realized that Saint Domingue was no longer a remote threat to the status quo; it was throbbing in the veins of the seemingly quiescent black population."⁷

In addition to Toussaint's revolt, another foreign slave rebellion reached America, but this time literally. In 1839, African slaves who had been captured by Spanish slave traders and illegally sold in Cuban slave markets were being transported by their owners to a Caribbean island on a ship named *The Amistad*. During the journey, the slaves onboard, led by the African Singbe, also referred to as Cinque, rebelled, and the Spanish enslavers became the enslaved. The Africans demanded the Spanish return them home,

but the Spanish deceived them by instead guiding the ship away from the Africans's destination. In the summer of 1839, after being at sea for months, the *Amistad* reached the northern coast of America, forced to dock in New York because provisions on the ship were becoming scarce. What followed was a historic court case. This same summer that the *Amistad* docked in New York was the same summer the young Melville left New York for his first tenure at sea as a cabin boy. The events surrounding the *Amistad* revolt unfolded before him. Consequently, though Melville used the account in Delano's *A Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern* as the primary source for his story, the *Amistad* case, Turner's rebellion, and the Haitian revolt all served as secondary imaginative sources for "Benito Cereno." In them, he saw different powerful models of black resistance from which he could draw for his novella's theme, as well as commanding leaders on which to base his portrayal of the resourceful and intelligent Babo.⁸

During the fifties, besides dealing with the political upheaval over the slavery issue, Melville also found himself experiencing an artistic and financial crisis. While his first two novels *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847) positioned him as a critical success, near the end of the decade, the reception of his subsequent publications was "hit-or-miss." This was most notably true of his novel *Mardi* (1849), which received overwhelmingly poor reviews and also sold poorly. In late 1850, when he began work on his epic *Moby-Dick* (1851), in correspondence to friends during its writing, Melville expressed apprehension about how his whaling romance would be received. After the failure of *Mardi*, he realized that masculine sea adventures did not fare well in a literary market dominated by sentimental literature with its largely female readership. His cognizance of his dilemma is evident in letters Melville wrote to two female acquaintances in which he addressed *Moby-Dick*. In one letter to Sarah Huyler Morewood, a family friend, Melville writes, "Concerning my own forthcoming book -- it is off my hands, but must cross the sea before publication here. Don't you buy it -- don't you read it, when it does come out,

because it is by no means the sort of book for you. It is not a peice [sic] of fine feminine Spitalfields silk -- but is of the horrible texture of a fabric that should be woven of ships' cables & hausers [sic].”⁹ In addition, a year after *Moby-Dick*'s publication, in a letter to Sophia Hawthorne (Nathaniel Hawthorne's wife), Melville expresses surprise at receiving her positive response to the novel. He writes, “It really amazed me that you should find any satisfaction in that book. It is true that some *men* have said they were pleased with it, but you are the only *woman* -- for as a general thing, women have small taste for the sea”(emphasis author's).¹⁰ While Melville's tone in both of these letters is a teasing one, there is a sense of seriousness and truth behind the humor in his acknowledgment of the sensibilities of the female readers who were largely dictating the literary market. It is in a letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne in which Melville's frustration about the literary climate and its affect on his career is most tellingly revealed. He writes, “Dollars damn me; and the malicious Devil is forever grinning in upon me, holding the door ajar . . .What I feel most moved to write, that is banned, -- it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the *other* way I cannot. So the product is a final hash, and all my books are botches.”¹¹ Melville's italicized emphasis on the word “other” not only appears to be a reference to the conventions of sentimentalism, but also conveys how he felt about sentimental literature. His emphasis on the word “other” both defines his own work strongly against those written in the sentimental tradition as well as suggests a sense of authorial elitism. He refuses even to name what “the *other* way” is.

Although Melville's expectations that *Moby-Dick* would not fare well prepared him for its reception, when the novel debuted in November 1851, he was still disappointed by its lack of success. Despite some positive reviews, sales were lukewarm. His hopes of regaining his former popularity and of being considered a great American literary figure, like his idol Hawthorne, were dashed. Several months before *Moby-Dick* appeared, Harriet Beecher Stowe had begun publishing serialized installments of what would become her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) in the antislavery publication *The*

National Era. Grounding her story in domesticity and Christianity, Stowe tells the tales of several slaves and how the institution has severely impacted their lives, with her centerpiece being the novel's title character. In her narrative, as a technique in order to persuade her audience to take action, Stowe relies heavily on sentimental rhetoric and romanticized stereotypical portrayals of black slaves as noble, suffering beings. When *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the prototype of sentimental abolitionist literature, was finally published in novel form, it so engaged the public that it quickly became a success. While there is no evidence of whether Melville read Stowe's novel, he inarguably was familiar with it. It was the most popular novel in the country at the time, and Melville was known to be a curious and voracious reader. It would be hard to believe that he did not read it. For Melville, the fact that a novel written in that "other way" was such a literary success, financially and with the public, surely must have poured salt into his still smarting wound over *Moby-Dick's* reception. It is of no small significance that "Benito Cereno," which I will be reading as a critique of sentimental abolitionism, appeared a few short years after *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* publication as a novel.¹²

While on one level, "Benito Cereno" is Melville's personal response to Stowe's novel, on another, it is also his artistic response to the conventions of popular sentimental abolitionist literature in general. Before being published as part of the collection *The Piazza Tales* (1856), the novella first appeared serialized in *Putnam's Monthly*, a magazine which Sarah Robbins argues, "positioned itself to reject feminine, sentimental authorial voices and characterizations in favor of a more detached, self-consciously intellectual, and often ironic discourse inviting distanced critique of social issues rather than tears."¹³ "Benito Cereno" fit firmly within *Putnam's* mission. For an author like Herman Melville, to use the conventions of sentimentalism to address the brutal reality of slavery is problematic; sentimentality means one's approach to the subject was governed by the audience's sensibilities and a rhetoric that compromised the representation of slavery as it truly was. In her influential study *The Feminization of American Culture*,

Ann Douglas has addressed how Melville resisted sentimentalism, in form and content, because he wanted to “set forth things as they actually exist,” or in other words, tell the truth, to his readers.¹⁴ Melville’s aesthetics were in direct opposition to Stowe’s, who in her *Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, wrote that “slavery, in some of its workings, is too dreadful for the purposes of art. A work which should represent it strictly as it is would be a work which could not be read; and all works which ever mean to give pleasure must draw a veil somewhere, or they cannot succeed.”¹⁵ In “Benito Cereno,” in his appropriation of the sentimental tradition in antislavery writing, Melville, too, purposefully draws a veil. However, he draws it only to deliberately and abruptly yank it down, exposing the fraudulence of the veil (sentimentalism) and what it conceals (racism, gender and sexual politics, an apologist agenda). Besides the cloaking, Melville also appears to have felt that the power of political and social protest was softened by the emotionalism of sentimental rhetoric. By choosing a factual account of a bloody slave revolt to reenvision, he chose an element of slavery that could not be sentimentalized and therefore rendered “safe” for his audience to bear. Instead of tears, in “Benito Cereno,” Melville’s motive in his subversive use of sentimental conventions is to elicit fear in order to force readers to confront their misperceptions of the black slave. In his depiction of the African Babo and Babo’s relationship with his master, Don Benito Cereno, he challenges the “good Negro” construction as sentimental myth and exposes the violent center of the master-slave relationship often romanticized in both sentimental abolitionist and proslavery literature.

In Melville’s portrayal of the relationship between Don Benito Cereno and Babo as an ironic inversion of social power, he re-genders the characters against sentimental stereotype by feminizing the white master and not the black male slave. Largely overlooked in Melville criticism, but crucial to this re-gendering, are Cereno’s effeminate demeanor, in Delano’s eyes, and his sickly constitution, both of which cast Cereno as a male playing the role of a victimized sentimental heroine. Also, a result of his

feminization is that it underscores the homoerotic tension surrounding his relationship with Babo, a tension that becomes even more charged through Melville's depicting of their relationship as a marriage and his symbolic use of the color gray to suggest the fear of miscegenation. The physical closeness of white bodies to black ones may intensify the underlying sexual tension of the interactions between men, as well as the volatility such proximity produces. Melville's use of the color gray to emphasize the gothic elements of the narrative as it relates to the setting is well known, but few have made the connection of how it relates to race. The color, created by the mixture of black and white, is used symbolically to address the terror of race-mixing. This terror is not just exemplified by the violence informing Cereno and Babo's relationship, but is also personified by Melville's portrayal of the scheming mulatto steward Francesco. In his characterization of Francesco as false and dangerous as Babo, Melville de-romanticizes another sentimental stereotype of antislavery literature, by portraying the mulatto, a character who traditionally exhibits the same qualities as a "good Negro," as being unstable as his darker-skinned counterpart.

In the portrayal of Captain Amasa Delano, who I argue plays at being an abolitionist, as the benevolent observer of the master-slave relationship, Melville indicts white, Northern abolitionists (the predominant authors of sentimental antislavery literature) for their sentimentality and hypocrisy. A Yankee from the free state of Massachusetts, Delano's romanticized perceptions of blackness are unmasked as the same racial prejudices and politics of that of the Southern slave owner or planter. By blurring this line between the "abolitionist" and the slave owner, Melville implicitly calls into question the agenda of Northern abolitionists to their politics.¹⁶ It is significant that when Delano finally discovers that the Africans on board the *San Dominick* are in a state of misrule, the benevolent ship captain's first impulse is to restore the "spectacle of disorder" by attempting to re-enslave the slaves. His moral superiority to Cereno is

revealed as yet another masquerade enacted in the tale in his complicity. He is as tainted as the man he judges.

In the novella, linked to Melville's critique of sentimental abolitionist literature and writers is his critique of the audience who was responsible for, and therefore perpetuated, the success of both. The voices of Delano and of the tale's narrator are crafted to lure the unsuspecting reader into the masquerade. The deception works in "Benito Cereno" because Melville is aware of how much readers were invested in sentimental conventions and stereotypes. If he indicts the sentimental abolitionist writer for employing them, then he indicts the sentimental reader for accepting them. Consequently, his depiction of the slave revolt, and more specifically Babo, not only challenges sentimentalism but also forces his audience to ask themselves a most unsettling question: What did they *really* know about black slaves? This question becomes arguably the most anti-sentimental abolitionist literature act in the novella because Melville refuses to answer it for them. Babo's silence at the novella's conclusion is Melville's rejection of assuming the white moral authority of sentimental abolitionism, which purports to know and to speak for slaves. By refusing to appropriate the voice of the slave, Melville steps outside of the tradition. There is no remorseful, sentimental speech given by a converted Babo or an emotional plea made by the author calling for slavery's end and the reader's aid. There is only the detached legal language of the court documents and the concluding image of Babo's decapitated head atop a pole.

At the story's beginning, when Delano first boards the foreboding *San Dominick*, Melville lays the foundation for how sentimentalism will serve to mask the true nature of the Spaniard Don Benito Cereno and his servant Babo's relationship throughout the tale.¹⁷ The ship, which has been drifting at sea for many days, is in a state of advanced decay. Like the ship, its captain is also in a state of disintegration. Delano's opinion of Cereno in their first encounter is he moved like a "hypochondriac abbot" and that Cereno's body "with nervous suffering was almost worn to a skeleton" (52). Cereno's illness gives

Delano the occasion to mark Babo's behavior towards his master: "Sometimes the negro gave his master his arm, or took his handkerchief out of his pocket for him; performing these and similar offices with that affectionate zeal which transmutes into something filial or fraternal acts in themselves but menial; and which has gained for the negro the repute of making the most pleasing body servant in the world; one, too, whom a master need be on no stiffly superior terms with, but may treat with familiar trust; less a servant than a devoted companion"(52). Obliging Delano's request to explain how the ship came to be in such an unfortunate situation, Cereno recounts how his ship encountered strong gales off the Cape Horn that battered the *San Dominick*, blowing it off course. There then was an outbreak of scurvy that claimed the lives of most of his crew and the African slaves who were part of the cargo. Throughout his account of these events, Cereno experiences a series of fainting spells and has to be physically supported by Babo, who encircles his master's body in a "half embrace"(56). When Cereno compliments Babo for maintaining order among the remaining slaves who outnumber the Spanish crew on board and his (Cereno's) own survival, Babo humbly responds that he has only done what is expected of him. Witnessing this exchange and Babo's concern for his master's health, Delano is impressed by the scene before him. In admiration of Babo, Delano says, "Faithful fellow! . . . Don Benito, I envy you such a friend; slave I cannot call him"(57). He is enchanted by the portrait of the two men together: "As master and man stood before him, the black upholding the white, Captain Delano could not but bethink him of the beauty of their relationship which could present such a spectacle of fidelity on the one hand and confidence on the other"(57). In both of these early scenes in the novella where Delano views the master-slave bond through the lens of sentimentalism, Melville presents a tableau common to sentimental antislavery literature. Babo is the stereotype of the noble or "good Negro," who even under the yoke of slavery, dotes on the person keeping him or her enslaved, and Cereno is the master who depends on this "good Negro" to be his faithful servant, which also entails warning him of potential slave uprisings. This

symbiotic bond between a “good Negro” and his master is represented by Cereno’s physical dependence on Babo. Cereno’s physical need to be supported and Babo’s earnestness to do so reflect their emotional investment in each other and cement their union. Impressed by their seemingly mutual dedication, Delano does not see the unequal power informing the relationship, but instead sees only the beauty of it. The tableau indulges his sentimental fantasies, especially about slaves. Blinded to the true nature of the master-slave relationship before him, Delano’s sentimentality is a symptom of what Gloria Harsley-Meacham calls his “racial myopia”(44). As the depiction of Babo will show, Delano’s inability to see blackness outside of its sentimental social construction can be read as Melville’s comment on popular depictions of black characters and nineteenth century attitudes about black people.

Besides the sentimental portrait of a master and his doting slave, the passages also present a problem often found in sentimental discourse of antislavery fiction. The fact that Delano could not but “bethink . . .the beauty of their relationship,” as well as his comment “slave I cannot call him,” illustrates his reluctance to associate their relationship with the ugliness of slavery. In his sentimentalizing, rather than the economic bonds that tie the two men together, he sees the bonds of friendship and de-emphasizes Babo’s condition as a slave by calling him a “devoted companion” and “friend” to his master. Some abolitionist writers, in their fictional representations of black slaves as “good Negroes,” emphasized this type of bond between a slave and a “good” master or mistress (another sentimental character and stereotype). Positioning slaves as “friends” to their masters or mistresses, instead of property, comes dangerously close to suggesting their condition is not as unbearable as it is. Even while the abolitionist writer’s purpose was to free slaves from their suffering and oppression, the issue of ownership, when it involves a “good” master, is downplayed. This is because in sentimentally transforming enslavement into friendship in the master-slave bond, there is an illusion of an equality that crosses

racial and social boundaries where there is none. No wonder, then, that this “spectacle of fidelity” in Melville’s “Benito Cereno” later gives way to a “spectacle of disorder.”

It is only when Cereno allegedly behaves as a bad master that Delano confronts the more uncomfortable realities of slavery, and his idyllic picture of Cereno and Babo’s relationship begins to crack. In two highly symbolic scenes of the novella, Delano is forced to see the abuse of white power over black bodies in a way he can not romanticize, and his glimpse of slavery’s reality makes him feel abolitionistlike sympathies. In an early scene, Delano witnesses an exchange involving Cereno and the slave Atufal, who are engaged in such a racialized power struggle. A former king in his native Africa, Atufal is the only slave on board the *San Dominick* who wears the physical accouterments of enslavement. He is described as wearing “an iron collar about his neck, from which depended a chain, thrice wound round his body; the terminating links padlocked together at a broad band of iron, his girdle” (61). Delano learns the chained Atufal is brought before Cereno every two hours to beg his master’s pardon for an offense he has committed. Impressed by Atufal’s submissive demeanor and his royal lineage, Delano asks Cereno to forgive Atufal’s crime and to end his punishment. However, he is told by Babo that Cereno can not do so because “The slave there carries the padlock, but master here carries the key” (63). Jean Fagan Yellin has appropriately called this scene “a burlesque of the somewhat less familiar abolitionist vision of black people as victims”(214). In requesting the noble Atufal’s freedom and seeing him as victimized by his master’s authority, Delano displays abolitionist-like inclinations, and in effect, briefly assumes the stance of one.

Melville continues to play around with Delano performing the role of pseudo-abolitionist when later in the story, Atufal reappears a second time before Cereno to repeat the ritual. Delano playfully chides Cereno, who has kept Atufal waiting for their scheduled appointment, saying, ““Ah now, pardon me, but that is treating the poor fellow like an ex-king indeed. Ah, Don Benito . . .for all the license you permit in some things, I

fear lest, at bottom, you are a hard bitter master'" (94). Though still ignorant of the drama being staged for him, he re-classifies the type of master he initially thought Cereno was because Cereno's behavior threatens his sentimental fantasy. Behind Delano's jocular scolding lies a censoring critique, which becomes especially evident by his interpretation of Cereno's reaction to his comment. After making his observation, Delano feels he has reached Cereno when he believes he sees Cereno cringe from his words "with a genuine twinge of his conscience" (94). The moral and emotional effect Delano believes his words have on Cereno reflects the purpose and powers of sentimentality in antislavery writing. Words have the power to wound. The ability to touch the slave master's conscience with words is the first crucial step to promote change.

Further illustrating the idea of Delano as an antislavery sympathizer of affect, in an incident following the famous shaving scene in which Babo cuts Cereno and draws blood, Delano echoes the thematic didacticism of sentimental discourse in abolitionist literature. After he witnesses Babo's "accidental" cutting of Cereno's cheek, Delano exits Cereno's cabin because he feels his presence is not wanted. Shortly after his departure, he turns to see Babo, who has also exited the cabin, clutching a hand to his bleeding cheek. Babo informs him Cereno has sliced his cheek in punishment for his having mistakenly cut Cereno's. Disturbed, Delano thinks, "Is it possible. . . was it to wreak in private his Spanish spite against this poor friend of his, that Don Benito, by his sullen manner, impelled me to withdraw? Ah, this slavery breeds ugly passions in man -- Poor fellow!" (88). Delano's statement that "slavery breeds ugly passions in man" not only explicitly connects him to the politics of abolitionism, but also serves to illustrate how he sees himself as morally superior to the slave-trading, slave-owning Cereno. His impulse to free Atufal and to empathize with Babo removes him, at least in Delano's eyes, from the contamination of slavery.

Although Cereno's acts of cruelty are in truth performances put on by Atufal and Babo for Delano's sake, Delano's sympathy for their predicament signals his

benevolence, which is a trait used in sentimental abolitionist literature to distinguish the characterization of white characters who have the capacity to be kind and good to slaves from those who do not. With his sentimentality, this benevolence masks his hypocrisy in his judgement of Cereno and his own racism and racial politics. He is no more benevolent than Cereno, though he certainly believes himself to be. Addressing Delano's observation of Babo's allegiance to his master, the narrator notes:

But if there be that in the negro which exempts him from the inflicted sourness of the morbid or cynical mind, how, in his most prepossessing aspects, must he appear to a benevolent one? When at ease with respect to the exterior things, Captain Delano's nature was not only benign, but familiarly and humourously so. At home, he had often taken rare satisfaction in sitting in his door, watching some free man of color at his work or play. If on a voyage he chanced to have a black sailor, invariably he was on chatty, and half-gamesome terms with him. In fact, like most men of a good, blithe heart, Captain Delano took to negroes, not philanthropically, but genially, just as other men to Newfoundland dogs. (84)

In this passage is a subtle, implied critique by Melville of Northern politics as they relate to race and slavery. The Yankee Delano can romanticize slaves and condemn Cereno because his interactions with blacks have been limited to free ones. Reading it in another context, the white Northern abolitionist writer who had no real experience with slavery, other than those stories related to them by fugitive slaves, could condemn the Southern plantation owner. The nostalgic flashback made by the narrator, that compares free blacks to Newfoundland dogs, not only reveals Delano's racism (evident throughout the tale), but also dehumanizes black people in much the same way sentimental stereotypes objectify African and black slaves. It is important to note that the narrator's comments link him to Delano, in that they imply a shared viewpoint. The role of the narrator as detached, trustworthy observer, then, is no more stable than the other roles in Melville's

“Benito Cereno,” and the sentimentality of Delano as he feigns “abolitionist” renders him and his benevolence as suspect as the goings on board the *San Dominick*.

Consequently, in his portrayal of Captain Amasa Delano, one of the questions Melville seems to pose implicitly in the novella is: Is the Northern abolitionist truly morally distinct from the Southern plantation owner turned Spanish sea captain? Melville’s answer is not only found in the questionable character of Delano, but also in Delano’s actions, which reflect this ambiguity. As John Haegart argues, “As for any claim [Delano] may have to moral ascendancy with the work, [readers] have already had the occasion to observe just how riddled with prejudice his American ‘innocence’ really is. If he is not evil himself, then he is unquestionably implicated - both by choice and by circumstance - in the institutional evils which have shaped his ideology”(33). The question of to what extent Delano is evil is illustrated in the narrative by the way Melville cleverly ties Delano to slavery. Just as he blurs the line between the “good Negro” and the rebellious savage (as I will argue later), Melville blurs the line between the abolitionist and the slave owner. Revealing Delano’s hypocrisy, he lifts Delano’s mask by linking him to slavery in two ways -- one subtle and one not. Although Delano claims that “slavery breeds ugly passions in man” and is disturbed by what he believes is his confirmation of this in Cereno’s behavior, he is so impressed by Babo’s devotion to his master that he offers to buy him from Cereno for himself. After viewing a violent altercation between two slaves and a Spanish sailor, “His glance called away from the spectacle of disorder to the more pleasing one before him [the sentimental portrait of Cereno and Babo], Captain Delano could not avoid again congratulating his host upon possessing such a servant, who, though perhaps a little too forward now and then, must

upon the whole be invaluable to one in the invalid's situation. 'Tell me, Don Benito,' he added, with a smile -- 'I should like to have your man here myself -- what will you take for him? Would fifty doubloons be any object?'" (70). Whether one reads Delano's offer as tongue-in-cheek or as sincere is debatable; but the more significant issue are the implications of the offer itself. In jest or not, there is the sense that he is not ethically opposed to owning a slave; he is only morally opposed to the ill treatment of one. And it is also in this brief scene where he places a price on Babo's head, when Delano comes closest to acknowledging Babo's true condition, not as a servant or a friend to his master but a slave. His valuation of Babo as being worth "fifty doubloons" identifies Babo as both a commodity and property.

The other way Melville links Delano to slavery is near the conclusion of the novella when Babo and the masquerade are unmasked. When all is revealed, Delano "with the scales dropped from his eyes, now saw the negroes, not in misrule, not in tumult, not as if frantically concerned for Don Benito, but with mask torn away, flourishing hatchets and knives, in ferocious piratical revolt" (99). Melville's use of the adjective "piratical" to describe the slave revolt instead of calling it a mutiny, which would seem to be a more appropriate term for a rebellion at sea, is highly ironic in its symbolism. The word "piratical" calls attention to how Delano sees the African slaves as thieves, and the irony is the booty being stolen are their own bodies. His sentimental portrait cracked, Delano, along with his crew from *Bachelor's Delight*, violently fights to restore the proper social order of things, in other words, to re-enslave the slaves. No longer the at-sea plantation myth of happy slaves, for Delano they become fugitives, a term during the nineteenth century commonly associated with runaway slaves (101). In

re-capturing them, as Sarah Robbins argued, Delano is “enacting. . .an at-sea version of compliance with the Fugitive Slave Act.”¹⁸ What does it mean for the same “abolitionist” who earlier sympathized with the plight of Atufal and Babo, that the moment the slave acts outside of the sentimental stereotype, the first impulse to act is as an enslaver would? By characterizing the disparity between Delano’s behavior and his somewhat abolitionist-like beliefs when he believes Cereno’s slaves are being mistreated, Melville suggests beneath the veneer of sentimentalism in antislavery literature lie complicated racial politics towards blackness, intimating some abolitionists are no less morally tainted than slavery’s apologists. As Eleanor E. Simpson observes, “The abolitionists . . .helped perpetuate both the docile primitive and Sambo stereotypes . . . White spokes[people] for Negro rights probably relied on such stereotypes to evoke sympathy, inasmuch as they permitted the public to retain undisturbed its assumptions of the Negro’s inferiority and at the same time to be ‘tolerant’ and ‘Christian’ at no risk.”¹⁹ Besides questioning the motives of abolitionists by exposing how sentimental discourse can cloak racism and a suspect agenda, Melville also unmasks the gender politics at work in antislavery fiction. He accomplishes this through subversion, by inverting the gendered roles of the relationship between a white master and a black slave. Typically, in sentimental antislavery literature, the black male slave as a “good Negro” is feminized in relation to his white master. (His female counterpart is usually desexualized.) His feminization asserts the same patriarchal authority exercised over the white mistress and the black female slave. Melville rejects the sentimental stereotype of the feminized male slave in his ironic inversion of the hierarchical power that informs the master-slave relationship. In “Benito Cereno,” it is the white master, Cereno, who becomes feminized in his

enslavement to Babo. Through this inversion, Melville demonstrates how one's manhood (and womanhood), regardless of race, becomes degraded by tyranny over the body. Cereno is feminized, for he is rendered powerless and ineffective as the ship's captain. His manhood is not only defined by his title as captain of the *San Dominick* but also the ship itself, which is a symbol of masculinity. To have the former seized and to not have control of the latter marks him as impotent -- castrated and sterile. Subject to Babo's will, he is emasculated. When he observes one of Cereno's crew being struck by a slave and Cereno's subsequent refusal to punish the offending slave, Delano thinks, "I know no sadder sight than a commander who has little command but the name" (59). It is clear by "no sadder sight" that Delano sees Cereno as something less than a man. With the prevailing attitudes of nineteenth-century America that defined social power in terms of whiteness and masculinity are challenged on board Melville's ship as white metaphorically becomes black (the reversal of the master-slave roles), and man becomes woman-like.²⁰

Integral to Benito Cereno's feminization is how his illness also serves to gender him. Throughout the narrative, Cereno experiences coughing attacks and fainting spells that cause him to swoon into arms of the ever present Babo. Of this swooning, Sandra A. Zagarell argues that as a "parody of the fragile, genteel lady," Cereno "evinces the consequences of his emasculation by responding as though he has been raped" (134). Violently stripped of his manhood, Cereno behaves as a victimized woman; spells and swooning are conventions applied to suffering female protagonists of sentimental fiction whose womanhood has been threatened or violated. Also feminizing Cereno is that these physical symptoms and his nervous behavior mark him as suffering from hysteria, which

was still commonly believed to be a female disease during Melville's era. It is because of the type of illness Cereno suffers that Delano treats him gently, as one would the nineteenth-century woman, in a condescending manner, for he perceives him as having a feminine constitution. As a hysteric, Cereno is not a man, not only because he has lost control of his ship and crew, but also because he has lost control of his emotions. Regarding the latter, to Delano, Cereno's extreme emotional behavior is both indicated by his hysteria as well as by his temperament, i.e. when he cuts Babo's cheek in an angry outburst. In addition to Cereno losing his manhood and emotional control, Delano also sees him as losing his mind. While he attributes Cereno's strange behavior to the emotional trauma he has suffered, Delano diagnoses him as mentally unstable, calling him a "half-lunatic"(52), a "victim of a mental disorder" (53), and an "unstrung, sick man" (86).

Though Melville establishes Cereno's feminization in sentimental terms, he addresses his madness in gothic terms. Captain of the decomposing vessel *San Dominick*, Cereno's fragile mental health is symbolically connected to the decaying ship just as Poe's Roderick Usher's descent into madness is reflected by the crumbling House of Usher. In his study on madness in Melville fiction, Peter McCarthy posits Cereno suffers from "moral insanity," which he generally defines as "a mental disease which affects primarily the emotions and may affect the cognitive faculties. The symptoms . . .rang[e] from an absence or diminution of feelings to pronounced displays of hatred, fear, or melancholy."²¹ Unfortunately, in his brief analysis, McCarthy only scratches the surfaces of what this moral insanity means as it relates to the story's theme. McCarthy's discussion concentrates on the symptoms of Cereno's madness but does not delve deeply into the source of it. He attributes the ship captain's behavior to the condition of his ship

and crew and the slave revolt. While Cereno's madness is in part induced because of what happens on the *San Dominick*, the term "moral insanity" itself also implies that a *moral* issue or dilemma may be an exacerbating source of his fragmentation. Could Cereno's madness also be that he is suffering from guilt caused by his moral complicity with slavery?

Expanding on the gothic aspect of Cereno's madness, Melville connects Cereno's hysteria to the supernatural. When Delano inquires as to why the mention of Cereno's deceased friend's name Alexandro Aranda upsets him so, Cereno reacts violently. The narrator notes that "with horrified gestures, as directed against some specter, he unconsciously fell into the ready arms of his attendant [Babo] . . . This poor fellow now, thought the pained American, is the victim of that sad superstition which associates goblins with the deserted body of man, as ghosts with an abandoned house. How unlike are we made!" (61). In addition, Delano also refers to Cereno as a "hobgoblin" (69) and the *San Dominick* as a "haunted pirate-ship" (77). And later in the tale when Delano asks Cereno once more to recount the specifics of the events that led to the *San Dominick's* conditions, Cereno evinces gothic trauma. He responds, "as if this question reproduced the whole scene of the plague before the Spaniard's eyes, miserably reminding him of his solitude in a cabin where before he had so many friends and officers around him, his hand shook, his face became hueless, broken words escaped; but directly the same memory of the past seemed replaced by insane terrors of the present. With starting eyes he stared at vacancy" (90). Benito Cereno is a man being haunted by death and ghosts and figuratively in turn, becomes a ghost of a man. In effect, he is a gothicized version of a slave master, undermining Delano's sentimental perception of one. In the larger political and historical context, as many scholars have generally noted, the decay of Cereno (and the ship) symbolizes the degenerative effects of European and American slavery. However, in a literary context, Melville's use of gothicism also reflects how there are darker truths obscured or masked by sentimental discourse in antislavery literature.²² The

darker truths are the terrors of slavery that were the things Stowe vaguely deemed “too dreadful” to say or to represent.

Returning to the issue of Cereno’s feminization, a somewhat overlooked aspect of it is that it heightens the homoerotic tension of the master-slave relationship, with the homoerotic tension, in turn, heightening the taboo and fear of miscegenation. Some abolitionist writers, in their use of sentimentalism, unconsciously redirected attention away from such sensitive subjects by emphasizing the platonic friendship bonds in their portrayal of interracial relationships. Instead, in “Benito Cereno,” Melville toys around with these issues and anxieties. In his depiction of the relationship between Cereno and Babo, he portrays the master-slave bond as a marriage, an unnatural one made so by its violent undercurrent. This violent undercurrent between the two manifests itself in different ways. There is the alleged striking of Babo by Cereno, Cereno behaving, as Zagarell suggests, as if he has been raped, and when Babo tries to kill Cereno once all is revealed. Informed and bonded by violence, their relationship is a perverse romance. In *Love & Death and the American Novel*, Leslie Fiedler aptly describes the Cereno/Babo relationship as “an obscene parody of the intimate bond of lovers.”²³ Like all things in the novella, the unnaturalness of their relationship lurks beneath the sentimentalized surface. When Delano first observes the interactions between Cereno and Babo, he is not initially disturbed, because their relationship reaffirms his sentimentalized perception of that between a white master and his devoted black servant. Only when he begins noting that the two men are always together does he become increasingly uncomfortable. One senses it is not the emotional attachment between them that unnerves Delano, but their physical proximity to each other. This physical closeness is not only Babo simply standing near Cereno. Babo also continuously touches his master’s body in order to physically support him. While Cereno’s physical dependence on him is because of Cereno’s deteriorating mental and emotional state, it serves to increase the physical intimacy between white and black bodies. Throughout the tale, Babo often has one arm encircled around Cereno, and

whenever Cereno experiences fainting attacks that cause him to swoon, Babo catches him. These actions heighten the homoerotic tension of their marriage-like bond, a bond which takes on romantic overtones in the way it is described. After the shaving scene when Cereno allegedly slashes Babo's cheek in retribution for mistakenly cutting him, Delano is surprised when with Babo physically supporting Cereno, both men reappear from the cuddy and act as if nothing untoward has occurred. Delano dismisses their argument, thinking the master and slave have had "“But a sort of love-quarrel”" (88). Delano's description of their altercation as a "love-quarrel" gives the event a romantic twist, sentimentally trivializing and dismissing the brutality of slavery.

Interestingly, regarding this conflation of homoeroticism and violence, Ruth Knafo-Sutton, who calls Cereno and Babo's relationship "curious," has observed that "There is a sado-masochistic element in their relationship that seems to excite both of them."²⁴ And Carolyn Karcher even suggests Delano himself becomes excited by their violent relationship. Karcher proposes Delano experiences "passive homosexual fantasies" and argues Melville "associates slavery with sexual perversion and hints that it is the systematic fulfillment of an urge to debase and exploit other human beings."²⁵ (If Delano, with his sentimentalism cloaking his sexual arousal, participates in this homoerotic affair as voyeur as Karcher suggests, then he displaces his sexual desire onto a safer object - a female slave on board the *San Dominick*.) Given Knafo-Sutton and Karcher's observations, Delano's pronouncement that "slavery breeds ugly passions in man" assumes an altogether different meaning. Melville's portrayal of the Cereno/Babo union is reminiscent of another interracial "shipboard romance" or marriage between men -- Ishmael and Queequeg in Melville's *Moby-Dick*. Sharing quarters with his newfound native friend, Ishmael theorizes, "there is no place like a bed for confidential disclosures between friends. Man and wife, they say, there open the very bottom of their souls to each other; and some old couples often lie and chat over old times till nearly morning. Thus, then, in our hearts's honeymoon, lay I and Queequeg -- a cosy, loving pair" (54).

This idyllic model of domestic happiness between men, one white and one cultural/racial other, in *Moby-Dick* becomes corrupted in “Benito Cereno” by the element of slavery. Also, the coupling of Cereno and Babo in a “marriage” is heightened by Delano’s own lack of a partner or his bachelorhood. While the name of Delano’s ship, *Bachelor’s Delight*, is meant to invoke a sense of carefreeness and innocence, both integral to the characterization of his blindness, the ship’s name also identifies how he is unmarried. Melville suggests a potential homoerotic link between Delano and Cereno by briefly “wedding” them. When Delano and Cereno sit down to lunch, it is described as, “Without companions, host and guest sat down, like a childless married couple, at opposite ends of the table [. . .]” (89).

The physical intimacy between Cereno and Babo and the discomfort Delano feels as a spectator of this close contact is how Melville raises the issue of the taboo and fear of miscegenation. Gray, a color created by mixing the colors black and white, is a threatening portent throughout the novella. The significance of it as it relates to race has remained largely unexplored. For example, in his article analyzing Melville’s use of gray in “Benito Cereno,” Guy Cardwell addresses Babo’s blackness and Cereno’s whiteness as stereotypical, racialized characters but neglects to speculate on what the connection between the two means in context of Melville’s symbolic use of gray.²⁶ Cardwell does not take that one further step. For example, what does Melville’s “marriage” between black and white mean? What does it mean that this coupling ends violently? The answers to these questions lie in Melville’s portrayal of Cereno’s mulatto steward Francesco, who is the personification of the threatening gray in the novella. Not only does Delano (and Melville’s sentimental reader) become alarmed by the charged physical intimacy between master and slave, but the product of such unions become troublesome. Because he is a secondary character, Francesco is often glossed over or ignored in “Benito Cereno” criticism. This is unfortunate, because with this intriguing character, in the same manner, Melville de-mythizes the sentimental stereotype of the “good Negro,” he destabilizes the

other “safe” construction of blackness in sentimental abolitionist literature - the mulatto.²⁷ In Melville’s antislavery story, the mulatto, in his “whiteness,” is revealed to be just as dangerous as the “sooty” Babo.²⁸

Melville achieves this (un)masking by presenting the privileging of the mulatto over the darker-complexioned African as contradictory. Following the shaving scene, when Cereno and Delano head to the captain’s cabin to lunch, the narrator remarks, “On their way thither, the two Captains were preceded by the mulatto, who, turning round as he advanced, with continual smiles and bows, ushered them on, a display of elegance which quite completed the insignificance of the small bare-headed Babo, who, as if not unconscious of inferiority, eyed askance the graceful steward. But in part, Captain Delano imputed his jealous watchfulness to that peculiar feeling which the full-blooded African entertains for the adulterated one” (88). In this passage illustrating Delano’s colorism, Babo’s “full-blooded” status marks him as subordinate to his lighter companion, as the words used to describe him against Francesco -- insignificant, small, and inferior -- illustrate. However, underscoring this association of superiority with complexions on Delano’s part is the positioning of the mulatto as a threatening figure. In admiration of Francesco’s dignified behavior, Delano says to Cereno, “I am glad to see this usher-of-the-golden-rod of yours; the sight refutes an ugly remark once made to me by a Barbadoes planter; that when a mulatto has a regular European face, look out for him; he is a devil.” When Cereno affirms Francesco’s goodness, Delano responds, “Ah, I thought so. For it were strange indeed, and not very creditable to us white-skins, if a little of our blood mixed with the African’s, should, far from improving the latter’s quality, have sad effect of pouring vitriolic acid into black broth; improving the hue, perhaps, but not the wholesomeness’s”(89). Paradoxically, “whiteness” gives the mulatto a more pleasing complexion, but *not* a more pleasing character. The mulatto becomes evil personified, a black body (the mulatto’s enslavement signals this no matter how light the complexion) with a “white” mask. Counter to prevalent sentimentalized

characterizations of mulattoes in antislavery literature, what makes Francesco dangerous is this whiteness, which Melville overtly emphasizes. Typically, both white antislavery and proslavery sentimental writers often measured the parallel between blackness to savagery in degrees or in other words, the darker the complexion, the more “African,” and consequently, the more savage. But by identifying whiteness as the “vitriolic acid,” Melville rejects this equation. In his portrayal of Francesco, he simultaneously indicts whiteness and subverts the sentimental writer’s and reader’s perceptions of blackness. The mulatto Francesco is neither “good” nor tragic, but murderous.

Melville accomplishes this dismantling of the sentimental stereotype of the mulatto through the use of irony. The truth about Francesco is revealed in the court documents following the recapture of the slaves and the *San Dominick*. In his deposition, Cereno relates the role Francesco played in the rebellion, testifying that “the mulatto steward, Francisco [*sic*], was of the first band of revolvers, that he was, in all things, the creature and tool of the negro Babo; that, to make his court, he, just before a repast in the cabin, proposed, to the negro Babo, poisoning a dish for the generous Captain Amasa Delano; this is known and believed, because the negroes have said it; but that Babo, having another design, forbade Francisco” (111). Ironically, the one performer in the masquerade Delano came closest to seeing through is the mulatto steward Francesco, though he is dissuaded by Cereno. This is because Delano never viewed Francesco through the same sentimental lens through which he viewed Cereno and Babo. On another level, Cereno’s later revelation in his deposition symbolically inverts Delano’s suggestion that whiteness “poisons” blackness, because in an act of reversal, Francesco seeks to literally poison Delano. As a result, the idea of racial contamination in “Benito Cereno” becomes reciprocal.

This idea of “cross poisoning” of miscegenation is also evident in two other more subtle allusions in the novella where Melville suggests the Spanish sailors become “tainted” by their close associations with the African slaves. In one scene when Delano

notices a sailor tarring, he observes “a sailor seated on the deck engaged in tarring the strap of a large block, with a circle of blacks squatted round him inquisitively eyeing the process. The mean employment of the man was in contrast with something superior in his figure. His hand, black with continually thrusting it into the tar-pot held for him by a negro, seemed naturally not allied to his face, a face which would have been a very fine one but for its haggardness” (71). The sailor’s symbolic tainting is illustrated in his being physically surrounded and enclosed by blackness (the encirclement of the slaves) and by his literal immersion into it (the tar-pot). The hand “naturally not allied” to his European face suggests difference and Delano’s view of the abnormality of this difference. And Cereno himself is an example of racial contamination because he is forever “poisoned” by his experience with the slaves. There is not only the intimation of miscegenation because of his relationship to Babo, but also a “blackening” that is internalized. Near the tale’s conclusion, when Delano asks, ““What has cast such a shadow upon you?,”” Benito Cereno replies, ““The negro”” (116). Aside from the symbolic miscegenation forced onto the sailors by the African slaves, voluntary “race-mixing” in the novella is tantamount to betrayal and also unnatural. Suspicious of Cereno’s strange behavior, Delano dismisses his suspicions thinking, ““Besides, who ever heard of a white so far a renegade as to apostatize from his very species almost, by leaguin in against it with negroes?””(75). The use of the word “species” is yet another example of Delano’s racism, for it implies he does not see the African slaves as human beings. For Delano, losing one’s whiteness means losing one’s claim to humanity.

Although miscegenation has dangerous overtones in “Benito Cereno,” because of Melville’s portrayals of volatile interracial relationships and his symbolic use of the foreboding color gray, this does not mean Melville himself was against it. During the time he spent overseas as a sailor, he does not report being appalled by interracial couplings but instead merely surprised by them. In “Benito Cereno,” miscegenation becomes a metaphor for the political and social conflict surrounding the controversy over

slavery to which Melville is responding. By manipulating the conventions of sentimental discourse to expose the violent undercurrent of relations between whites and blacks, he forewarns the unstable future of America. Slavery is a poison linking the uncertain fates of the Northern white abolitionist (Delano), the Southern slave owner (Cereno), and the slave (Babo, Atufal, and Francesco) together. His critique of sentimentalism and the sentimental abolitionist writer is integral to this distress over the fragmented, fragile state of the nation. While sentimentalism was noble, in that it served the purpose of publicizing the plight of the slaves and calling for the abolishment of slavery, the power of the form meant assuming a moral authority and responsibility over the body of the slave and the government itself. (This is not an overstatement, lest we forget Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, even today, is often mythically cited as the book that ignited the Civil War.) With its merging of emotionalism and politics, it is easy to see then how sentimental power would make a writer like Melville wary of abolitionist writers having such a strong influence with the public to effect change. Perhaps what was most disturbing to Melville, as evidenced by his depiction of Delano, is how sentimental antislavery literature determined how the American reading public saw not just the "peculiar institution," but those at the center of it all -- the slaves. The romantic racialism intrinsic to sentimental discourse transformed the slave into a Romantic character, not a human being, but an objectified, stereotyped figure for literary consumption.

Melville challenges this casting of blackness in his characterization of the rebellious Babo. Babo is neither definitively a "good Negro" nor a "bad Negro," but yet another shade of gray in the novella, which is why he is one of the more controversial and revolutionary black characters in American Romantic fiction. Appropriating and manipulating sentimentalism, in his portrayal of Babo, Melville masks and unmasks the slave character to de-romanticize and de-Romanticize it. However, it is important to note this unmasking has long been a source of critical conflict in Melville scholarship. Some scholars have argued that Babo's savagery reaffirms and perpetuates negative stereotypes

about blackness, even while Melville is attempting to subvert them. Yet while there is no question Melville crosses and blurs dangerous lines, exclusively reading Babo as a primitivistic stereotype of a black slave is problematic. The danger of Babo may not be so much that he is stereotyped, as that sentimental readers are unable or unwilling to embrace Babo both as a “good Negro” and Babo as a savage. As Eleanor E. Simpson argues, “[Melville] has not said that Negroes in general are bestial and malevolent, but that Negroes -- like other men -- are capable of extreme violence and sadistic cruelty, especially when subjected to the dehumanizing conditions of slavery.”²⁹ This being said, if Melville’s depiction of Babo is solely dismissed as yet another example of an early American white writer demonizing blackness, then this means to reject the complexities of Babo and the novella itself. After all, “Benito Cereno” is a novella which compels us to read it twice -- once with the sentimental mask and then again without it. Forced to reread it for the clues, is not the modern reader just as “fooled” by Melville’s sentimental cloaking of Babo’s masquerade as the nineteenth-century reader? We must remember, as John Bryant observes, in Melville’s works his readers are quite often “victims of narrative cons.”³⁰ Therefore, when Melville ultimately lifts Babo’s mask at the tale’s conclusion, is the response of these same scholars who critique and categorize Babo as a savage in knee-jerk reaction similar to Delano’s response when he sees a different Babo? It is the same act of containment. When analyzing Melville’s depiction of Babo, it is not just Melville’s perceptions of blackness we must question, but also our own. Melville was subject to negative nineteenth-century perceptions about race and gender, but can Melville scholars say that they are any less influenced by their twentieth and twenty-first century perceptions of race and gender in their analyses of “Benito Cereno”? How we see Babo is not only through Delano’s eyes and Melville’s eyes but also our own. Addressing the criticism of Melville and his treatment of blackness in *Shadow over the Promised Land*, Carolyn L. Karcher argues, “The unique power of Melville’s rhetoric - the way it has of getting under our skin and making us squirm - perhaps reflects his

awareness that in sounding the depths of Delano's mind, he was exorcizing something of Delano's unhealthy attitude toward blacks from his own mind and participating in the discomfiture he was inflicting on the reader." She goes on to note, "Having himself trod his fine line separating legitimate anthropological racism [his fictionalized adventures in the South Seas], Melville surely knew what he was doing by repeatedly forcing the reader to cross it. . ." ³¹ Rather than just affirming stereotypes, Melville consciously exploits, explores and subverts them in a way that the other white author in my discussion who appropriated sentimental conventions to address slavery, Maria Edgeworth, does not.

In his critique of sentimental discourse in antislavery literature, one of the ways Melville de-romanticizes Babo is to de-objectify him at the conclusion of "Benito Cereno." Throughout the story, Melville emphasizes the color of Babo's skin and his physical proximity to Cereno, calling attention to the body of the slave. ³² Revealing Babo's punishment, the narrator states, "As for the black -- whose brain, *not body*, had schemed and led the revolt, with the plot -- his slight frame, inadequate to that which it held, had at once yielded to the superior muscular strength of his captor, in the boat . . . Some months after, dragged to the gibbet at the tail of a mule, the black met his voiceless end. The body was burned to ashes but for many days, the head, that hive of subtlety, fixed on a pole in the Plaza, met, unabashed, the gaze of whites;" (emphasis added) (116). Significantly, in the concluding image of Babo, Melville stresses Babo's lack of a body i.e. the decapitation, Babo's diminutive physical stature, and the burning of his body to ashes. With his body (object) gone, his head becomes subject. The focus is no longer on the black body, but the black mind. This is important, because earlier in the narrative, Melville is careful to illustrate how racism prevents whites from seeing the intellect of slaves. When Delano becomes suspicious of Cereno's behavior, he thinks, "The whites. . . by nature were the shrewder race. . . But if the whites had dark secrets concerning Don Benito, could then Don Benito be any way in complicity with the blacks? But they were too stupid" (75). By attributing Babo's brain as the source of the

masquerade and the rebellion, Melville revises the stereotype of the “bad Negro.” Ultimately, it is not Babo’s alleged savagery that is positioned as threatening in the novella; it is his cunning. Subject to the gaze of whites, Babo meets their gaze “unabashed,” which connotes an unapologetic defiance. As a result, his head, that “hive of subtlety,” serves a symbolic warning, not to other potentially rebellious slaves, but to whites. With Babo’s head situated atop a pole, the sentimental reader is forced to confront an unsentimental view of slaves and slavery.

Related to the de-objectifying of Babo’s body is Melville’s subversion of the sentimental abolitionist writer. At the novella’s conclusion, the destruction of the slave’s body means it is not only no longer sexual and economic property, but it is also no longer sentimental property. Because the discourse and conventions of sentimentalism call for the white abolitionist writer to appropriate the voice of the slave, the slave becomes a spoken for object. This appropriation means a privileging of the white voice over the voices of slaves’s, effectively silencing and robbing them of the authority over defining their own experience. (Even when former slaves began writing slave narratives, their narratives were still authenticated by their white editors). However, Melville resists assuming the white moral authority of sentimentalism by having Babo meet a “voiceless end.” (The decapitated head of Babo serving as a “voiceless end” echoes his earlier refusal to speak in the courtroom in his own defense.)³³ Unlike what we have come to expect in sentimental antislavery literature, Babo does not experience a sentimental conversion, meaning he does not woefully lament his situation, nor does he rail against the whites who have reenslaved him. Instead, Melville chooses to not have him speak at all. By not speaking or testifying for Babo, Melville acknowledges the boundaries of a white male writing blackness. As Brook Thomas argues, “As a true representative of the repressed, Babo cannot be contained. He is a figure whom Melville, in examining slavery, must represent, but for whom, as alien other, Melville can provide no voice.”³⁴

At the conclusion, besides Babo's silence, there is another rejection of sentimentalism that is rarely addressed in Melville criticism on "Benito Cereno," and this is *Melville's* silence. Typically at the end of a sentimental abolitionist tale, the author imposes himself or herself on the text and calls for the end of slavery and upon the reader to act. Melville makes no such emotional appeal. There is no moralizing comment meant to educate his reader or a plea for sympathy on behalf of the slaves. There is only Babo's head atop a pole. In departing from the formulaic ending of the tradition, Melville allows the narrative itself and the final image of Babo to serve as his commentary. By doing so, the didactic and moral responsibility is shouldered onto the part of the reader and not the author. And additionally, although some critics believe the inclusion of Cereno's deposition detracts from the story's power, my argument is that the cold, detached legal language of the court document serves the same purpose at the conclusion as Melville's silence.³⁵ The testimony is the antithesis of sentimental discourse. The truth of the events that occurred on board the *San Dominick* is related without romanticizing and cloaking. The language is direct and the information factual. For example, the deposition provides the number, origins, names, and ages of the slaves on board, the details of the mysteries involving the various sailors's strange behavior and their names, and the specific particulars of masquerade and revolt. It is the same story told, differently and in fact, it can be argued that "Benito Cereno" is composed of two stories -- one told through the sentimental lens of Delano and the other through the unobscured lens of Cereno.³⁶ Neither version of events is meant to leave the reader in tears.

Leaving his reader's eyes dry, in his appropriation and manipulation of sentimental conventions to critique sentimental abolitionist literature, the sentimental reader is also Melville's target. As Ann Douglas observes, "Melville regarded the reception of his books as a test which would ascertain what genuine masculinity, or as he tacitly defined it, what health and independence of mind, remained in American culture. The content and style of his work were to register his increasingly bitter disillusion with

his experiment[s]. Melville's subject came to be his readers, and his disappointment with them."³⁷ Illustrating how strongly Melville felt this disappointment towards his audience in her book, Douglas even titles this section of her discussion on Melville and sentimentalism "Melville and the Revolt Against the Reader." Melville, exploiting the reader's natural inclination to trust the narrator, draws his reader into accepting the deceptive cloaking properties of sentimentalism. The reader becomes a gullible spectator of the masquerade like Delano, for though the gothic elements in "Benito Cereno" heighten the reader's suspicions that something is awry, the sentimentalism redirects attention away from these suspicions. Melville's intention in doing so seems not to have been to make sentimental readers feel but to instruct them. Though they may identify with Delano, it is ultimately Cereno who Melville positions as the medium of the lesson they must learn. As Geoffrey Sanborn argues, "[Melville] shows Cereno sinking under the weight of this recognition ["the knowledge of difference is only *apparently* fixed and visible"] not because he wants his white readers to think themselves to death, nor because he wants them to swing back in the direction of Delano, but because he wants them to act otherwise: to learn how to live in a world where meaning is the product of ungrounded decisions, and where acts of illumination are always shadowed by the darkness they displace" (175). When Melville exposes the various masks in his antislavery tale, he robs sentimental readers of their faith and investment in the rhetoric and conventions of the form by rendering both suspect. The bond of fidelity between master and slave can not be trusted; the "good Negro" can not be trusted; Delano as the "abolitionist" can not be trusted; Cereno as the slave owner can not be trusted; the mulatto can not be trusted; the narrator can not be trusted; the formulaic plot can not be trusted; and most tellingly, the author who employs sentimental strategies can not be trusted.³⁸ By subverting the expectations of sentimental readers, Melville makes visible the uncomfortable aspects of slavery as they relate to race, gender, and the sexual that sentimentalism often works to spare them from. They are forced to enter the shadows. Additionally, as a consequence,

put in the position of falling for Melville's masquerade, his contemporary readers were forced to confront not being able to trust their own believed perceptions about blackness and slavery, a realization which I believe, as Fiedler has termed it, also induced a "full gothic shiver."³⁹

Melville apparently felt "Benito Cereno" was an important artistic and political statement, initially planning for it to be the title of his collection and the first story. For thematic purposes related to the collection's structuring, he changed his mind. In a letter to his publishers Dix & Edwards, he writes, "The new title selected for the proposed volume is '*The Piazza Tales*'s and the accompanying piece ('*The Piazza*') as given that name to the book, is intended to come first in order. . .In the corrected magazine sheets I sent you, *appended to the title* of '*Benito Cereno*'; but as the book is now to be published as a collection of '*Tales*'s, that note is unsuitable & had better be omitted."⁴⁰ Besides changing the title, interestingly, he also reversed the order in which "Benito Cereno" and "Bartleby the Scrivener" were to appear in the collection. The original table of contents of the collection under the title of *Benito Cereno & Other Sketches* read: "Benito Cereno," "Bartleby," "Bell-Tower," "Encantadas," and "Lightning-Rod Man." But in the same letter he retitles the collection, he alters the table of contents. The final order of the stories in the table of contents reads: "The Piazza," "Bartleby," "Benito Cereno," "Lightning-Rod Man," "Encantadas," and "Bell-Tower."⁴¹ While the other stories were also shuffled around, the reversal of "Benito Cereno" and "Bartleby the Scrivener" seems to have been done because Melville's intent was for them to serve as companion pieces. By positioning "Bartleby the Scrivener" before "Benito Cereno," it appears he hoped his readers would make the connection between one man's rebellion against economic slavery and conformity (Bartleby's mantra "I prefer not to") and the collective rebellion of the African slaves in "Benito Cereno" who prefer not to be enslaved. Nevertheless, despite the powerful comment Melville was making, upon its publication, "Benito

Cereno” seems to have been largely overlooked, as was Melville’s purpose behind its writing.

When it was first published in *Putnam’s*, one reviewer from the *New York Evening Post* contextualized Melville’s narrative with the true account by Captain Amasa Delano on which it is based. The reviewer writes:

One of his voyages [the real Delano] was commenced in 1799, when he sailed from Boston in the ship *Perseverance*, as master, and it was then that he had the little affair at St. Maria, which Mr. Melville has turned into a romance. The Spanish ship had sailed from Valparaiso for Lima, but when only a week out the slaves on board, seventy in number, with that perverse stupidity which has often been manifested by men deprived of their freedom, rose on the crew and captured the vessel . . . The upshot of the business was, that Capt. Delano’s men, with great gallantry, recaptured the Spaniard, and restored her to Benito Cereno.⁴²

The rest of the review is not devoted to critiquing Melville’s fictionalized version of events, but to the reviewer’s offense at Amasa Delano’s less than appreciative post-recapture behavior. (During the *Amistad* court proceedings, Delano argued he deserved a monetary reward as restitution for his travails.) To be fair the review *is* entitled “The *Origin of Melville’s Benito Cereno*” and explains why the emphasis would be on the fictional story’s source (emphasis added). Still, there is no comparison or contrast between the texts by the reviewer in the analysis, nor an overt statement of what he thinks about Melville’s tale. Nevertheless, his opinion of it is made quite evident by his sarcasm in the short passage when he does address “Benito Cereno,” referring to the bloody slave revolt as a “little affair” and Melville’s account of it as a “romance” (476). In addition, he also observes at the beginning of the review that “[Melville] is taking the same liberty with Captain Amasa Delano that he did with my old acquaintance, Israel Potter” (477). Given the sarcasm that follows this statement throughout the review, it is hard to believe the reviewer meant “taking the same liberty” as compliment. And when “Benito Cereno” was later published as a part of *The Piazza Tales*, one reviewer disdainfully observed,

“Herman Melville’s *Piazza Tales*, taken as a whole, will not augment his high reputation. ‘Benito Cereno’ is melodramatic, *not* effective . . . The author of ‘Typee’ should do something higher and better than Magazine articles.”⁴³ Another reviewer, misspelling the title as “Benita Cerino,” refers to the novella as a “somewhat amplified account of an insurrection of slaves on board a Spanish vessel.”⁴⁴

While other contemporary reviews were not as negative, they still neglected to address the significance of the narrative in context of the nation’s ongoing slavery debate, instead focusing on the telling of the story itself. For example, one critic wrote, “[Benito Cereno] opens with a mysticism which reminds us of Edgar Poe’s prose tales, and this mysticism is admirably preserved, even deepening in every character to the end, when all appears as clear as the sun at noon-day.”⁴⁵ Another noted, “[Melville] possesses in an eminent degree two indispensable requisites for a successful romance writer -- vivid imagination and remarkable descriptive powers. Take, for instance, the story in this volume, entitled ‘Benito Cereno’ -- in the descriptive it is unsurpassed by any thing which we ever read, and it keeps the reader’s imagination constantly exercised.”⁴⁶ And yet another reviewer from the *New York Sun* seemed to be at a loss for words as to how describe the tale, simply observing, “‘Benito Cereno’ is a strangely conceived story of a negro mutiny on board a Spanish vessel.”⁴⁷ Perhaps the reason behind the emphasis on the novella’s literary value is because Melville was not an “abolitionist writer,” meaning his contemporary reviewers and readers may not have read it as political and social commentary in the vein of those writers who were. Consequently, it would not be until a century later when “Benito Cereno” would be looked at critically within the literary and historical context in which it was written.

In his article “Melville Climbs the Canon,” in which he traces Melville’s inclusion in the exclusive canonical club of great American writers, Paul Lauter suggests even early twentieth century critiques of “Benito Cereno” were lacking because the persona of Melville as “spurned artist and prophet overwhelm[ed] all other ways of thinking about

his texts.” Lauter concludes that “Melville’s dramatization of American racism remains altogether hidden behind their [1920s and 1930s critics] construction of Melville’s biography as an archetype of the limits and frustrations of their own class position”(12). It was not until the 1950s that, perhaps stimulated by F.O. Matthiessen’s treatment of the author in his influential study on American literature *American Renaissance* (1941), scholars began examining the issue of race and slavery in “Benito Cereno” more closely. This renewed interest in reading the novella within a racial and cultural context may have also been a result of African American scholars in the academy who were developing their critical aesthetics towards blackness in a pre-Civil Rights and Black Arts Movements climate. During this period, two conflicting schools of thought on the novella emerged, best exemplified by the Joseph Schiffman versus Sidney Kaplan readings of the novella.⁴⁸ Schiffman believes Melville’s portrayals of race and slavery in “Benito Cereno” are progressively political. And even though Schiffman argues that “Melville did not intend [it] as an abolitionist tract”(33), he concludes his argument emphatically, noting: “What an indictment of slavery!,” strongly suggesting that he believes it is such a text (34). Kaplan, however, challenges Schiffman’s interpretation and argues that “the image of Melville as a subtle abolitionist in *Benito Cereno* may be a construction of generous wish rather than hard fact”(37). Kaplan contends Melville’s ambiguous color imagery and what he sees as Melville’s primitive depictions of the African slaves undermine any antislavery intentions because he seemingly reaffirms proslavery arguments about blackness. Unsurprisingly, the lightning rod for Kaplan’s critique is Babo, whom he reads as an example of Melville’s problematic animal imagery (Babo = baboon) and calls the “prototype of innate depravity” (45). The Schiffman/Kaplan arguments are significant because the dialogue existing since their opposing interpretations has been centered largely around their “either/or” debate.

Could Melville possibly be considered an abolitionist? Are his depictions of the African slaves on board the *San Dominick* racist? Is “Benito Cereno” a text that endorses

slavery or is it one that endorses rebellion? First, most certainly, Melville was not a practicing abolitionist, but as Schiffman suggests, there is a strong antislavery sentiment in the novella. To quote Karcher: "If Melville could neither embrace abolitionism as a program nor abolitionists as fellow travelers, he could and did join them in dramatizing the evils of slavery, in refuting the rationalizations by which southerners defended it and conservative northerners tolerated it, and in tracing its insidious corrosion of American democracy" (17). True, his constructions of the slaves do encompass negative stereotypes, but he had to employ those stereotypes in order to divest them of their power. To classify Melville as racist, as Kaplan does, without recognizing how he manipulates black stereotypes, is a bit dangerous. As I argued earlier in my discussion of *Babo*, to neglect to read Melville as a writer who was extremely conscious of race and difference in his fictional representations of the racial/cultural other is to do him a grave injustice. Simpson believes the problem lies not in Melville, but in the inability of scholars to distinguish fact from fiction in Melville's work. Taking Kaplan and his argument to task, she notes, "[Kaplan] makes the gratuitous assumption that Delano's attitudes are Melville's, a confusion which adherence to the most elementary principles of literary criticism would help him avoid [. . .] In objecting to Melville's imputation of malice to Negroes, [he] reveals that, like many white liberals, he wishes to exchange one stereotype (Negro as primitive) for another (Negro as hero -- as 'free spirit')." ⁴⁹ Yes, the slaves are recaptured and order is restored at the tale's conclusion, but the shadow of the Negro is a looming and unsettling one and order is forever deemed unstable. My feeling is that Melville's use of sentimental conventions plays a large part in these controversial disagreements, because the textual ambiguities make it difficult for scholars to decipher what is being meant from what is being said. The misinterpretation caused by his manipulation of sentimentalism is also complicated by his own conflicting philosophical beliefs. Karcher observes that "Melville was extremely ambivalent. The view he presents of slave revolt in 'Benito Cereno,' for example, is hardly that of an enthusiastic partisan.

Some critics have construed this as ipso facto evidence of racism and irresolute antislavery feelings [here Karcher alludes to a footnote referring to Kaplan]. Yet Melville betrays the same qualms about endorsing violent rebellion in all his works, be the rebels black or white. At the same time, he consistently exhibits tyranny as unbearable and resistance to it as essential if the victim of oppression is to preserve his manhood . . . By temperament Melville seems to have been at once a refractory conformist and reluctant rebel.”⁵⁰

And another scholar who has recognized the failure of engaging in such an “either/or” debate is Brook Thomas. Thomas theorizes, “Even readers holding neither view can argue that because the alternative, antislavery point of view is not explicitly supplied in the story, it cannot be attributed to it. While one reader can argue that it is precisely through presenting proslavery prejudices that Melville undercuts them, another can argue that [his] technique reinforces them. Ultimately, then, ‘Benito Cereno’ subverts its own power of subversion.”⁵¹ Thomas rightly concludes these complexities are the result of “the dilemma of a writer who senses the injustice of that system [slavery] but does not feel capable of offering alternative, affirmative visions to combat its injustice”(125). Like Karcher and Thomas, I believe Melville was somewhat uncertain about how to solve the slavery question. His silence at the novella’s conclusion, then, takes on even more meaningful overtones. My own reading of “Benito Cereno” as a critique of sentimental conventions in antislavery literature speaks to this dilemma, for if America is not prepared for violence as answer, Melville seems to be arguing, neither is sentimentalism one.

NOTES

¹ This Higginson quotation is cited by Charles Swann in his analysis of “Benito Cereno.” Swann, “*Benito Cereno: Melville’s De(con)struction of the Southern Reader*” in *Critical Essays on Herman Melville’s Benito Cereno* ed. Robert E. Burkholder (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1992) 180.

² Robertson-Lorant documents “tawney” as Melville’s family’s nickname for him (76). In her biography, Robertson-Lorant cites a brief passage from a letter Melville wrote to his father in which he uses dialect meant to represent African American speech. He wrote, “How is you? Am you very well? How has you been? As to myself I hain’t been as well as usual. I has had a very cruel cold for this darnation long time, & I has had and does now have a werry bad want of appetisement -- I seed Mrs. Peebles tother day and she did say to me to not to fail to tell you that she am well.” The letter concludes with Melville writing, “No more at present from you friend TAWNEY” (77-78). Robertson-Lorant explains, “Melville’s jocular note must be a response to racist barbs about his suntan, darted at him by friends and relatives who, like most genteel Victorians, associated tanned skin with peasants, primitives and slaves” (78). As one can easily observe, Melville’s attempt at dialect use is very poorly done. Addressing this awkwardness, Robertson-Lorant notes, “[Melville’s] mimicry of the blackface lingo made popular by white minstrels is inept compared with the ventriloquism of a Joel Chandler Harris or a Mark Twain, perhaps because Melville spoke with accents and inflections typical of his class . . . he appears to have had little ear for dialogue or slang” (79). Robertson-Lorant, *Melville: A Biography* (New York: Clarkson Potter Publishers, 1996) 76-79.

³ For an account of the events surrounding the riot and the testimony, see Joyce, *Boston Slave Riot and the Trial of Anthony Burns* 1854. (Northbrook, IL: North Metro Books, 1972). Another fascinating study of the Burns trial is by historian Albert J. Von Frank whose book addresses the trial within the context of Emerson and the Transcendental movement. While I was primarily interested in Von Frank’s book as a source for supporting details of the Boston riot, I found his work on the trial to be thorough and informative. Von Frank, *The Trials of Anthony Burns: Freedom and Slavery in Emerson’s Boston* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998) 61-70.

⁴ Karcher, *Shadow over the Promised Land: Slavery, Race, and Violence in Melville’s America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1980), 11-12.

⁵ Brook Thomas has done an intriguing analysis of the relationship between the controversy surrounding Shaw’s legal decisions and Melville’s story. One of the more interesting suggestions Thomas makes is that there may be similarities between Shaw’s problematic political beliefs (he was against slavery, but judicial law overruled his moral

distaste for it) and Melville's depiction of Delano. See Thomas, "The Legal Fictions of Herman Melville and Lemuel Shaw" in *Critical Essays on Herman Melville's Benito Cereno* ed. Robert E. Burkholder (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1992) 116-126.

⁶ A notable example is David Walker, a free black, whose *Appeal in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World* was published in 1829. Walker was one of the earliest African American writers to draw connections between America's thrust for independence from England to the plight of the slaves. Using thematic and structural irony, Walker drafted his *Appeal* using the structure of the Constitution as his blueprint. Walker, "Appeal in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World" in *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie Y. Kay et al. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997) 179-190.

⁷ Osagie, *The Amistad Revolt: Memory, Slavery, and the Politics of Identity in the United States and Sierra Leone* (Athens: Univ. of Ga Press, 2000) 44.

⁸ The influences of these historical events in "Benito Cereno" are far more complex than my brief assessment may reflect. For a more in-depth, informative analysis, see Eric J. Sundquist's essay "Benito Cereno and New World Slavery" in *Critical Essays on Herman Melville's Benito Cereno* ed. Robert E. Burkholder (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1992) 146-167.

⁹ Davis and Gilman eds. *The Letters of Herman Melville* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960) 138.

¹⁰ Davis and Gilman 146. The italicized emphases in this quote are Melville's.

¹¹ Davis and Gilman 128.

¹² In *The Feminization of American Culture*, Ann Douglas briefly addresses one of Melville's earlier critiques, pre-dating "Benito Cereno," of sentimentalism and the sentimental audience. She calls his novel *Pierre* (1852) "a savage study of the conspirational interaction between genteel religion, feminine morality, and polite literature against the interests of genuine masculinity." Douglas, "Herman Melville and the Revolt Against the Reader" in *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Noonday Press/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998) 294.

¹³ Robbins, "Gendering History of the Antislavery Narrative: Juxtaposing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and *Benito Cereno*, *Beloved*, and *Middle Passage*" in *American Quarterly* 49.3 (1991) 548.

¹⁴ Douglas, "Herman Melville and the Revolt Against the Reader" in *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Noonday Press/Farrar, Straus and Giroux) 301.

¹⁵ See Stowe, *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* 1854. Ed. William Loren Katz. (Salem, N.H.: Ayer Company Publishers, 1987) Nic need to find out how to do reprint. The influence of Stowe's sentimental abolitionist novel on Melville's "Benito Cereno" has not gone unnoticed. Melville's Babo is unquestionably the anti-Uncle Tom. For an excellent comparative analysis of "Benito Cereno" and Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, see Robbins, "Gendering History of the Antislavery Narrative: Juxtaposing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and *Benito Cereno*, *Beloved*, and *Middle Passage*" in *American Quarterly* 49.3 (1991) 531-573. In her analysis, Robbins argues Melville re-genders the feminine domestic didacticism of the antislavery narrative by reclaiming it as masculine domain in his rejection of sentimentalism.

¹⁶ Here, there are shades of a critique of Shaw.

¹⁷ Because Babo's original owner Alexandro Aranda is murdered, Cereno becomes his master as well as the master of the other Africans on board. This rule of the transference of the slaves as property is yet another indication of how their enslavement was perpetuated. I emphasize Cereno's whiteness as opposed to his Europeanness, because symbolically, Melville is more interested in Cereno's whiteness. In the narrative, Melville does shift between referring both to Cereno as white and as a Spaniard or European. But as Jean Fagan Yellin observes, "The story projects a shifting triad of figures, envisioned in the distant past as American, Spaniard, and African, but more familiarly recognized by *Putnam's* readers as Yankee, Slaveholder, and Negro" (217). Therefore, in my references of Cereno's whiteness throughout my analysis, I am not disregarding the implications of his Spanish heritage as Melville's critique of European slavery. Instead, I am focusing on how the characterization of Cereno reflects Melville's domestic concerns involving the slavery question in America. Yellin, *The Intricate Knot: Black Figures in American Literature, 1776-1863* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1972).

¹⁸ Robbins, "Gendering History of the Antislavery Narrative: Juxtaposing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and *Benito Cereno*, *Beloved*, and *Middle Passage*" in *American Quarterly* 49.3 (1991) 556.

¹⁹ Simpson, "Melville and the Negro: From Typee to 'Benito Cereno'" in *American Literature* 41 (1969) 37.

²⁰ Regarding this issue of the inversion of the social order as a means of critique, it interesting how ships seem to function in Melville's fiction like the forests in Shakespeare's dramas.

²¹ McCarthy, *"The Twisted Mind": Madness in Herman Melville's Fiction* (Iowa: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1990) 15.

²² Here, I should note that another terror undermining sentimentality in "Benito Cereno" is the climactic revelation of the Aranda's skeleton on the *San Dominick's* bow.

Although I do not address the intimation of cannibalism in my discussion, in his book *The Sign of the Cannibal: Melville and the Making of a Postcolonial Reader*, Geoffrey Sanborn devotes a chapter to examining the issue of savagery and cannibalism in Melville's novella. Sanborn, *The Sign of the Cannibal: Melville and the Making of a Postcolonial Reader* (Durham: Duke UP, 1998).

²³ Fiedler, "The Failure of Sentiment and the Evasion of Love" in *Love & Death in the American Novel* (New York: Anchor Books, 1960; 1992) 363. In a footnote, Fiedler makes an interesting apology in a footnote in the most recent edition (1992) of his book. In the section where he addresses the homoerotic relationships between men and the impact of race on them in American Romantic fiction, including an analysis of the one in Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Fiedler writes, "'Homoerotic' is a word of which I was never very fond, and which I like even less now. But I wanted it to be quite clear that I was not attributing sodomy to certain literary characters or their authors, and so I avoided when I could the more disturbing word 'homosexual.' All my care has done little good, however, since what I have to say on this score has been at once the best remembered and most grossly misunderstood section of my book. *Ubi morbus, ibi digitus*"(349). Although Fiedler's hesitancy to use the term "homoerotic" is understandable if he wants to clearly define his terms and not impose a misinterpretation onto the texts and authors, he seems uncomfortable with his subject. This is somewhat surprising, because he devotes an extensive part of the section addressing the symbolic marriage between Ishmael and Queequeg and Melville's teasing and playful use of imagery of sperm and masturbation in the novel. My question for Fiedler is: if "homosexual" is "disturbing" and "homoerotic" misleading, then what word would be "appropriate" for naming the sexual imagery and tension in Melville's portrayals of intimate relationships between men?

²⁴ Knafo-Sutton, "Master and Slave in 'Benito Cereno' in *Ritual in the United States: Acts and Representations* (Tampa: American Studies Press, 1985) 1.

²⁵ See Karcher, *Shadow over the Promised Land: Slavery, Race, and Violence in Melville's America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1980) 152.

²⁶ See Cardwell, "Melville's Gray Story: Symbols and Meaning in 'Benito Cereno'" in *Modern Critical Views: Herman Melville* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986) 68-76.

²⁷ My choice to use the more general term "mulatto" instead of the more specific one "tragic mulatto" is purposeful. The tragic mulatto character is more limited in its characterization and definition because it adheres to a formulaic construction of the mulatto experience in sentimental literature.

²⁸ In the shaving scene, Babo's blackness is qualified by the narrator's comparison of it to the whiteness of the shaving lather. The narrator observes that "[Cereno's] usual ghastliness was heightened [*sic*] by the lather, which lather, again, was intensified in its hue by the contrasting sootiness of the negro's body. Altogether the scene was somewhat peculiar, at least to Captain Delano, or, as he saw the two thus postured, could he resist

the vagary, that in the black he saw a headsman, and in the white, a man at the block” (38). The violence threatened between black and white becomes realized in this scene not only by the executioner image but also later when Cereno’s blood is spilled when Babo cuts him with the shaving blade.

²⁹ Simpson, “Melville and the Negro: From Typee to ‘Benito Cereno’” in *American Literature* 41 (1969) 37.

³⁰ Bryant and Milder eds., *Melville’s Evermoving Dawn: Centennial Essays* (Ohio: Kent State Univ. Press, 1997) 8.

³¹ Karcher, *Shadow over the Promised Land: Slavery, Race, and Violence in Melville’s America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1980) 131-132.

³² Although I do not foreground this issue in my analysis, the stress Melville places on the bodies of the Africans on board the *San Dominick* also identifies them as sexualized objects. While Melville only hints at sexual overtones in his description of Babo’s body, the scene in which Delano observes an African woman nursing her baby is overtly sexual. In this voyeuristic scene, Melville perverts the version of Madonna and Child, as if to reflect the depravity of the viewer, the debasement of the viewed, and the sexual corruption of the institution of slavery itself.

³³ One is also reminded of the voicelessness of Melville as Redburn by appropriating the voices of the chained figures of the statue in the Market’s Exchange.

³⁴ Thomas, “The Legal Fictions of Herman Melville and Lemuel Shaw” in *Critical Essays on Herman Melville’s Benito Cereno* ed. Robert E. Burkholder (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1992) 125.

³⁵ In his book *The Example of Melville*, Warner Berthoff notes that G.W. Curtis, a reader for *Putnam’s*, was displeased with Melville’s inclusion of the court deposition in “Benito Cereno.” Curtis informed the editors, “It is a great pity he did not work it up as a connected tale instead of putting in the dreary documents at the end. -- They should have been made part of the substance of the story” (153). See Berthoff, “Melville’s Story-Telling” in *The Example of Story-Telling* (New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1962) 133-158.

³⁶ While my reading of “Benito Cereno” as two tales is meant to reflect how the narrative literally unfolds structurally, Babo’s silent absence from the deposition is an integral part in this structuring. As Robertson-Lorant suggests, “The deposition . . . actually frames the story to form a mutilated triptych, with the implied third panel being the ‘voiceless’s Babo’s version of the story. The legalistic language obscures the moral issues and nullifies the Africans’s point of view, as history written by the colonizers always does” (350). She goes on to conclude that “Melville’s version of Amasa Delano’s *Narrative* turns colonial history on its head and reflects the legal dramas of the times” (351).

Robertson-Lorant, *Melville: A Biography* (New York: Clarkson Potter Publishers, 1996) 350-351.

³⁷ Douglas, "Herman Melville and the Revolt Against the Reader" in *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Noonday Press/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998) 296.

³⁸ Viewing "Benito Cereno" with a twenty-first century critical eye, one can not help but note how Melville's tale exhibits elements of postmodernism.

³⁹ In *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Leslie Fiedler argues it is the combination of potential bloodshed and blood sharing (miscegenation) that produces the "full gothic shiver" (412). Fiedler, *Love & Death in the American Novel*. (New York: Anchor Books, 1992).

⁴⁰ Davis and Gilman eds. *The Letters of Herman Melville* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960) 178.

⁴¹ Davis and Gilman 179.

⁴² Higgins and Parker eds. *Herman Melville: The Contemporary Reviews*. (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press) 469.

⁴³ Higgins and Parker 480.

⁴⁴ Higgins and Parker 476.

⁴⁵ Higgins and Parker 477.

⁴⁶ Higgins and Parker 478.

⁴⁷ Higgins and Parker 478.

⁴⁸ Lauter concludes that "Melville's dramatization of American racism remains altogether hidden behind their [1920s and 1930s critics] construction of Melville's biography as an archetype of the limits and frustrations of their own class position"(13). See Lauter, "Melville Climbs the Canon" in *American Quarterly* 66 (1994) 1-24.

⁴⁹ Simpson, "Melville and the Negro: From Typee to 'Benito Cereno'" in *American Literature* 41 (1969) 36-38.

⁵⁰ Karcher, *Shadow over the Promised Land: Slavery, Race, and Violence in Melville's America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1980) 2-3.

⁵¹ Thomas, "The Legal Fictions of Herman Melville and Lemuel Shaw" in *Critical Essays on Herman Melville's Benito Cereno* ed. Robert E. Burkholder (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1992) 124.

CHAPTER 3

READING THE SENTIMENTAL TRADITION IN MARY PRINCE'S

*THE HISTORY OF MARY PRINCE:**A WEST INDIAN SLAVE, RELATED BY HERSELF*

[Mary Prince's] is a tale that has not been told before, the very tale of the female slave who heretofore had been spoken for but who had not yet spoken *for herself*. . . Whereas black women are objects of narration in the tales written by black men, Prince's slim yet compelling story celebrates their transformation into subjects, subjects as defined by those who have gained a voice.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr.¹

In her preface to Moira Ferguson's edition of Mary Prince's narrative, Ziggi Alexander's first sentence is a question: "What is significant about *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself*?" (vii). Although Alexander posed this question in 1987, fifteen years later it still remains a pertinent one.² Though Prince's text is the first slave narrative recounting the experience of the British black female slave, a notable distinction, it seldom receives critical recognition and respect as an important work in the tradition of antislavery writing. Her narrative, unfortunately, is very much on the outside. One could theorize that this marginalization and under appreciation of Prince has been because of the usual suspect, the dual-edged sword of race and gender, and in the case of African American literary scholarship, there is the additional problem of her nationality. While Prince's status as a black woman does play a part in her marginalization to canonical fringes, given the continuing trend in academia of recovering forgotten texts, especially those by women writers of color, it is less likely a reason and

more likely an excuse. This certainly becomes apparent in view of Moira Ferguson's considerable efforts to establish Mary Prince as a visible figure specifically in British literary studies. Ferguson initially brought Prince to critical attention when she published in 1987 what today remains the definitive scholarly edition of *History*. Her edition has since gone to press twice more, most recently in 1997. Later, further underscoring Prince's significance, Ferguson also went on to devote a chapter in her influential book on British women's slavery writings, *Subject to Others* (1992), to a discussion of Prince's narrative. While her scholarship on Prince is extensive and noteworthy, there have been relatively few, more recent in-depth analyses and different critical perspectives on Mary Prince from other scholars. By laying down a foundation to initiate a discourse, Ferguson has sent out calls, but the responding Prince scholarship has been sporadic at best.

The lack of scholarship on Prince's narrative may be because she has been subjected to scholarly elitism, overlooked because of the privileging of slave narratives considered of more literary, and thus more valuable to critique. For example, if we observe the striking similarities in content specifically between Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (1861) and Prince's narrative (i.e. their sexual victimization, their critiques of slave mistresses, their transition/transformation from acted upon victims to active agents in their quest for freedom), then we have to ask: what is it that differentiates them, making Jacobs draw more critical attention than Prince?³ The answer to this, perhaps loaded, question is of course largely subjective but still, the question itself does speak directly to the problem. It seems that Prince, in large part, has been neglected because *History* may not be considered as influential as a slave narrative like Jacobs's. Unlike famous slave narratives that have come to be considered classics, Prince's text does not readily exhibit those attributes we are taught by the academy to value as scholars and readers. Authors and their works' "greatness" are judged by the authors' mastery of their chosen form, genre and how they fit within a tradition. Also, how an author uses literary conventions, technique, and style are

considered in our valuation of a particular text's "literaryness." With respect to Prince and her narrative, all of these things work against them both.

First, Prince is not the author of her narrative in the traditional meaning of the term because she did not write it herself but instead dictated it. While transcribed slave narratives are not rare, questions concerning authorial authority (which we prize) about them compromise how those texts are read, even more so than slaves who penned their own narratives but had white abolitionist editors. The questionable legitimacy of Prince's voice may make her either less "safe" or too complicated for scholars to want to address her. Also related to this issue of Prince's voice is that her tale is a simple, straightforwardly told one, and her language, though filtered through a transcriber, does play a strong factor in how her narrative is perceived. In her analysis of Prince's text, Helena Woodard has referred to the language in Prince's *History* as "grammatical roughness" and says it "flaunt[s] the bareness of Prince's literacy skills."⁴ Although Woodard's comment misrepresents Prince somewhat, because it is a bit dangerous to judge Prince's literacy simply by her speech, the connection she draws between language and literacy does hint at another possible reason for the insufficient scholarship on Mary Prince. If Prince is not thought to display exceptional literacy skills, then how is her merit to be gauged in a tradition in which literacy and the literate slave narrator are highly held? Why read Prince when one can critique the more poetic, self-written narratives of Olaudah Equiano or Frederick Douglass, both of who demonstrate a remarkable stylistic use of language and literacy? Of course, a large part of the problem is in fact this measuring of her narrative against more critically favored ones, because in comparison, only superficially, perhaps Prince may not seem as challenging or sophisticated since she does not overtly or consciously employ many literary techniques. There are no passages in *History* overtly literary like Douglass's famous apostrophe of the ships on the Chesapeake Bay. Still, there are many passages in Prince's narrative just as striking and powerful, as I will argue, simply *because* she speaks of her experience with "grammatical roughness."

Although Prince's narrative may not show the level of mastery of other narratives, the way she relates her experience does suggest an appropriation of some of the sentimental conventions of abolitionist literature. So far, no one has thought to explore fully how the sentimental tradition works in Prince's *History* and how she responds to the sentimental values of nineteenth-century England. Only Joycelyn Moody in her recently published work *Sentimental Confessions* has noted the sentimental strategies of Prince's narrative.⁵ It is true that addressing how sentimental conventions work in Prince's narrative is a bit complicated, since there is the question of how much influence her editor Thomas Pringle and her transcriber Susanna Strickland had on the construction of her voice. Still, although their influence does pose somewhat of a problem, it does not mean Prince's voice is appropriated or suppressed. Instead, it is merely constricted. Nevertheless, like other slave narrative authors who were published under similar conditions, Prince manages to assert a distinct, separate voice of her own and to reclaim textual authority from her editor. What enables her to do so is her "rough," direct speech that counters the imposing influence of Pringle and the manner in which sentimental conventions are employed throughout *History*. Significantly, the way Prince distinctively uses her voice to express herself and to challenge her editor's control over her text parallels the way she uses it to challenge her master's and mistress's control over her body at crucial moments during her enslavement. Speech is how she resists the chains of slavery, both literal and psychological. Speech as a form of resistance and empowerment, or "voice agency" as Jenny Sharpe calls it, in Prince's narrative, then, plays the same symbolic role literacy does in slave narratives that were written by former slaves themselves.⁶

For the most part, the sentimental techniques in Prince's narrative are subtle, with her simultaneously utilizing them in a way commonly found in antislavery writing while still testing the boundaries of what a delicate audience should see. One example is how she presents graphic scenes of physical violence against slaves committed by slave

owners that are not only meant to elicit sympathy but are also meant to wound her reader, a familiar strategy of sentimental abolitionism. Though the portrayals of such scenes of brutality are intrinsic to most slave narratives, in some of these descriptions of the abuse she and other slaves suffered, Prince includes the ritualistic stripping of slave bodies in a way that suggests an underlying sexual element. Scenes meant to provoke sentimental tears become sexualized. This venturing into uncomfortable territory becomes even more discomfiting in her account of the behavior of one of her master's who engaged in psychosexual harassment by forcing Prince to bathe him. It is through the exposure of black and white bodies set within a context of violence that she encodes her sexual victimization. The sentimental text Prince's reader reads, then, is not only the narrative itself, but also the body Prince puts on display. Her lacerated and exposed flesh is the most powerful sentimental sign in her text. By encoding her sexual abuse, Prince not only implicitly challenges censoring by her audience, she also subverts the censoring by her editor Pringle, who sought to exclude those things related to sex and sexuality from *History*, an editorial decision that became apparent after the narrative's publication when he was sued for libel by one of Prince's former owners. Pringle's primary reason for omitting anything explicitly sexual, presumably, was because he knew it could lead to questions about Prince's moral character and womanhood that would be difficult to defend and would also jeopardize the political purpose of her narrative. This cause for discretion is revealed when it is intimated in court testimony by Prince herself that she had consensual sexual relationships with men, both black and white, outside of marriage. Including scenes suggesting the sexual depravity of slave masters that situate Prince in the role of victim positions her as someone with whom the audience can empathize, but allowing Prince to speak about sexual romances would put her in the position of someone it could vilify. Consequently, the issue of womanhood is minimized in *History*.

While the sexual aspect of Prince's history is one reason for the lack of emphasis on womanhood in her narrative, the other is that she could not really speak to it in

sentimental terms with any authority because she was neither a mother nor fully a wife, two essential roles in the achievement of true womanhood. She was perhaps unable to have children as a result of the lifetime of physical abuse she suffered, and her marriage was an unsatisfactory, unfulfilled one, made so by her owner's unhappiness with it and their constant demands on Prince. The sentiment that the slavery institution is responsible for denying her these privileges is an underlying theme in *History*. Since she is unable to locate her experience within the sentimental discourse of domesticity and motherhood as Jacobs does in *Incidents*, Prince accesses the only sentimental identity available to her as a black woman writing slavery -- that of the redeemed Christian. Her account of her conversion not only serves to make her a more appropriate figure for the abolitionist agenda but it also suggests how she recovered from the trauma of her sexual victimization, as well as alleviated the guilt caused by the sexual transgressions she committed. Through spiritual cleansing, she removes the stains from her soul that she cannot remove from her tainted womanhood and violated body. Though her conversion from sinner to saint is how she cloaks the exposed self being put on public display, at the conclusion of my analysis, I will address how her former owners attempt to strip Prince's cloaking in print and in court.

Following the conventions of a traditional slave narrative, Prince's opens with the details of her birth and her idyllic childhood before she knew the true horrors of slavery. Sometime around 1788, she was born in Bermuda as a slave belonging to Charles Myners, who died shortly after her birth.⁷ Prince's mother was Myners's house slave and her father was a sawyer belonging to a different owner. After Myners's death, his estate was divided among his relatives and Prince and her mother were given to a Captain Darell, who in turn gave Prince to his granddaughter Betsey Williams as a companion. This transference of ownership early in Prince's life later became a pattern in her experience with slavery, as she moved from being owned by one cruel owner to the next. Because her mother was also given to the Williams family, Prince enjoyed being raised

by her mother and grew up in the company of her younger siblings, a luxury many other slaves did not have. As a slave child in the Williams household, Prince remembers her duties as being simple and living her life in a carefree existence. Her primary responsibility was to serve as playmate to Betsey, who she says treated her like a pet (47). Looking back, a wiser Prince calls this period “the happiest period of my life; for I was too young to understand rightly my condition as a slave” (47). For the young Prince, the first signs her domestic bliss were about to be shattered occur when she is hired out as a nursemaid because her owners are experiencing financial problems. Separated from her beloved mistress and her mother and siblings, Prince recalls how painful the experience was. For her reader, she is careful to qualify this pain she felt at the time by noting it was little in comparison to the abuses she would later suffer. Foreshadowing what is to come in the narrative, Prince says, “This separation seemed a sore trial to me then; but oh! ‘twas light, light to the trials I have since endured -- ‘twas nothing -- nothing to be mentioned with them” (48).

The turning point in Prince’s fortunes comes with her mistress Mrs. Williams’s (Betsey’s mother) untimely death. After Mrs. Williams dies, Prince learns she and two of her sisters are to be sold to help pay for her master’s wedding to a woman with whom he had been having an extramarital affair. Prince’s inclusion of the detail that Mr. Williams was involved in an affair serves to support her point about the loose sexual morality of male slave owners in the West Indies, which is one of the corruptive effects of the slave institution she wants to expose. Their fates decided, Prince and her sisters are led by their mother to a market-place where they are to be auctioned off. At the market-place, what follows is a separation scene familiar to abolitionist literature. Prince recalls:

We followed my mother to the market-place, where she placed us in a row against a large house, with our backs to the wall and our arms folded across our breasts. . . My heart throbbed with grief and terror so violently, that I pressed my hands quite tightly across my breast, but I could not keep it still, and it continued to leap as though it would burst

out of my body. But who cared for that? Did one of the many bystanders, who were looking at us so carelessly, think of the pain that wrung the hearts of the negro woman and her young ones? No, no! They were not all bad, I dare say, but slavery hardens white people's hearts towards the blacks; and many of them were not slow to make their remarks upon us aloud, without regard to our grief - though their light words fell like cayenne on the fresh wounds of our hearts.

Oh those white people have small hearts who only feel for themselves.

At length the vendue master, who was to offer us for sale like sheep or cattle, arrived, . . . He took me by the hand, and led me out into the middle of the street, and, turning me slowly round, exposed me to the view of those who attended the vendue. I was soon surrounded by strange men, who examined and handled me in the same manner that a butcher would a calf or lamb he was about to purchase, and who talked about my shape and size in like words -- as if I could no more understand their meaning than the dumb beasts. I was then put up for sale. (52)

This market-place scene is one of the more important passages in Prince's narrative, because within it are all the themes and issues threaded throughout *History* with respect to Prince's experience -- objectification, dehumanization, sexual vulnerability, fragmentation, exposure, and white apathy. In her reflection on her auction, her remark, "Oh those white people have small hearts who only feel for themselves," is both a commentary on the lack of white empathy for her plight in the past and on her expectations for the person in the present act of reading her history. The linking between the heart and feeling reflects the motivation of sentimentality, which asks readers not just to be touched but to also be affected by that touch. The throbbing and wounding of Prince's heart in comparison to the hardened (non-throbbing) hearts of the white spectators and purchasers gives Prince a kind of sentimental authority over them. Also, the cayenne wound comparison she makes literalizes and corporealizes the abstract 'heart' of sentimentality.⁸ Prince's throbbing heart demonstrates her ability to feel, and more specifically and significantly as is evidenced later in her narrative, her ability to feel for others. In addition, as a slave, her ability to feel contradicts her dehumanization, a dehumanization indicated by all the animal imagery she uses in the passage. For Prince, feeling is the mark of humanity. This becomes especially clear in the concluding passages

of *History*, when she inverts the animal imagery associated with blackness and slaves and applies it to the white British.

The troubling journey into the slave experience for both Prince and her reader begins when she is sold at the market-place to a master she identifies as Capt. I--. Ferguson calls Prince's first year of ownership by Capt. I-- as "the formal dissolution of Mary Prince's innocence," because Prince soon discovers from Capt. I-- and his wife what it truly meant to be a slave.⁹ With the I-- family, Prince takes up her former occupation as nursemaid and also is responsible for other domestic duties. She does not provide any descriptions of the minutiae of household affairs or her interactions with the children; instead, there is only violence. Her physical abuse begins almost immediately. She notes Mrs. I-- teaches her "to know the exact difference between the smart of the rope, the cart-whip, and the cow-skin" and that her mistress also exacted blows with her fists to her face and head (56). This account by Prince of how she acquired knowledge of the instruments of abuse is a powerful, angry parody of education. Unlike those who had the fortune to be born free and white, the education of slave did not mean learning to read and write; it meant learning one's true condition in life by the strike of the whip against one's skin. There was not an awareness primarily of the mind, but instead a constant awareness of the body. Effectively exacerbating Prince's hyper-consciousness of her body, it is Mrs. I-- who often orders her to be stripped, hung up by tied wrists, and then whipped, which Prince describes as "ordinary punishment for even a slight offence"(56). Her description of her mistreatment by Mrs. I--, which evokes the image of her exposed body and her vulnerability, is the first allusion to the issue of nakedness Prince makes her narrative.

Like other slave narrative authors, in telling her personal experience, Prince includes the stories of fellow slaves who suffered under the slave system, expressing sympathy for the plight of others in spite of her own despair. During her tenure with the I--s, she was particularly affected by the circumstances of a French black slave woman

named Hetty. She remembers how she felt sorry for Hetty because she was overworked. Because Hetty treats her kindly, Prince develops a connection with her. Indicating the close bond in their relationship, she calls her “Aunt,” though a common term for black servants, but suggests Hetty is a substitute for the family from which Prince had been sold away that fateful day at the market-place (57). However, Hetty is not only symbolic of the bonds of kinship forged between slaves who were torn away from their immediate families; she is also representative to Prince of the true horrors of the slavery institution. In graphic detail, Prince describes how a pregnant Hetty is beaten by Capt. I--, recalling, “My master flew into a terrible passion, and ordered the creature to be stripped quite naked, not withstanding her pregnancy, and to be tied up to a tree in the yard. He then flogged her as hard as he could lick, with both the whip and cow-skin, till she was all over streaming with blood. He rested, and then beat her again and again. Her shrieks were terrible” (57). Her master’s vicious beating of Hetty results in her prematurely giving birth to a stillborn child. After the brutal punishment, Prince goes on to relate how although Hetty is barely recovered from the flogging and the difficult labor of her stillborn baby, the I--s resume their abusive treatment of her. As a consequence of never being given a chance to heal of her injuries, Hetty’s body swells with infection and she ultimately dies a painful death; her infection literally bursts her body. For her part, Prince says she was haunted by what she witnessed, observing, “The manner of it [Hetty’s death] filled me with horror. I could not hear to think about it; yet it was present to my mind for many a day” (57). The whipping scene and the portrayal of Hetty’s death are as disturbing to a sentimental reader and test the borders of sentimental discourse. The domestic terror of slavery is corporealized by the contrasting the images of the natural swelling of the female slave body caused by pregnancy and the unnatural swelling of that same body caused by infection. With the privilege of motherhood seized from her by the whip, Hetty becomes an emblem of the corruption and disruption of black womanhood. Motherhood is rendered perverse as she is literally forced to give birth to death twice --

first her baby and then her own (the bursting of fluid from her body). Like the marketplace scene in which Prince's mother is forced to watch her children sold away, Hetty's story engages the sentimental trope of the tragic slave mother.

After Hetty's death, Prince assumes Hetty's duties and finds herself increasingly subjected to the same excessive persecution by Capt. I-- and his wife. One incident she recounts is when she was accused of breaking a jar belonging to Mrs. I-- . Although the jar cracked accidentally in her hands due to its age, she says Mrs. I-- punished her by stripping and whipping her until she (Mrs. I--) no longer had any strength. Then when Capt. I-- learned of the affair, Prince says he called her names "too, too bad to speak in England" and that she received a hundred lashes from him (58). Unlike his wife, he did not allow exhaustion to stop his punishment of Prince; he beat her, then rested, and then would beat her again. Shortly after these floggings by Capt. and Mrs. I--, Prince recalls another incident when one of the family's cows escaped and ate some sweet-potatoes from the vegetable garden. When Capt. I-- discovered what the cow had done, he took off one of his boots and struck Prince with a severe blow in the small of her back, where she notes for her reader that she "still feel[s] a weakness to this day" (59). These particular back-to-back scenes of her owner's cruelty serve to accentuate not just the severity of their actions but also the irrationality of their behavior, given Prince's lack of culpability. She does not present herself as a troublesome slave who is deserving of such harsh correction but her master and mistress as being the unreasonable ones. This characterization of herself as a "good" slave later becomes important, because in the lawsuit her last owners file against Pringle, they suggest they had to punish her, saying she was incorrigible and difficult.

Her daily existence with the I--s became so unbearable, Prince recounts that after the cow incident, she finally felt forced to run away. She is hidden in a cave by her mother, until her father learns of her whereabouts and returns her to Capt. I--. Prince's brief escape from slavery is a significant event in the narrative, not only because her

running away is the first sign of Prince becoming proactive and rebelling against her condition, but also because of what happens after she is returned. Notably, she does not comment on how it felt to have her father deliver her back into slavery and the hands of a cruel master. Instead she tells how after her return to Capt. I--'s home, her father urges him not to abuse his daughter anymore. In spite of her father's betrayal, Prince follows his example of courage. When Capt. I-- says she deserves to be punished, Prince stands up to him. She informs Capt. I-- that she could take the beatings no longer and she had run away to her mother for protection. She goes on to tell him that she learned that running away did not matter, because "mothers could only weep and mourn over their children, they could not save them from cruel masters - from the whip, the rope, and the cow-skin" (60). Here, she again employs the sentimental trope of the tragic slave mother to articulate the sense of powerlessness and hopelessness of the slave's condition. Given her descriptions of how savagely Capt. I-- had beaten her, for Prince to make such a comment was suicidal. For her act of verbal insolence, she could have been whipped to her death like Hetty before her. Capt. I--'s only response to Prince is to issue a warning for her to "hold [her] tongue" (60). Prince makes a point to note to her reader that her master's warning aside, she does not get beaten that day. This scene of her momentary victory over her master is the first instance in the narrative in which she gains agency through speech. She does not get her freedom, but she does feel empowered, which is a kind of freedom itself for Prince. The "hold your tongue" advice Capt. I-- gives her foregrounds the matter of Mary Prince's voice, as she is progressively unwilling to keep silent, with speech becoming her tool of defiance and her sharp tongue her weapon.

Leaving her reader with her first moment of courage, Prince skips forward five years to her sale from Capt. I-- to her next master Mr. D--, excising any specific events that may have happened during the remainder of her years with Capt. I-- and his wife. This fast forwarding of time occurs periodically in Prince's *History* and also mirrors how she sometimes quickly and abruptly shifts from relating one incident of abuse to another,

which may contribute to the narrative's "roughness." Nevertheless, rather than being disconcerting, the lack of narrative flow gives her story a sense of urgency. The relating of her experiences in such a manner seems less like an editorial choice on Pringle's part and more indicative of how Prince expressed herself; it is as if she is overly aware she is working within a confined space and wants to tell as much as possible within that space. As a result, there are several scenes where she does not exploit the sentimental power of them the way she does in the market-place scene or the passage about Hetty. In any case, on Turk's Island with Mr. D--, Prince finds herself facing an even more difficult life than she had lived with her previous owners. Mr. D-- received his income from a share in the profits in the salt mines on Turk's Island based on the number of his slaves that worked in them and Prince is immediately sent there. Describing her daily tasks, she says, "This work was perfectly new to me. I was given a half barrel and a shovel, and had to stand up to my knees in the water, from four o'clock in the morning till nine, . . . [we] worked through the heat of the day; the sun flaming upon our heads like fire, and raising salt blisters in those parts which were not completely covered. Our feet and legs, from standing in the salt water for so many hours, soon became full of dreadful boils, which eat down in some cases to the very bone, afflicting the sufferers with great torment" (61-62). The specificity in her description of salt mine work presents the audience with yet another way slave bodies were assaulted, and like the Hetty scene, invites her reader to vicariously experience pain through strong visual imagery. Pain is how Price primarily communicates her suffering. As Elaine Scarry argues in her study on pain, "Physical pain has no voice, but when it at last finds a voice, it begins to tell a story."¹⁰

Reflecting this, it must be addressed how, although she uses graphic scenes of physical violence to serve a sentimental purpose, Prince slightly departs from convention in her presentation of those scenes. Each of her accounts of the cruel treatment she and other slaves received is intended to cause her reader to have not only an emotional reaction but also a physical one. With the tears, she wants to induce pain. It is only by

doing both that she can effectively wound the reader. As Marianne Noble defines it, “A wound is a site where emotions and senses intersect in pure *feeling*, and in attempting to produce affect in their readers, sentimental authors attempt to communicate through the presence of physical and emotional feelings, rather than through abstract detachment from the body.”¹¹ Indicating this, significantly, in the fifteen or more years of slavery Prince has experienced up to the midpoint of her narrative, the stories of abuse she selects to tell are the ones that draw attention to the body (e.g. nakedness and lacerated skin) and bodily fluids (e.g. blood and pus). Sentimentalism, as Noble asserts in her book, is a masochistic discourse. To this end, Prince does wound her reader. Because she at times moves somewhat abruptly, without shifting, apologies, or forewarning, from violent episode to violent episode, it has the effect upon her reader of vicariously experiencing the lashing of the whip. Almost repetitively, throughout her narrative, one is “struck” or assaulted by one disturbing incident after another with little reprieve. The lack of comment, apology, and forewarning that accompanies these “strikes” is where Prince deviates from the rhetorical sentimental strategies often found in antislavery writing. When Prince recounts an incident of abuse, there is neither a prelude warning the reader of the disturbing scenes with which they are about to be presented nor an extended, impassioned speech following. She also does not apologize for offending her audience’s sensibilities, a protective measure some authors used to offset anticipated criticism. With her lack of comment, the sentimental power of these scenes comes from their standing as they are and her directness and concise, concrete language.

Prince devotes a significant amount of attention to her existence on Turk’s Island, perhaps because the hard manual labor she spends ten years in the salt mines doing becomes the source of painful physical ailments that would plague her for the remainder of her life. This may also explain why she elaborates more on the particulars of Turk’s Island life, such as the work slaves did, where they slept and what they ate, than she does in her account of life with the Darrells, the I-- family or even her final owners, the

Woods. Besides the strenuous work and the appalling living conditions of the salt mines, Prince and the other slaves also had to contend with physical abuse. Comparing her experience with her former master with that of her new one, Mr. D--, Prince notes, "I hoped, when I left Capt. I--, that I should have been better off, but I found it was but going from one butcher to another. There was this difference between them: my former master used to beat me while raging and foaming with passion; Mr. D-- was usually quite calm. He would stand by and give orders for a slave to be cruelly whipped, and assist in the punishment, without moving a muscle of his face; walking about and taking snuff with the greatest composure" (62). The contrast Prince makes between Capt. I-- and Mr. D-- recalls the issue of the importance of heart and feeling that is raised earlier in the narrative in the market-place scene. What makes Mr. D--'s inhumanity so distinctively cruel and what unsettles Prince is that he is both expressionless and emotionless. While the apathy of the white spectators of Prince's sale suggests an unwillingness to feel, Mr. D--'s calculated composure suggests the total absence of feeling; in the most fitting use of term, he is heartless.

While in previous passages of *History* Prince provides several specific incidents of her abuse, in the Turk's Island section of her narrative she only reports accounts involving other slaves. As she explains, "In telling my own sorrows, I cannot pass by those of my fellow-slaves - for when I think of my own griefs, I remember theirs" (65). (However, she does briefly note at one point she was stripped naked and whipped in the same manner by Mr. D-- as she had been done by Capt. and Mrs. I--.) The intertwining of her experience with the experience of the other slaves on Turk's Island is an integral element in the literary tradition of the slave narrative. Doing so enabled a speaker to strike a double-sided blow against slavery by publicizing one's personal trials and by extending the individual struggle to address the plight of the collective. Besides including the trials of fellow slaves as a strategy, she also seems to have done so because she was particularly affected by the suffering of Mr. D--'s slaves. Her time on Turk's Island was

the only period of her enslavement in which she had sustained interactions with a large number of fellow slaves, and she perhaps felt a strong sense of community that she did not have when she served as a house slave. One example of her master's unflinching cruelty to other slaves Prince recalls is how Mr. D-- commands that salt be poured into the open wounds of a physically disabled slave he often ordered whipped. As in the Hetty scene, she goes into some detail of the incident. She says, "our master would order him to be stripped and laid down on the ground, and have him beaten with a rod of rough briar till his skin was quite red and raw. He would then call for a bucket of salt, and fling upon the raw flesh till the man writhed on the ground like a worm, and screamed aloud with agony. This poor man's wounds were never healed, and I have often seen them full of maggots, which increased his torments to an intolerable degree" (64). Although Prince does not seem to recognize the implications, the swarming maggots, a sign of decay and death, are especially symbolic, suggesting both the literal consumption of slave bodies and the moral decay of society caused by slavery. Another tragic story she tells is that of a slave named Ben, who steals some of his master's rice out of hunger and is flogged so grievously that he has a pool of blood beneath him. Mr. D-- nevertheless continues to whip him (64). These gothic images of maggots and pools of blood challenge the myth of happy plantation life, the idea of slavery as a benevolent institution with singing and dancing slaves and kind, tolerant slave masters and mistresses. The expectations of those sentimental readers who require a palatable story about slavery are unfulfilled.

For Prince, it is not only Mr. D--'s mistreatment of slaves she finds reprehensible, but also his son Master Dickey's. In the narrative, Dickey's own spiteful behavior towards the slaves comes to represent the cyclical, corruptive nature of slavery. If Prince's indoctrination into slavery is a parody of education, then Dickey's is a perversion of education. Of Dickey, she says, "I must say something more about this cruel son of a cruel father. -- He had no heart -- no fear of God; and he had been brought up by a bad father in a bad path, and he delighted to follow in the same steps" (65). Educated by his

father's example, serving as overseer, Dickey brutalizes and terrorizes the slaves on Turk's Island. Prince relates another incident involving the slave Ben when he was caught stealing rice once again, with Dickey this time playing a role. The fact that he attempted to steal rice again after receiving such a terrible whipping for doing it once before bespeaks the desperation of slaves. When Ben was caught by his master, he informed him that he often saw Dickey steal rice and rum, thinking Mr. D-- would pardon him since his son engaged in the same behavior. Dickey denies it and Ben is punished. Out of revenge for his deeds being exposed, after Ben was severely whipped by Mr. D--, Dickey drives a bayonet through the offending slave's foot while Ben is still hung up and tied by his wrist. Prince also tells how Dickey once cruelly abused an elderly female slave named Sarah who was not working quickly enough for his tastes. Prince recalls, "He threw her down on the ground, and after beating her severely, he took her up his arms and flung her among the prickly-pear bushes, which [were] all covered over with sharp venomous prickles. By this her naked flesh was so grievously wounded that her body swelled and festered all over, and she died in a few days after" (65). Although she does not give any of her personal reactions to the brutality she witnesses committed against other slaves, Prince has to have been deeply affected by the extent of their persecution. It seems this would especially be the case with Sarah's death; the female body swelled with infection surely must have reminded Prince of Hetty's horrible death. For more than ten years, Prince witnessed and was subjected to extreme violence at the salt mines until Mr. D-- retired and she returned to Bermuda to become his house slave. There her abuse would take on darker overtones, and she would learn there was no depth to her master's depravity.

Besides giving a sense of how she expresses herself, Prince's minimal use of sentimental rhetoric also works to make her narrative seem less propagandistic. In the *History's* preface, her editor Pringle tries to downplay the narrative's (and Prince's) connections to any organized antislavery movement, stating, "I shall here merely notice

farther, that the Anti-Slavery Society have no concern whatever with this publication, nor are they in any degree responsible for the statements it contains. I have published the tract, not as their Secretary, but in my private capacity; and any profits that may arise from the sale will be exclusively appropriated to the benefit of Mary Prince herself” (46). In distancing the Anti-Slavery Society from having involvement in the publication of Prince’s narrative, it is clear Pringle acted out of legal concern, because the accusations Prince makes about her owners could be considered defamatory. His statement that all financial earnings belong to Prince is surely intended to circumvent any allegations that she was being exploited. Still, just because neither the Society nor Pringle were profiting monetarily from the sale of Prince’s narrative does not mean they did not have an investment in it. Indeed, it is simply not possible they “ha[d] no concern whatever” with its publication. In the abolitionist movement, the slave as author, narrator, character, or subject was a product for consumption, a political being who spoke in a political voice. Therefore, the profit the Society gained from Mary Prince was another advertisement to publicize and to promote its agenda. In turn, the profit that Mary Prince gained from the Society was that she could help end slavery in the British West Indies, while she also received the personal and financial support she needed in her own struggle for freedom, for which she was still fighting when her narrative was published. The influence of Prince’s relationship with the Society and Pringle manifests itself in a very specific way in her narrative. There are a couple of moments in *History* where there is a subtle yet noticeable shift in Prince’s language. Her speech at these times seems to contrast how her voice is represented in the narrative as a whole. Instead of her simpler, plainer speech, she uses the more emotional language that characterizes sentimental abolitionist discourse. An example of this is when she remembers the day she learned she and her sister were to be sold away. She laments:

Oh dear! I cannot bear to think of that day, -- it is too much. --It recalls the great grief that filled my heart, and the woeful thoughts that passed

to and fro through my mind, whilst listening to the pitiful words of my poor mother, weeping for the loss of her children. I wish I could find the words to tell you all I then felt and suffered. The great God above alone knows the thoughts of the poor slave's heart, and the bitter pains which follow such separations as these. All that we love taken away from us -- oh, it is sad, sad! And sore to be borne!" (51)

Although the sentiment expressed in this particular passage may be Prince's, the phrasing is curiously consciously formulaic in a way that, if we are to go by the majority of her narrative, her typical speech is not. Because her narrative is transcribed, it is difficult to say for certain whether this is the case, but it is as if either Pringle "pruned" her original sentiments or her transcriber Susanna Strickland reinterpreted what Prince said at moments to make her sound more eloquent and sentimental. To be fair, it is also possible that it is Prince herself who is responsible for the shift, perhaps lapsing into rhetoric on her own that her audience was trained to connect emotionally. What is certain is that there is an obvious influence, one that is the cause for the questions of legitimacy, regarding her voice.

Within Prince's accounts of her physical abuse, she encodes her sexual victimization, one of the more delicate subjects one could address in antislavery literature. This sensitive issue reveals itself throughout the narrative in a subtext of sexual vulnerability and anxiety that is linked to the exposure of bodies -- primarily Prince's and one of her master's. The earliest textual clue of Prince's vulnerability first occurs during the market-place scene. Remembering her trip to the slave auction, Prince says, "We followed my mother to market-place, where she placed us in a row against a large house, with our backs to the wall and our arms folded across our breasts" (52). Surprisingly, none of the existing Prince scholarship explores the implications of these actions made by Prince's mother. She is not just a distraught, grieving mother about to be separated from her children; she is also a knowing, experienced black woman who is all too aware of what fate may await her daughters as female slaves. By placing her daughter's backs against the wall and their arms across their breasts, she effectively hides

from public view those features of her daughters' bodies that sexualize them -- their breasts and hips. The young Prince seems to have been aware of her sexual vulnerability, even though the adult Prince looking back on this day does not name it. Describing her emotions at the time, Prince recalls, "My heart throbbed with grief and terror so violently, that I pressed my hands tightly across my breast" (52). While part of her dread originates from being separated from her mother, Prince's increasing fear and the instinctive move of clutching of her breast hints at the underlying sexual element of her panic. The sexual overtones of the market-place scene are intensified even more so by her following description of her auctioning off by the vendue-master. She notes, "He took me by the hand, and led me out into the middle of the street, and turning me slowly round, *exposed* me to the view of those who attended the vendue" (emphasis added) (52). In turning Prince around, the vendue-master offers the male prospective buyers a full view of what had been concealed by her arms and the wall. Prince's use of the word exposed to describe the vendue-master's actions is telling, calling attention both to how she felt and her vulnerability under the scrutiny of the male gaze. Exposed connotes violation. Given the fact that she was approximately twelve years old at the time of this event, she must have been in the initial stages of physically maturing into womanhood, which probably heightened her anxiety. One can only imagine how traumatizing an experience it was for a pubescent Prince to have her body in a state of sexual development put on display literally for the public consumption.

In her discussion of Prince, addressing this issue of Prince's body on public display, Helena Woodard reflects how the market-place scene evokes the image of Sartje Bartmann (also known as Sarah Bartmann), an African female slave whose body was exhibited throughout London in 1810. Perceived as a monstrous example of black female sexuality, placed in a cage, a barely dressed Bartmann was paraded before the English public in a manner that Woodard likens to a peep show. Much of the public's attention focused on Bartmann's large buttocks, and caricatures modeled on Bartmann's figure

exaggerating the black female form became popular. Although there was controversy over the indecency and inhumaneness of Bartmann's condition, the exhibitions continued in England and then France, where she later died. After her death, her body was then put on display in a Paris museum. Woodard states that "Ensclosed in the twin discursive tropes of exhibition and containment, which translated into mass popular culture as desire and repulsion, [Bartmann] metaphorizes the historical predicaments of black women generally and Mary Prince specifically."¹² The consequences of Prince's objectification are sexual anxiety and a preoccupation with the body, both of which are barely veiled in *History*.

Although the sexual element of slavery and the female slave's status as sexual property are mostly implied as subtext in the market-place episode, they become foregrounded in the narrative in both Prince's descriptions of how she and other slaves were stripped naked before being whipped and in her account of her relationship with Mr. D-- . Of the former, the sexualization of violence adds an erotic element to the physical abuse of slaves. Alone, the ritual Prince describes of a slave's body first being exposed and then tied and whipped is not overtly alarming, because there are many slave accounts including similar scenes. It was another way owners and overseers used to humiliate the slave being punished. But in Prince's case, it is her attitude towards the ritual that suggests there may have been something more going on disturbing her. She hints her masters were receiving a pleasure from stripping and whipping slaves other than that of being flushed with power. Their behavior suggests playing out their sexual desire by inflicting pain onto the taboo objects of that desire. The passion with which some slave owners beat their slaves sounds suspiciously close to sexual excitement. This becomes especially evident in one particularly telling episode Prince describes involving her master Capt. I-- .

Having been sentenced to receive one hundred lashes, she states, "When he had licked me for some time he sat down to take breath; then after resting, he beat me again

and again, until he was quite wearied, and so hot (for the weather was very sultry), that he sank back in his chair, almost like to faint” (58). The heat causing Capt. I--’s collapse may not only be weather-induced but also from the frenzy of sexual passion, with the sinking and faint symbolically signaling the climax. There is another sexually suggestive aspect to the scene; licking, too, has potentially sexual overtones. Recognizing the sexual implications of flogging, Mary A. Favret has called such scenes of flaying and flayed bodies “the reproduc[tion] of slavery as erotic spectacle” and continues noting that “the opening and closing of skin, its quivering and shuddering, all testify to a charged violent move toward the dissolution of the human body, an overdetermined loss of self-possession that invites erotic transport” (19).¹³ Despite the sexual overtones of this scene and her abuse in general, it is not definitely known whether there was any sexual intimacy between Prince and Capt. I-- because Prince does not broach the subject. Despite her silence, the sexually suggestive whipping scene notwithstanding, the chances Prince was victimized by her master Capt. I-- are very high, especially in light of what happened to Hetty. Because Prince does not mention the pregnant Hetty having a husband or significant other, it is not altogether presumptuous to draw the conclusion there may have been a sexual relationship between her master and Hetty. Prince’s comment that Hetty’s death was caused by what she calls “the dreadful chastisement” of her by Capt. I-- during her pregnancy possibly provides the best clue (57). Perhaps Capt. I--’s excessive abuse of Hetty was because in her womb, she bore tangible proof of her master’s sexual desire and violation. If so, then his wife’s ill treatment of Hetty, her husband’s pregnant concubine, is also clarified. Since Prince herself notes after Hetty’s death she assumed her place and took over her duties, then there is the likelihood Prince assumed her place in other ways, too.

Despite the unknowns surrounding Prince’s relationship with Capt. I--, there is little question that her relationship with her next master Mr. D-- was of a sexual nature. In the narrative, the anxiety Prince exhibits towards exposed bodies is heightened when

she addresses how she was frequently forced to bathe Mr. D--. When Mr. D-- retired from the salt mining business, he left Turk's Island for his Bermuda home and brought Prince along to serve his daughters. Through living with him, Prince learns more about Mr. D--, and the portrait she paints of him is a man with no redeemable qualities. He is not only a cruel slave master, who viciously punished his slaves on Turk's Island, but in his personal life, he is also an alcoholic, who in a drunken rage sometimes beats one of his daughters. His behavior is no less deplorable in his treatment of Prince. Although her job is to be a house servant, it soon becomes obvious that he has an ulterior motive for wanting Prince in such close proximity. In Bermuda, she still receives floggings, but she makes it as clear as she can, without being too explicit or indelicate, that she was also taken advantage of sexually.¹⁴ She addresses her victimization through indirection, making her reader read between the lines, saying, "He had an ugly fashion of stripping himself quite naked and ordering me then to wash him in a tub of water. This was worse to me than all the licks. Sometimes when he called me to wash him I would not come, my eyes were so full of shame" (67-68). Carefully alluding to what is part of the experience of the female slave, her master's nakedness, the forced physical contact between him and Prince, and her shame confirm an inappropriate intimacy. By revealing how her master revealed himself to her and his sexually threatening behavior, Prince shows the immorality of slave masters and by extension, the institution itself.

Mary Prince's disclosure of the more uncomfortable aspect of her relationship with Mr. D-- tests the boundaries of how this most sensitive subject could be broached, even though she cloaks it. If descriptions of slave bodies being publicly exposed throughout the narrative did not affect her audience because they were familiarized or desensitized to such things, then the exposure of the body of a white man forced them to confront head-on the ugliness of Prince's experience. The sexualized violence against naked black bodies alone may or may not have disturbed them, but they were sure to be morally offended that a woman, slave or not, was forced to look upon the naked body of a

man, specifically one who was not her husband. This serves to help make Prince an even more sympathetic figure and solidifies her status as victim, which explains why Pringle did not censor this part of Prince's experience. Also, her admitted shame of being forced to bathe her master establishes that she has a moral compass her master does not. In a way, her moral superiority to him can be given a sentimental turn, for it gives her the moral authority to judge, and more importantly, to speak. In addition, her showing some semblance of virtue in such immoral circumstances protects her womanhood from being too harshly judged, for she illustrates how her innocence was compromised without calling into question her character. Instead, with the focus on his depraved behavior, it is Mr. D--'s character that is called into question. By doing so, as Woodard observes, "Contrary to popular-cultural perception, then, Prince dispels the notion as a black woman, she is responsible for the moral degradation of the white male enslaver" (141).

Following the continuing pattern in the narrative of Prince speaking up and out against the behavior of her oppressors, in Bermuda, the next step of Prince's journey to selfhood and towards freedom is marked by another act of her voice agency. After Mr. D-- strikes her for refusing to bathe him, she refuses to be victimized by him any longer. Just as she scolded Capt. I-- the day she ran away as young girl, she rebukes Mr. D--. Experiencing a moment of courage, she says, "I defended myself, for I thought it was high time to do so. I then told him I would not live longer with him, for he was a very indecent man -- very spiteful, and too indecent; with no shame for his servants, no shame for his own flesh" (68). Her repetition of the word "indecent" to describe him, and her qualification of it, indicates the level of her disgust. Acting on her word, Prince leaves his home actively to seek a new master. Considering the five years of daily abuse she suffered while living with Capt. I-- and his wife and the following ten difficult years she spent in the salt mines, in comparison, her decision to leave Mr. D--'s home because of his impropriety speaks volumes to how traumatized she was by his sexual manipulation. Significantly, Mr. D-- does not go after Prince, nor does he punish her. For Prince, this

second act of insolence without punishment is an empowering moment, not only because she gains some limited control over her circumstances, but also because it proves to her that speech is a way to protest power successfully. Unsurprisingly, a more emboldened and defiant Mary Prince proves to be problematic for her next and final owners.

Desperate to get away from Mr. D--, Prince finds a man named John Wood from Antigua who is willing to purchase her. Fleeing from one harsh environment, with the Wood family Prince discovers herself in yet another unsatisfactory situation, reflecting her comment early in the narrative about how her lot in life was "to be pass[ed] from one misery to another, and from one cruel master to a worse" (58). At the Woods's, Prince is subjected to a different type of abuse than she encountered with Capt. I-- and his wife and Mr. D--. While her portrayal of her experience with her previous owners emphasizes the slave owner's lack of humanity, her portrayal of her experience with the Woods stresses their lack of compassion. In the Woods's home, Prince assumes domestic duties that included nursing one of the Wood children and doing the family wash. Although she is periodically flogged by the Woods, their primary means of abusing her apparently are the continuous physical demands they make on her. These physical demands are troublesome for Prince because during her period with the Woods, she begins suffering from bouts of rheumatism brought on by her years of working in the salt mines.

As a result, she was often unable to work without experiencing debilitating pain. Prince states the Woods were insensitive to her suffering and did not offer her any sympathy but instead heaped duty upon duty onto her, forcing her to perform difficult household tasks that only aggravated her illness. Sometimes she complained or did not do the work because she simply could not. As a consequence, she is accused of being disobedient. The tool for abusing Prince for what the Woods considered as her obstinacy was not the whip but their words, and Prince notes she is often scolded by them, particularly by Mrs. Wood. The Woods, though, are dealing with a more defiant Prince, who had already to varying degrees successfully challenged the authority of her previous

owners, and the relationship between Prince and the Woods evolves into a battle of wills that would also later play itself out in court. As she becomes increasingly proactive in attaining her freedom and verbal about her wish to do so, the Woods become increasingly controlling and reluctant to give it to her. When the Woods take Prince to England with them, it is there she finds sympathy and aid in her plight.

Coinciding with her empowerment is Prince's religious conversion. Her conversion is closely tied to the problem of her compromised womanhood, because her spiritual redemption cleanses not only her soul but also her character. For Prince, then, claiming the sentimental identity of redeemed Christian is in some ways a practical strategy. Since religion played a major role in the abolitionist movement, Prince's conversion made her a better candidate to receive assistance in her plight from the Anti-Slavery Society, the organization to which both her editor and transcriber belonged, and it also made her narrative more suitable for publication. As Ferguson succinctly puts it, "Conversion aids social acceptance."¹⁵ This is not meant to suggest Prince's religious conversion was insincere. On the contrary, her conversion seems to have enabled Prince to achieve selfhood, in that she absolved herself of the guilt of the sexual transgressions committed against her womanhood during her enslavement and those she herself committed. Taken to a prayer meeting at Christmas by a fellow slave, of her conversion, Prince remembers, "I felt sorry for my sins also. I cried the whole night, but I was too much ashamed to speak. I prayed God to forgive me" (73). After later attending Bible studies at a Moravian church, she goes on to say, "I never knew rightly that I had much sin till I went there. When I found out that I was a great sinner, I was sorely grieved, and very much frightened. I used to pray God to pardon my sins for Christ's sake, and forgive me for every thing I had done amiss" (73). Although Prince does not identify for her reader what her "sins" were or what she "had done amiss," she is probably alluding to, among other things, the sexual intimacy with Mr. D-- (and perhaps Capt. I--) and her relationship with Capt. Abbot, which is later revealed in court testimony. It is always

problematic when a victim assumes the culpability of his or her victimizer(s) but for Prince, her repentance protects her from audience's judgment in the same way her shame does in the bathing scene. Thematically, though, it also serves another purpose. Their attention near the end of the narrative being drawn away from matters of the body to matters of the soul leaves her audience with the impression of Prince not as a tainted woman but as a purified Christian. Curiously, despite this, like several of the scenes of abuse, Prince does not take advantage of the sentimental potential her conversion allows. She records she has an emotional response, but her spiritual transformation is not as powerfully portrayed as it could have been, especially since becoming a Christian is an important part of her experience. The significance of her spiritual education is minimized by the lack of sentimentality in which it is related, even though it is her redemption that gives her the privilege of morality.

In many ways, the identity of a saved sinner was the only one available to Prince because presenting herself as an emblem of womanhood would pose too much of a problem. Because nineteenth-century women were defined by their roles as wives and mothers, those roles were prized and their sentimental valuation high. Aside from Prince's sexual victimization, an unfulfilled marriage and her absent motherhood place her outside the constructions of true womanhood during her time. In the narrative, it is only after her conversion, cleansed of her "sins," that Prince attempts to embark on one of the rites of passage of womanhood -- marriage. Rather than providing her with domestic happiness or stability, her marriage instead becomes an example of how enslaved black women are denied the privileges afforded to white women, to which Prince alludes when she notes her marriage to a free black carpenter named Daniel James was not in the English Church because English law forbade a free man to marry a slave woman (74). But the deeper personal injury to her seems to have been that the Woods refused to allow her to enjoy her marriage. For Prince, marriage, like speaking up, was most assuredly an exercise of freedom, which is why the Woods persecute her for it, whipping her after their

discovery of what she had done. She says of this period, “I had not much happiness in my marriage, owing to my being a slave” (75). Later, even after leaving the Woods and her narrative’s subsequent publication, Prince still is unable to strengthen her marital bond because her husband remains in Bermuda and Prince cannot risk her freedom by leaving England. Domestic bliss eludes her.

After Prince’s narrative appeared, the emotional distance caused by the physical separation between Prince and her husband became apparent when he challenged the allegations she makes in *History*. In his scathing attack on Prince in an editorial in *Blackwood’s Magazine*, James Macqueen, a Woods defender, cites Prince’s husband Daniel James’s support of the Woods as proof of Prince’s fraudulence as well as her narrative’s. Macqueen quotes James as saying, “Mr. Wood *never punished* Mary to his knowledge” (emphasis author’s).¹⁶ Macqueen also claims James wrote a letter to Mr. Wood in which he refers to his “*late wife*” and apologizes for his wife’s statements, “regretting that she had been so base and so badly advised” (748). By calling Prince his “late wife,” her husband severs their marital bond; it is a symbolic act of divorce. His actions also repeat the betrayal of her father. His censuring of her is damaging, because she is not only accused of being untruthful, but she is also made to look like a bad wife. She seems very much an unsuitable woman if her own husband rejects her and calls her base. Prince’s inability to be a true wife and her husband’s rejection prevents her from exploiting her identity as wife, which could have been another way for her female readers to identify with her.

The other available role for Prince in the domestic sphere is also denied her -- that of mother. Her childlessness is yet another indication of how slavery rendered black motherhood impotent, earlier exemplified in *History* by Prince’s mother, who was helpless in protecting her children and had them sold away from her, and by Hetty, whose floggings caused her baby to die in her womb. Prince never had the opportunity to become a mother, because, as Moira Ferguson has suggested, she was quite possibly

unable to conceive, her sterility a result of the many brutal beatings she suffered throughout her lifetime.¹⁷ Elaborating on her position that Prince could not address her sterility within a context of violence because it would jeopardize the religious bent of her narrative, Ferguson argues, “Mary Prince tries to communicate an alternate profile of her own domestic ‘fitness’s (in all senses) in the absence of motherhood. She takes pleasure in working as a nursemaid, in visiting with her own mother, siblings, and other children. Weighty silence, as much as anything, speaks to the grim, damaging sexual coercion of female slaves and her discursive power in circumnavigating evangelical taboos” (*Subject to Others* 289). Although I agree with Ferguson’s statement about silence, I am unsure to what extent Prince tries to construct an alternative to prove her domesticity through the relationships Ferguson names. In recounting her experience, Prince does not stress the importance of these relationships in the personal way they often are in other female slave narratives. We receive little insight into how Prince interacted with her family, except for a couple of key moments in her narrative. She visits her family but does not report what went on during these visits or provide any descriptions about how she felt. As for her role as nursemaid, while the teenaged Prince was close to her wards before she was auctioned away, she does not express having developed any motherlike emotional attachment to any of her later owner’s children. Consequently, there is not the sense that she is trying to prove domestic worthiness to her audience. Even if she wanted to do so, it would have been difficult for Prince to construct a domestic model for herself, alternate or not, because to varying extents all familial relationships she relates in her experience are fragmented or failed. In relation to the political purpose of her narrative, for Prince this is unfortunate, because like wifery, motherhood would have enabled her to connect with her readers an experience with which they could identify that transcended race and class. In *History*, Prince can only enact the sentimental drama of being a tragic slave mother through her own mother and Hetty. Thus, her newfound Christianity and

conversion serve to compensate for her not being a suitable example of a wife as well as her absent motherhood.

The trials of black womanhood in the narrative raise the issue of the absence of sisterhood between Prince and her white mistresses during her enslavement in the West Indies. Because of her race and status, she is never thought of in abolitionist terms “as a woman and a sister” but instead always as property, enabling her white mistresses to dissociate themselves from her and to justify their inhumane treatment of her. Throughout her narrative, there is an implied indictment by Prince that her mistresses should have been more sympathetic to her situation rather than participating in her victimization and subjugation, a similar sentiment expressed in other female slave texts. Her feelings towards her mistresses seem to lie somewhere between anger and disappointment. Early in *History* the impact of race and class on the attitudes of slave mistresses towards black female slaves is perhaps best exemplified by Prince’s recollection of her relationship with Miss Betsey, whom the then innocent Prince thought of as a “good” mistress. Emphasizing that this was the period of her life before she understood the implications of what it meant to be a slave, Prince recalls how their relationship was sister like and how Miss Betsey used to refer to her as “her little nigger” (47). In and of itself, Miss Betsey’s calling Prince “her little nigger” is quite an obvious indication of the nature of attitude towards Prince. However, the defining moment revealing the true parameters of their relationship was Prince’s sale. Upon learning her favorite slave is to be sold, Prince quotes Miss Betsey as crying, “Oh, Mary! my father is going to sell you all to raise money to marry that wicked woman. You are *my* slaves, and he has no right to sell you”(emphasis author’s) (50). I find it telling that in directly quoting her mistress, Prince stresses the possessive “my,” recalling the emphasis her mistress put upon this single word. Miss Betsey’s emphatic “my” is an act of claiming, signifying ownership and reaffirming Prince’s identity as property, sister-like or not. In addition, her lack of sympathy towards Prince’s plight further objectifies Prince. Miss Betsey is not appalled

and dismayed because of the misfortune of her favorite slave and her sisters being sold away from their mother. Instead, Miss Betsey's distress originates from what *she* has lost and how her authority has been undermined by her father. Still, despite Miss Betsey's prejudice and obliviousness to Prince's emotional pain, in comparison to her later mistresses Mrs. I-- and Mrs. Wood, one can understand why Prince considered Miss Betsey a good one.

Portraying the lack of sisterhood also later in her slave life, Prince's depicts Mrs. I-- and Mrs. Wood as being as cruel tormentors of her as their respective husbands, both women inflicting physical and emotional suffering upon her without a flicker of compassion. They are actively complicit in her dehumanization. In her description of how Mrs. I-- abused her, Prince says Mrs. I-- mercilessly pinched her arms and neck and punched her face and head, as well as how often ordering her to be stripped and then flogged. Regarding this stripping of her body, in the segment of her narrative when Prince addresses her abuse by Capt. I-- and his wife, she only notes how it is Mrs. I-- who has her stripped naked and not Capt. I--. Even in the sexually charged episode she relates in which Capt. I-- beats her until he is exhausted, she does not allude to her nakedness. Although it may be simply an oversight on Prince's part, it is unlikely she remained clothed when Capt. I-- punished her. Her description of how he stripped and whipped the pregnant Hetty suggests it was one of his methods of punishing his slaves. For him not to have given the same treatment to Prince seems improbable. The question, then, is why does she remember this small detail with his wife but not him? One has to wonder if Prince noting Mrs. I-- had her stripped may be a subconscious allusion to how unnatural she felt it was for a woman to expose another female body. Adding tension to this unnaturalness is that Mrs. I-- seems to have been constantly touching Prince's body, for unlike Mrs. Wood, who had others whip Prince for her, Mrs. I-- abused Prince using her own hands.

At one point in the narrative, Prince herself makes a remark linking her exposed body to Mrs. I--'s touch. Speaking to her education as a slave by Mrs. I--, Prince says, "she caused me to know the exact difference between the smart of the rope, the cart-whip, and the cow-skin, when applied to *my naked body by her own cruel hand*" (emphasis added) (56). The physical contact between Prince's naked body and Mrs. I--'s cruel hand suggests a sexual undercurrent to her abuse of Prince. In the Capt. I-- passage in which he whips Prince until he is exhausted, his passion derived from violent physical contact with her body is closely tied to sexual excitement. For Mrs. I--, part of the pleasure she receives in lacerating Prince's body is closely tied to sexual jealousy. Addressing the issue of sexual jealousy in plantation life, Minrose C. Gwin observes, "Powerless against a lustful husband and blind to the harsh realities of chattel slavery, the enraged wife often vented her jealous rage upon the one person whom she *could* control, the black woman . . . power could transform sexual jealousy into intense cruelty"(emphasis author's) (40).¹⁸ Mrs. I--'s obsessive abuse of Prince in this context lends more credence to the possibility of Prince having been sexually involved with her master. Sexual jealousy aside, by having Prince stripped and whipped, Mrs. I-- does more than just participate in the physical mistreatment of her. In mimicking her husband's ritual of exposing the female slave body, she also participates in Prince's sexual abuse.

As for Mrs. Wood, Prince criticizes her for her lack of sympathy and for overworking her despite knowing she suffered from painful bouts of rheumatism. After she relates the story of one particularly severe attack in which she was incapacitated for an extended period, Prince indicts Mrs. Wood for her heartlessness, noting, "My mistress did not care to take any trouble about me; and if the Lord had not put it into the hearts of the neighbours to be kind to me, I must, I really think, have lain and died" (69). However, Mrs. Wood's attentiveness posed as much a problem for Prince as her inattention. As a demanding mistress, when dissatisfied with Prince, Mrs. Wood either had her whipped, or what seemed to be worse for Prince, she scolded her. To Prince, the scolding was

insufferable. Having to do endless, laborious domestic work, Prince remembers, “I could give no satisfaction. My mistress was always abusing and fretting after me. It is not possible to tell all her ill language” (70), and she describes Mrs. Wood as “frett[ing] the flesh off my bones (75), which literalizes the effects of aggressive speech. Though Prince refrains from quoting any of the major things Mrs. Wood said to her for her reader, when she testifies in court after the Woods sue for her editor for libel, she says Mrs. Wood called her “a devil, a black devil, and a spawn, and said she wanted to be a lady.”¹⁹ Mrs. Wood’s behavior became worse after Prince’s marriage, as if she did not want Prince to enjoy any domestic happiness of her own. Her accusation of Prince “wanting to be a lady” is more than a subtle hint about the role class played in her treatment of Prince. Though Prince was aided by white Englishwomen in her plight for freedom when she later traveled to England with the Woods, sisterhood in the West Indies between white and black women was nonexistent.

Showing how slave mistresses are corrupted by slavery, Prince removes them from the sentimental pedestal upon which the eighteenth and nineteenth century British (and American) white woman was placed. Abusive, unfeeling, and cruel, both Mrs. I-- and Mrs. Wood are emblems of this contaminated womanhood. As a black woman, for Prince to present a presumably largely white female audience with negative portrayals of white womanhood that she does was risky. One of the ways she tempers her critique is she includes incidents in her narrative of white women suffering, which accomplishes two things. First, she is able to show another perspective of the white women she encountered, depicting them not just as victimizers but also as victims. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, Prince is able to demonstrate her sentimental credentials in her ability to feel for and to pity others. The empathy Prince shows towards white women who are in desperate situations also illustrates how she recognized the bonds they shared in sisterhood, even though they did not extend any help or sympathy to her.

In the two stories of the two white women she witnessed in pain, it is obvious she recognized that although she was black and enslaved and they were white and free, because of gender, they too were experiencing a form of oppression.

The first white woman she witnesses suffering is her mistress Mrs. Williams, who was Miss Betsey's mother and wife to Capt. Williams. It was Mrs. Williams's death that was the catalyst for Prince's sale. In her description of Mrs. Williams, Prince depicts a woman trapped in an unhappy marriage to an emotionally abusive man. Prince says, "[Capt. Williams] was a very harsh, selfish man; and we always dreaded his return from sea. His wife was herself much afraid of him; and, during his stay at home, seldom dared to shew her usual kindness to slaves. He often left her, in the most distressed circumstances, to reside in other female society, . . . My poor mistress bore his ill-treatment with great patience, and all her slaves loved and pitied her" (48). Besides Mrs. Williams, playing the role of martyr, suffering through her husband's neglect and his extramarital affairs while she was alive, after she dies, her husband further disrespects her by immediately marrying his mistress. Though Prince was but a child, she understood Mrs. Williams's predicament and pitied her, as did the other Williams slaves. The consequence is a reversal of a sentimental trope in antislavery writing; it is not the slave as a tragic figure who is the object of pity but the slave mistress. As an adult woman remembering the past, this compassion Prince expresses for another woman reflects, if not an overtly sisterly attitude, then at least demonstrates an awareness that there is something analogous when the powerless suffer in spite of difference.

What does reflect an overtly sisterly attitude in *History* is Prince's account of her actions when she found her master Mr. D-- beating his daughter. She remembers, "I strove with all my strength to get her away from him; for she was all black and blue with bruises. He had beat her with his fist, and almost killed her. The people gave me credit for getting her away" (67). Instead of being an unmoved spectator, intervening, Prince risks her own safety to protect a white woman from the same man who physically and

sexually abused her. Interestingly, Prince uses physical power to save Mr. D--'s daughter as opposed to the verbal power she uses to defend herself. To lay her hands on her master in a gesture of force is an even more dangerous act than using speech to rebuke him, and her doing so demonstrates the urgency of the situation in her willingness to fight for another. There is a double model, here, on two levels. Prince fights back where white women do not. At their best, they allow themselves and others to be abused; she stands up for others as well as for herself. The significance of this particular episode in Prince's narrative is not just found in her act itself of coming to another victimized woman's aid but also in her concluding observation of her actions. The acknowledgment she receives from the slave community makes her protection of the abused daughter even more of an empowering, feminist act, because her public display of female solidarity gives her the respect and authority denied to her as black woman. Prince's defense of Mr. D--'s daughter and sympathy for Mrs. Williams, read against the incidents she includes in her narrative when her other white mistresses abused her or neglected to protect her, illustrates the failure of sisterhood on the part of white women on the islands.

Without the benefit of mutual sisterhood, Prince defends herself with the only resource available to her -- her voice. Using it to defy her enslavers and to critique British colonialism, Prince's voice is central to her empowerment. Verbal resistance is her weapon and strategy. In each of her accounts of her abusive owners, there is a moment in which she speaks up and out, challenging their authority. In the case of Capt. I--, it occurs when she tells him she ran away because she could not bear his abuse anymore. Tellingly, Capt. I--'s response to Prince's admission is for her to "hold her tongue" (60). And after she saves Mr. D--'s daughter from the beating, she again speaks defiantly. When Mr. D-- attempts to beat Prince for intervening, she tells him, "'Sir, this is not Turk's Island,'" refusing to accept the same treatment she received for ten years in the salt mines (67). In Prince's relationship with Mrs. Woods, the two women were constantly engaged in a battle of words because Mrs. Wood was verbally abusive and

Prince could no longer, as Mr. D-- once warned her, hold her tongue. Prince recalls one particular day when Mrs. Wood was incessantly scolding her, noting, "I bore in silence a great deal of ill words: at last my heart was quite full, and I told her that she ought not to use me so; - that when I was ill I might have lain and died for what she cared; and no one would then come near me to nurse me, because they were afraid of my mistress. This was a great affront" (70). Prince offends Mrs. Wood again in another episode after she asks to buy her freedom from the Woods. She says, "Mrs. Wood was very angry - she grew quite outrageous - she called me a black devil and asked me who had put freedom into my head. 'To be free is very sweet,' I said: but she took good care to keep me a slave. I saw her change colour, and I left the room" (75-76). Prince's response to Mrs. Wood's question, I think, shows a bit of Prince's cleverness and sassy spirit. By replying with an abolitionist-like slogan, she answers Mrs. Wood's question in a way that lets her know exactly who without telling her. In each of the exchanges between slave and owner, Prince illustrates speech as an effective means of self-defense. In a different context, this is also the case in the production of her narrative, for in dictating her story to a transcriber, she creates a text that serves not just as her testimony against slavery but also as another forum in which she challenges and indicts her owners through speech. As a whole, *History* enacts the same dramas of verbal resistance that the individual episodes portray.

Along with the episodes of voice-agency in *History* demonstrating the provocative nature of Prince's speech, there is a boldness or sharpness to her language that challenges how slaves were expected to speak as sentimental subjects. Ferguson puts it best, remarking that Prince had a "fiery spirit."²⁰ Throughout the narrative, it is not just what Prince says but the *way* she speaks that is rendered "inappropriate." Indicative of this, in the editorial and court case following the narrative's publication, in accusations made by her detractors, her mouth becomes one of the sites of her indecency, her body being the other. In his defense of the Woods printed in *Blackwood's Magazine*, Macqueen quotes

Grace White, a black woman employed by the family during the same period as Prince, as saying, “I was obliged to quit Mr. Wood’s service, in consequence of Molly’s violence and scandalous language towards me. She threatened to kill me more than once or twice.” Even Prince’s editor Pringle, writing in an otherwise positive letter defending Prince, observed among her “chief faults” was “a somewhat violent and hasty temper” (105). Though Pringle does not cite a specific instance where he witnessed a Prince outburst in his assessment of her disposition, there is little question that her temper was most likely made known to him through her speech. Considering how in moments of hopelessness or anger she was not opposed to telling her volatile owners off, it is hard to believe her editor would be any less immune to a tongue lashing from Prince.

In her narrative, the hostility in Prince’s speech can also be found in her critique of white people, in which she essentially shoots verbal daggers. For example, as we have seen, in the market-place scene when she comments on the apathy of the by-standers as she was being auctioned, she observes, “They were not all bad, I dare say, but slavery hardens white people’s hearts towards the blacks; . . . Oh those white people have small hearts who can only feel for themselves” (52). And at the conclusion of the narrative, she observes, “Since I have been here [England] I have often wondered how English people can go out into the West Indies and act in such a beastly manner. But when they go to the West Indies, they forget God and all feeling of shame, I think, since they can see and do such things” (83). Here, Prince calling their behavior beastly connotes animalism in a way that cuts right to the core of the matter. Slaves are believed to be and treated like animals but once whites leave “civilized” society, it is they who become ones. Prince slyly inverts scientific thinking and social attitudes of her day, implying in the exploitation and mistreatment of slaves who the real savages are. Also, as biting is her comment when she sees her new home after her sale to Capt. I--. Prince observes, “I could not see much of it that night. I saw too much of it afterwards. The stones and the timber were the best things in it; they were not so hard as the hearts of the owners” (54).

Her editor Pringle footnotes this particular comment Prince makes, noting, “These strong expressions, and all of similar character in this little narrative, are given verbatim as uttered by Mary Prince” (54). Pringle’s footnote is a protective measure, but it does not serve the same purpose in the preface of authenticating the text. His footnote is to distance himself from her biting words, in essence signaling Pringle’s awareness of the dangerous nature of Prince’s speech. The “strong expressions,” as Pringle calls them, in Prince’s narrative are the moments where there can be no question of whose voice is being heard.

Still, as earlier argued, the authority of Mary Prince’s voice is compromised by the transcription of her narrative; it is a suspect text. In the preface to *History*, anticipating questions about the narrative’s veracity, Pringle tries to circumvent them, writing:

The narrative was taken down from Mary’s own lips . . . It was written out fully, with all the narrator’s repetitions and proximites, and afterwards pruned into its present shape; retaining, as far as was practicable, Mary’s exact expressions and peculiar phraseology. No fact of importance has been omitted, and not a single circumstance or sentiment has been added. It is essentially her own, without any material alteration farther than was requisite to exclude redundances and gross grammatical errors, so as to render it clearly intelligible. (45)

Pringle’s assertion that the story comes from “Mary’s own lips” is not only meant to authenticate her text, but also to privilege the oral word over the “pruned” written word of the transcribed text itself. In addition, his comment also calls attention to the site of her mouth. While Jenny Sharpe has correctly argued that “[Pringle’s] statement deauthorizes the speaker in the very act of authorizing the written record of her words,” Prince subverts this subversion and reclaims her authority as speaking subject.²¹ I agree with Ferguson when she argues, “Mary Prince does not, however, readily surrender her narrative to editorial rule.”²² At the conclusion of her narrative, Prince says, “I will say the truth to the English people who may read this history that my good friend, Miss S--, is now writing down for me. I have been a slave myself - I know what slaves feel - I can tell *by myself*

what other slaves feel, and by what they have told me” (emphasis added) (84). What Prince does in this brief passage is an inversion (and subversion) of what Pringle does in the preface. Prince acknowledges there is another actor in the telling of her story, but Strickland’s role is merely to write for her, and by an implied extension, Pringle’s merely to edit for her. Her assertion she can “tell by [her]self what other slaves feel” informs the reader she does not need anyone to speak for her or to her experience. As Sandra Pouchet Paquet notes, “The power of [Prince’s] word is oral and familial; writing is what other people do. Her narrative reveals none of the preciousness about individual voice that characterizes the professional writer in our time. Her speaking voice has its own preeminent validity.”²³ In addition, Dwight McBride has observed that “Prince completely reverses the established roles ascribed to slave and master. In her logic, the *slave* knows best what the slave wants.”²⁴ Therefore, no matter if one is a transcriber or editor, master or mistress, white abolitionist or proslaveryite addressing slavery, Mary Prince asserts that only *she* has the authority to voice her individual personal experience with slavery and that of the collective. Of this defiant stance of Prince’s, William L. Andrews argues, “The implication of [her] declaration should not be underestimated, since it provides the first claim in the Afro-American autobiographical tradition for the black woman as singularly authorized to represent all black people, regardless of gender, in Western discourse about ‘what slaves feel’ about the morality of slavery.”²⁵

Despite the authority over her text and experience Prince claims in her declaration, the content of her narrative was challenged when Wood sued Pringle for libel two years after *History* appeared.²⁶ Claiming the cruel treatment that Prince ascribed to him and his wife is false, in *Wood vs. Pringle*, Wood accuses Pringle of being opportunistic and manipulating Prince to further his own political agenda. Unsurprisingly, in order to prove his case for the damage done to the Woods’s characters by the publication of *History*, Wood’s lawyer seeks to disparage Mary Prince’s word and character. In court testimony recorded by a court reporter for *The London Times*, witness

after witness for the plaintiff attacks her character. Contradicting Prince's account of her difficult relationship with the Woods, they cast Mr. and Mrs. Wood as the put-upon owners and Prince as the problem and the one who could not be pleased. The testimonies delivered by Wood supporters make Prince seem unreasonable and as if she were exaggerating her circumstances. Of Prince, the Wood family doctor said, "He never saw greater attention and kindness paid to her by Mr. and Mrs. Wood. She appeared to be a favourite of her mistress . . . She was always very well dressed. She had a complaint called St. Anthony's fire. [He] attended her for a long time and she had every care necessary for her recovery. [He] had frequently seen Mrs. Wood attending on her, and giving her food with her own hands" (*The London Times* F6). This image of a caring, attentive Mrs. Wood offering Prince food with her own hands is quite the opposite of Prince's description of her wielding the rope, cart-whip, and cow-skin with those same hands to strike Prince. Further discounting Prince's claims in *History*, the Woods's daughter testified that "Mrs. Wood always treated Mary Prince with the utmost kindness, and attended to her herself. She had money allowed her, and was always very well dressed . . . There was no dismission of kindness towards [her], but she appeared very discontented. She did not like roast beef and veal, because she thought it was like horse-flesh; that was the first ground of discontent. She appeared to perform her work very unwillingly . . . [She] went away voluntarily, and not in consequence of any harsh treatment on the part of Mr. and Mrs. Wood." Also, the captain of the ship the family journeyed to England on observed that Prince "was very lazy" and claimed he "had more trouble with her than any other person in the vessel." While injurious, these particular statements about Prince's behavior are not as damaging as they could be: meaning they focus only on how she was a bad slave and not a "bad" woman. This is especially surprising because in a letter Wood's wrote to the governor of Antigua, in which he explains why he refuses to give Prince her freedom, he intimates that there is more to his disapproval of her than just her disobedience and attitude. He writes to Sir Patrick Ross:

“It would be to reward the worst species of ingratitude, and subject myself to insult whenever she came in my way. Her moral character is very bad, as the police records will shew; and she would be a very troublesome character should she come here without any restraint. . .It would be beyond the limit of an ordinary letter to detail her baseness” (91). Prince’s baseness, to which Wood’s is referring, or her “depravity” as his attorney calls it in his opening statements, concerns her relationship with a white ship captain named Abbot.

In the narrative, Prince mentions Captain Abbot in passing, saying only, “A gentleman also lent me some [money] to help buy my freedom -- but when I could not get free he got it back again. His name was Captain Abbot” (71). Because of the brevity of his appearance in *History*, it is hard to discern the exact nature of their relationship, or even question it, which is what Prince’s editor Pringle wanted. Abbot seems no more than a casual acquaintance. In her cross-examination on the stand, Prince reveals the details of her relationship with Captain Abbot. The court reporter notes: “She had lived seven years before [she married] with Captain Abbot. She did not live in the house with him, but slept with him sometimes in another hut which she had, in addition to her room in the plaintiff’s yard. One night she found another woman in bed with the Captain in her house. This woman had pretended to be a friend of witness. (Laughter.) Witness licked her, and she was obliged to get out of bed. (A laugh.)” (*The London Times* F7). In her testimony, she also reveals that before Captain Abbot there was another man with whom she lived for a while, a free black man she met when she first arrived in Antigua named Oyskman. Unlike Captain Abbot, he is not mentioned at all in *History*. Prince’s admission under testimony positions her as a morally loose woman by Victorian society’s standards, because she not only had sexual relationships with two men outside of marriage but also cohabitated with them. The fact that there was laughter in the courtroom does not minimize the harm the revelation does to Prince’s womanhood as much as it is a commentary on how black sexuality was perceived. On a related side

note, demonstrating a strained sisterhood among black women, a free mulatto woman named Martha Wilcox alleged that Prince once stole another woman's husband and also hinted Prince prostituted herself, saying, "she made money *many, many* other ways by her badness; I mean, by allowing men to visit her, and by selling to worthless men" (*The London Times* F7). The image her detractors present of Mary Prince's womanhood in court jeopardizes the moral power of her corrupted innocence that is a subtext of her narrative.

While Prince goes on to testify that she later ended her association with Captain Abbot because it affected her relationship with the Moravian church, what is more significant is that she tells the court she disclosed everything to her transcriber, Susanna Strickland. The exclusion of Prince's relationship with Captain Abbot, then, is the most overt example of how Pringle censored sensitive parts of Prince's history. One can understand why Pringle did so: this particular aspect of her experience threatened the sentimental image of her as a redeemed Christian, making her a less suitable subject and representative for the religious-centered abolitionist cause. Allowing Prince to "slip in" Mr. D--'s sexual depravity and the implication of Capt. I--'s shows how her victimization and corruption were enabled by the institution of slavery, but allowing her to address a consensual sexual relationship, especially between a black woman and a white man, would make her as indecent to her audience as her slave masters. Nevertheless, there was at least one person who publicly argued Mary Prince should not be judged and that her relationship with Captain Abbot should be regarded in context of the environment in which it was born. Shortly after the narrative was published, Joseph Phillips, a resident of Antigua and an antislavery supporter, in a letter defending Prince, notes, "-- that I have heard she at a former period (previous to her marriage) a connexion with a white person, a Capt. --, which I have no doubt was broken off when she became seriously impressed with religion. But, at any rate, such connexions are so common, I might almost say universal, in our slave colonies, that except by the missionaries and a few serious persons,

if faults at all, so very venial as scarcely to deserve the name of immorality” (101). Unfortunately, other than the court reporter noting Wood was awarded £25 for his complaint, the other legal consequences of the *Wood vs. Pringle* libel case are unknown, because court documents have remained unfound. Little is also known about Mary Prince’s life afterwards.²⁷

Indicating the success of her narrative with the English public, it went to press two more times, but Prince still found herself in the position of having to defend its authenticity. As an appendix to the third edition, there appears a letter, signed by several other women corroborating its contents, written by Mrs. Pringle. To prove the veracity of the account of her experiences, the letter relates, Prince was asked to publicly strip for perhaps what was the last time in her life. Describing the sight of Prince’s exposed body, Mrs. Pringle writes, “the whole back part of her body is distinctly scarred, and, as it were, *checquered*, with the vestiges of severe floggings. Besides this, there are many large scars on other parts of her person, exhibiting an appearance as if the flesh had been deeply cut, or lacerated with *gashes*, by some instrument wielded by most unmerciful hands”(emphasis author’s) (19). Compromised narrative voice or not, her body tells her story and reveals truth. Making this same point, Ferguson observes, “[Prince’s] body-as-text announces that, regardless of gender, torture speaks and is spoken” (*Subject to Others* 295). Also commenting on Prince’s body-as-text, McBride states, “Her scarred, black body - unlike language and rhetoric - cannot but tell truth. In the absence of the real, unmediated slave experience . . . the closest one can hope to come to th[e] real experience is Prince’s black body: the very palimpsest upon which slave experience is indelibly written for all to read. Prince’s body quite literally assumes evidentiary status” (98). Ferguson and McBride both miss, though, how this scene in which Prince must turn herself around to be valued, this time within the context of her worth to the abolitionist cause, re-enacts the body-as-spectacle of the market-place episode.

Mary Prince's *History* is a sentimental text, engaging the sentimental aesthetics so intrinsic to the culture of sentimentality found in abolitionist literature. My analysis is not an attempt to make her "fit." The influences *are* there; they are only not there in the more conventional way we have come to expect them to be. This is why it is important for me to situate my discussion of Prince before my discussion of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. I want not only to establish Prince as Jacobs's distant literary kin but also to play upon how Jacobs expands on and foregrounds the subject and sentimental techniques that are in the background of Prince's narrative. Also, by linking Prince and Jacob as companion chapters, I believe it allows Prince to share the spotlight with Jacobs, while still having a place of her own in which her own significance is celebrated. Her narrative is an important text and a rich literary resource. It is true the chances she will ever be canonized are remote, but she does not deserve to remain relatively stranded in a critical no man's land. I consider this chapter as a small step in the journey scholar Moira Ferguson began more than twenty years ago to rescue Prince from remaining an outcast. Hopefully, when the question "What is the significance of Mary Prince?" is asked twenty years from now, there will be a wealth of scholarship to answer it.

NOTES

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- ¹ Gates, Jr., *Slave Narratives* ed. James Tackach (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2001) 110-111.
- ² Alexander herself has shown an investment in early women writers of color, having completed scholarly work on and published an edition of Mary Seacole's *The Wonderful Adventures of Mary Seacole*.
- ³ It should be noted that it has only been within the last twenty years that Harriet Jacobs's narrative itself has received critical recognition and inclusion in the canon.
- ⁴ Woodard, "Reading *The History of Mary Prince: The Politics of Race and Gender*" in *African-British Writings in the Eighteenth Century: The Politics of Race and Reason* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994) 144.
- ⁵ Moody, *Sentimental Confessions: Spiritual Narratives of Nineteenth-Century African American Women* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia P, 2001). In a chapter on Nancy Prince and the rejection of sentimentalism, Moody includes a short discussion of Mary Prince's *History*, in which she argues that Prince's sentimental construction as a saved Christian was devised by her editor and transcriber. While Prince's editor and transcriber certainly affected how Prince was "seen," to not give Prince any credit in this construction negates her significance as an actor in the telling of her story.
- ⁶ Sharpe, "'Something Akin to Freedom': The Case of Mary Prince" in *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 8.1 (1996) 43.
- ⁷ In the Introduction of her critical edition of Prince's narrative, this is date Moira Ferguson cites from her extensive research on Prince and her family history. Prince, *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself* introduction by and ed. Moira Ferguson (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1997) 2.
- ⁸ Tricia Lootens made this observation in her reading of a draft of this chapter.
- ⁹ Ferguson, *History of Mary Prince* 4.
- ¹⁰ Scarry, *The Body in Pain* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985) 3.
- ¹¹ Noble, *The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature* (New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000) 181.
- ¹² Woodard 143. For a more in-depth analysis on the representations of the black female body and sexuality and Sartje Bartmann, see Sander L. Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art,

Medicine, and Literature 223-261” in *“Race,” Writing and Difference* ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press Chicago, 1986) 223-261.

¹³ Favret, “Flogging: The Anti-Slavery Movement Writes Pornography” in *Essays and Studies 1998: Romanticism and Gender* ed. Anne Janowitz (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1998) 19.

¹⁴ It is not known whether Mr. D-- sexually abused Prince during her tenure on Turk’s Island and Prince does not mention it. However, I would cautiously venture that he probably did so. Having her living in his home exacerbated his abhorrent behavior.

¹⁵ Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 284.

¹⁶ Macqueen, “The Colonial Empire of Great Britain. Letter to Earl Grey” in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (Nov. 1831) 30: 748.

¹⁷ In her introduction to Prince’s narrative, Ferguson observes, “The fact that children are never mentioned -- unusual in a female slave narrative -- raises the question, understandably not mentioned by Mary Prince (or permitted to be mentioned by Pringle), of possible physical abuse leading to sterilization. Mary Prince’s severely weakened health, testified to by Pringle and by a number of writers in the preface to the third edition and in the postscript, as well as by Mary Prince herself, corroborates this speculation” (14).

¹⁸ Gwin, “Green-eyed Monsters of the Slavocracy: Jealous Mistresses in Two Slave Narratives” in *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition* eds. Marjorie Pryse and Hortense J. Spillers (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1985) 39-52.

¹⁹ “Wood v. Pringle” *The London Times* 1 Mar 1833: F6+.

²⁰ Prince, *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself* 13.

²¹ Sharpe 38.

²² Ferguson, *Subject to Others* 283.

²³ Pouchet Paquet, “The Heartbeat of a West Indian Slave: *The History of Mary Prince*” in *African American Review* 26 (Spring 1992): 135.

²⁴ McBride, *Impossible Witnesses: Truth, Abolitionism, and Slave Testimony* (New York: New York UP, 2001) 101.

²⁵ Andrews, *Six Women’s Slave Narratives* ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Oxford UP, 1988) xxxiv.

²⁶ There was no challenge made to Prince's narrative by Capt. I-- or Mr. D--. Both men were deceased by the time of its publication.

²⁷ In the second edition of *History*, Pringle includes a postscript in which he updates Mary Prince's life since the narrative's first publication. He says she suffers from an eye disease which may eventually leave her blind and again urges people to buy her narrative to provide her with financial sustenance to give her comfort in her failing health (118).

CHAPTER 4

WHISPERS, SILENCES, AND SENTIMENTAL STRATEGIES IN
 HARRIET JACOBS'S *INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF A SLAVE GIRL*

There are some things that I might have made plainer I know-
 Woman can whisper -- her cruel wrongs into the ear of a very
 dear friend -- much easier than she can record them for the world
 to read.

Harriet Jacobs in a letter to Amy Post¹

One of the reasons why Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (1861) is so distinctive from more conventional slave narratives is because her fictionalized autobiography fuses the African American literary form and tradition of the slave narrative with the English literary form and conventions of the sentimental novel.² The other is because of what Jacobs uses these merged forms and traditions to do, which is to communicate the American female slave experience and to expose the sexual vulnerability and sexual abuse located within that experience. Sentimentalism enabled Jacobs to negotiate her own space as a black female author and an abolitionist. This negotiation, however, is complicated by the fact she is also her own subject, and what becomes acutely apparent in her appropriation of sentimentalism is Jacobs's struggle between her public self, Linda Brent, and her private self, Harriet Jacobs. In *Incidents*, this conflict is exemplified more by what she does not say about particular aspects of her experience than by what she does. She is forthcoming but not forthright. She discloses the events related to sex, sexuality, and womanhood that are

central to her story but she recounts them through indirection and implication, in whispers and silences.

Given the narrative's subject and social expectations of female behavior, her discretion is, of course, not surprising. Her story required a delicate approach to an indelicate subject; to do otherwise would have meant to risk offending and alienating her audience, thereby defeating her purpose. Even so, there is still more at work behind Jacobs's reticence than just external forces. Her use of sentimentalism to cloak not only reveals how self-conscious she was about her character being judged by her audience, but also how invested Jacobs was in the sentimental values that she challenges. Jacobs deals with the issue of her audience's judgement by revising and redefining the standards of womanhood to make them more inclusive of the black female experience. Doing so enables her to construct the parameters of a sentimental argument, in which, if she must be judged, then she will be judged on her own terms. Though this empowers her, her position is a complicated one, for even while Jacobs is subversive, she still identifies with those beliefs and values instilled in her by her grandmother. Therefore, for Jacobs, sentimentalism is a dual-edged sword. Although addressing sentimentalism in somewhat of a different context, I think an observation Ann Douglas has made can be applied to articulate Jacobs's situation: "Sentimentalism provides a way to protest a power to which one has already in part capitulated."³ This conflict is why scholarship addressing Jacobs's use of sentimentalism is largely written from two diametrical critical perspectives, either balancing heavily on the side of reading her text as a critique of sentimentalism or on the other as reading it as conforming to the tradition. It is not that analyzing it either way is "wrong," the narrative itself supports both opposing critical positions, it is just that some things are missed.

The problem in reading *Incidents* as definitively more one way or the other is that too often this means the gray areas of Jacobs's story are not fully explored, with certain aspects of the narrative relegated to background or dismissed altogether. These gray areas

were an intentional strategy of Jacobs and can be seen in the way she uses sentimentalism to redirect her reader's attention away from delving too deeply into what she does not wish to disclose, particularly things surrounding events involving her owner Dr. Flint and her relationship with Mr. Sands. Only a few scholars, such as Franny Nudelman and Ann B. Dalton, have specifically addressed in extended analyses the connection between Jacobs's vagueness and the way she appropriates and manipulates sentimentalism in the narrative.⁴ Jacobs describes her sexual harassment at the hands of Flint, but refuses to repeat the words he wrote and spoke to her that tormented her. Instead, the reader is forced to use his or her imagination to deduce what terrible things Flint whispered into the young Jacobs's ear. She provides the motivation and reasoning behind her decision to have a sexual relationship with the unmarried Sands, but does not explain why she continued the relationship past when it served her purpose. Her pregnancy with and the birth of her second child, her daughter Ellen, are related abruptly and succinctly.⁵ While the silence around the Flint and Sands episodes may seem to be a minor issue to call attention to in contrast to what Jacobs does reveal through suggestion, it is not. In particular, with the passages concerning Flint, her silence is glaring. The sexual abuse of Jacobs was committed through what Flint said to her, her ears being the site of his penetration and rape. By concealing from her reader Flint's "foul words," Jacobs also conceals an integral part of her experience crucial to her corruption and victimization. As Nudelman observes, "In the narrative itself, the promised revelation of sexual suffering gives way to the practice of evasion" (951).

In the following analysis of sentimentalism in Harriet Jacobs's narrative, I examine how the whispers and silences enable her to claim the sentimental identities of sentimental heroine and the good mother in her construction of black womanhood. In addition, I argue that while her claiming those roles demonstrates agency, Jacobs's cloaking throughout the narrative also illustrates how confined she was not just by the moral sensibilities of her audience but also by her own. Reflecting her self-

consciousness, throughout her text, there is an underlying anxiety informing the way she relates her history that makes it evident she still experiences residual guilt and shame. While it is true that in publicizing her own experience she is defiant, she is also supplicant, both to her audience and to her own shame. To reference one of the more noted quotations from *Incidents*, Jacobs's appropriation and manipulation of the conventions of sentimentalism, then, only offered her "something akin to freedom." As Karen Sánchez-Eppler argues, "Jacobs's narrative strategies evince a desire to have it both ways, to hide her story, and hence her sexual vulnerability, within the general rubric of slavery's atrocities, and to rupture the normative abolitionist accounts of cruel masters and suffering slaves by interposing within it the private discourse of female sexuality."⁶ The revealing and re-veiling and the conflict and contradictions found in Jacobs's narrative speak most clearly to issues she was struggling with as subject and author, which is why, as Nudelman notes, Jacobs "alternately describes herself as a victim of circumstance, pleading for pity and assistance, and as a discerning actor who exercises significant control over nearly impossible conditions" (939). Rather than downplay Jacobs's anxiety over the sexual and the resulting complexity of both her position and her text, my analysis seeks to foreground both. Through this foregrounding and the emphasis on the connection between the sentimental techniques and silences in *Incidents*, my reading supplements existing scholarship on Jacobs and sentimentality by providing both an alternate way of approaching it and a different exploration of it.

Prior to her narrative's publication, in the early stages of its conception, Jacobs had already displayed sensitivity about the issue of her womanhood and how she should be represented, most notably in her dealings with Harriet Beecher Stowe and in her correspondence with Amy Post. Initially, on the suggestion of her employer Sarah Willis, Jacobs wished for Stowe to pen her narrative, but this intention proved to be a problem. Stowe, who wanted to include an excerpted version of Jacobs's story in her *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853), forwarded a letter written by Amy Post to Willis in order to verify

the veracity of the events of Jacobs's, inadvertently revealing the parentage of Jacobs's children to Willis. Offended, Jacobs wrote to Post, "I had never opened [sic] my lips to Mrs Willis concerning my Children -- in the Charitableness of her heart she sympathised [sic] with me and never asked their origin my suffering she knew it embarrassed me at first but I told her the truth but we both thought it was wrong in Mrs Stowe to have sent you [sic] letter."⁷ In the same letter, Jacobs goes on to tell Post how both she and Willis wrote Stowe to express their desire that her story be told in its entirety, as opposed to appearing as a shortened version in her *Key*. Stowe did not respond to their letters, prompting Jacobs to observe that "it was not Lady like [for Stowe] to treat Mrs Willis so" (235). Beth Maclay Doriani interprets Stowe's actions as "a racial insult," but to what extent race played a factor in Stowe's rudeness and her abrupt abandoning of the project can only be conjectured.⁸ Even if Jacobs did consider it racially motivated, the more significant matter is what she calls Stowe's behavior. Her labeling of Stowe's actions unladylike is quite revealing. While she refers to Stowe as unladylike because she felt Stowe was disrespectful to Mrs. Willis, Jacobs also appears to be responding to the lack of consideration she felt Stowe neglected to show *her*, for what was also not "ladylike" was Stowe exposing her and betraying her confidence. Consequently, in forwarding Post's letter, Stowe not only questioned Jacobs's honesty but also called into question her womanhood. By doing so Stowe was not just being unladylike but also unsisterly, both of which are contrasted by Mrs. Willis's empathy for Jacobs. Unlike Stowe, Mrs. Willis refrains from asking Jacobs any uncomfortable questions about the origin of her children, even though she had to have suspicions about Jacobs's history.

Besides the Stowe/Jacobs incident illustrating the strained, tenuous bonds of sisterhood between black and white women (an issue the narrative and Jacobs's argument revolves around), it also connects to the issue of Jacobs concealing. Jacobs's silence ("never opened my lips") about her children is an example of her impulse to cloak delicate parts of her history. For Willis, the existence of Jacobs's children is not a secret,

but the specifics about how they came into being are. Like the readers of Jacobs's *Incidents*, she is told only as much as Jacobs is willing to reveal and has to draw conclusions about missing information. In being forced to address this part of her history with Willis, Jacobs's embarrassment is an indication of the discomfort about the subject of sex and sexuality. While Frances Smith Foster has observed that in comparison to white female abolitionist authors, black female writers "were not expected to be refined, chaste, or ladylike so they could speak more freely," I feel Jacobs is somewhat of an exception to Smith's statement, because she *wants* to be perceived by her readers as ladylike, regardless of societal expectations, and therefore she refrains from speaking too freely regarding her sexual experience.⁹ As the epigraph opening this chapter illustrates, Jacobs is conscious of her veiling, her whispering, in her admission to Post that "there are some things I might have made plainer I know." She is restrained by her anxiety about her womanhood and how her character would be judged by her audience, white middle-class Northern women whose womanhood was privileged, protected, and prized. Harryette Mullen argues this same point, noting, "The exposure of the slave woman's body -- in the field where she worked, on the auction block, at the public whipping post, along with her sexual vulnerability within the master's household -- is at odds with the hidden sexuality and corresponding modesty of the bourgeois white woman, whose body is covered, confined, and sheltered with the patriarchal household designated as her domestic sphere."¹⁰ This is why in relating her story, Jacobs uses sentimental discourse as a linguistic sheath for her exposed body, from which she can connect politically and emotionally with her audience but still remain very much obscured.

In the preface of *Incidents*, Jacobs again asserts her reluctance publicly to reveal her experience, noting, "it would have been more pleasant to me to have been silent about my own history" (5). In the following introduction, it is Jacobs's editor, abolitionist Lydia Maria Child, who accepts accountability for the sensitive content of Jacobs's narrative. Emphasizing the political purpose and necessity of Jacobs's story appearing in print,

Child writes, “I am well aware that many will accuse me of indecorum for presenting these pages to the public; for the experiences of this intelligent and much-injured woman belong to a class which some call delicate subjects, and others indelicate. This peculiar phase of Slavery has generally been kept veiled; but the public ought to be made acquainted with its monstrous features, and I willingly take the responsibility of presenting them with the veil withdrawn” (6). Though Child’s purpose is to prepare the reader, her comments hint at the forbidden sexual revelations to come in almost a tantalizing way. Sánchez-Eppler rightly calls this Child’s “heralding the narrative as a form of undressing, a discursive striptease” (93). In partaking in the “discursive striptease” as editor, Child’s positioning of herself as just as indelicate and unladylike for presenting the narrative as Jacobs is for writing is a gesture of female solidarity, though not everyone reads it this way. For example, P. Gabrielle Foreman argues that in her introduction Child “wrests responsibility from Jacobs. [Her] language is informed by patron-child hierarchy which mirrors the slave patriarchy, where slave is figured as child and master as patriarch.”¹¹ While it is understandable that Foreman finds Child’s comments problematic and suspect, Child’s motivation seems not to have been to “wrest,” (quite a strong word), ownership of Jacobs’s experience away from her, but instead to symbolically demonstrate in her sharing of it, the alliance between Northern white women and Southern black female slaves that needed to be forged. Child’s loyalty to Harriet Jacobs and the antislavery cause is evident, with her telling Jacobs in a letter, “You know I would go through fire and water to help you give a blow to Slavery” (244).

Child’s willingness to share the burden of judgment with Jacobs does more than establish a sense of sisterhood. Child’s statement in her introduction to *Incidents* is also significant because of the way she directly engages and challenges abolitionist sentimental aesthetics like Stowe’s that propose “slavery, in some of its workings, is too dreadful for the purposes of art. A work which should represent it strictly as it is would be a work which could not be read; and all works which ever mean to give pleasure must

draw a veil somewhere, or they cannot succeed.”¹² The privileging of pleasure over slavery’s less pleasant realities undermines the plight of the female slave as a political subject. She is not just a suffering mother, a safer representation of black womanhood to address that avoids the “dreadful”; she is also a suffering woman, a highly sexualized being whose exploitation forces discussions about the “dreadful.” Jacobs herself recognized that initially, there was no real place for her experience in the abolitionist movement because of its indelicate nature: she told Post, “when I first came North I avoided the Antislavery people as much as possible because I felt that I could not be honest and tell the whole truth” (232). Jacobs does draw her own version of a veil in her use of sentimentalism, but it is not to make her story more pleasurable. The veil is her tool to access those sentimental values that enable her to align herself with the sheltered white womanhood of her readers. Still, this writing from behind a sentimental veil for Jacobs is a precarious undertaking, for as Krista Walter points out, “whether she shields herself in the dominant values of white womanhood, or openly exposes her predicament as a female slave, as the author-figure of the narrative, [Jacobs] knows she is subject to contempt or dismissal from all sides . . . [Her] difficult task is thus to negotiate a virtually impassable moral terrain.”¹³

Following the opening chapters of *Incidents* in which she provides information on her family history and addresses the early part of her childhood, Jacobs first introduces the issue of her sexual vulnerability and harassment in the chapter entitled “The Trials of Girlhood.” The title of this chapter highlights the tension between girlhood and womanhood that Jacobs stresses throughout the narrative. Her reference to herself as a girl emphasizes her innocence and how her journey into womanhood was corrupted and accelerated by slavery, causing her to become “prematurely knowing” (26). (Even the adult Jacobs’s titling of her narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* as opposed to a slave woman can be read as a reflection of this disruption.) As a servant in the Flint household, fifteen-year-old Jacobs finds herself increasingly subjected to the sexual

advances of her master Dr. Flint, whose respectable position as the town physician masks his depravity. Remembering this period, Jacobs writes, “My master began to whisper foul words in my ear. Young as I was, I could not remain ignorant of their import . . . He peopled my young mind with unclean images, such as only a vile monster could think of” (26). With Flint’s violation of her ear, it is through speech that Jacobs loses her sexual innocence. The “unclean images” Flint’s sexual speech causes suggest the tainting of her sexual purity, and the “peopling” of Jacobs’s mind, as Dalton notes, suggests the act of impregnating (44). The location of Jacobs’s sexual abuse being her ear also has another symbolic meaning. Threatened with violence or death by Flint, Jacobs is forced to remain silent. Dalton observes, “Her use of the woman’s ear as the site of the attack is appropriate and evocative because the abused ear is parallel to the silenced mouth of the molested woman and what she cannot tell” (43). Jacobs learns early that silence is both a means of survival as well as a prison.

This relationship between speech, silence and sexual corruption is why Jacobs the author censors Flint’s language spoken to Linda the young female slave. At one point in the narrative, Jacobs explicitly addresses her censoring of Flint’s voice, saying, “I was subjected to such insults as no pen can describe. I would not describe them if I could; they were too low, too revolting” (64). To repeat the words Dr. Flint spoke into the ear of her reader would associate her with his perversion and violate the reader through the same medium she was violated. Speaking to this, Deborah Garfield argues in her analysis of speech and sexuality in Jacobs’s narrative, “If sentimental discourse, as Jane Tompkin notes, is particularly adept at eroding the boundary between reader and character, at eliciting from the reader the protagonist’s tears, then reading about sexual victimization in a sentimental idiom might itself prove an erotic contamination.”¹⁴ The resulting consequence, Garfield observes, is that “The black target, not the lewd patriarch, tragically becomes the satanic tempter whose candid whispers might blight the white auditor’s purity” (29). Bruce Burgett also has recognized Jacobs’s linguistic dilemma,

observing, “As receiver and transmitter of obscene talk, Jacobs positions herself as both victim and pornographer” (18). Trapped, Jacobs supplements what she cannot speak by detailing Flint’s physical actions in his campaign of abuse, his shadowing of her wherever she treads and passing her notes (the contents of which are untold). However, she is still cautious; to be too sexually explicit about what was said and done would put her reader in the position of being a voyeur. Consequently as Burgett notes, “*Incidents* provides its readers with sexual knowledge, even as it assures them that their eyes and ears remain chaste,” and I would add that by extension, it also allows the author to be chaste (18). By silencing Flint’s sexual speech and not offending the sensibilities of her audience, Jacobs reclaims some of her purity as it relates to the subject of her womanhood, for her discretion allows her to reclaim her virtue and the morality denied to her by Flint, slavery, and popular beliefs about black female sexuality. To this end, in choosing a biblical passage from Isaiah as one of the epigraphs for *Incidents*, “Rise up, ye women that are at ease! Hear my voice, ye careless daughters! Give ear unto my speech,” Jacobs casts the female ear of her reader not just as a site for sexual speech but also for political speech. Still, in spite of the privilege asserted by Jacobs’s silence and vagueness about the words “too low, too revolting” for her to describe to her reader, her shame is evident and serves as another motivating factor behind her cloaking, for, as Dalton notes, “the passage also suggests that [Jacobs] recoiled from recalling the trauma of the past incidents because they were too disturbing for *her* to represent” (emphasis author’s 47).

Her inability and unwillingness to repeat what Flint says and writes to her is what renders Jacobs powerless during her time in the Flint household. She recalls, “I longed for some one to confide in. I would have given the world to have laid my head on my grandmother’s faithful bosom, and told her all my troubles” (27). Tormented, she is silent both because Flint threatened her life if she confided in her grandmother and because of her own fear that if appraised of the situation, her grandmother might react violently against Flint. More significant, though, Jacobs also refrains from telling her

grandmother about her sexual harassment because of the same guarded sense of delicacy that restricts what she tells her reader about it. While part of her reason for not confiding in her grandmother is because Flint threatened her life (Jacobs's) if she did not remain silent and her fear her grandmother would react violently against Flint if she apprised her of the situation, she is also prevented from speaking by the same guarded delicacy that restricts what she tells her reader. Jacobs says, "I was very young, and felt shamefaced about telling her such impure things, especially as I knew her to be very strict on such subjects" (27). Jacobs again shows her embarrassment and reluctance to engage in sexual speech. Symbolically, in relating the sexual aspect of her story to a sentimental reader, her grandmother Aunt Marthy (Molly Horniblow) serves two purposes: her grandmother represents not only the sentimental values she defines herself by and struggles against, but as a "character," the grandmother is also figure with whom the audience can identify. Speaking on the first one, Gloria Randle states, "The grandmother is at one Brent's ideal and her nemesis -- on the one hand, and exemplary model whom she can never hope to emulate; on the other an unrealistic, disempowering model from whom she wants to break free."¹⁵ As for the second purpose, the grandmother-sentimental reader identification is integral to how Jacobs gains the support and empathy of the white female readers of her narrative, most specifically when she addresses her sexual relationship with Mr. Sands. When a jealous Mrs. Flint goes to Jacobs's grandmother with accusations about Jacobs and her husband, her grandmother reacts with moral outrage: "'O Linda! Has it come to this? I had rather see you dead than to see you as you now are. You are a disgrace to your dead mother.' She tore from my fingers my mother's wedding ring and her silver thimble. 'Go away!' She exclaimed, 'and never come to my house, again'" (48). Aunt Marthy's declaration that she would rather Jacobs be dead than ruined is right out of the tradition of the sentimental novel and calls attention to how Jacobs makes the "wrong" choice as a heroine by choosing to give up her virtue instead of her life. Suicide is the more respectable solution. In addition, another significant issue raised by

this particular passage is rarely commented on. While the wedding ring and thimble are remembrance tokens for Jacobs of her mother, they are also symbols of domesticity. In her grandmother's seizure of them, the last vestiges of her womanhood are snatched and stripped away from Jacobs. As a fallen woman, she is exiled, cast out of the domestic sanctuary of her grandmother's home and the cult of true womanhood. Also, as Randle notes, "The reclamation of the mother's ring symbolically tears mother from daughter once again, underlining Brent's motherlessness. The dispossession of this particular emblem -- a wedding ring -- also marks the pregnant girl as unmarried, and therefore immoral"(46).

Jacobs's description of her grandmother's reactions mirrors how Jacobs expected her contemporary audience would respond to this delicate part of her story, swift to cast judgment of her character without fully recognizing the complexity of her situation. Rebuked and shamed, Jacobs says, "I longed to open my heart to her. I thought if she could know the real state of the case, and all I had been bearing for years, she would perhaps judge me less harshly" (49). Later, when her grandmother finally agrees to see her again, Jacobs recalls, "I told her I would bear any thing and do any thing, if in time I had hopes of obtaining her forgiveness. I begged of her to pity me, for my dead mother's sake. And she did not say, 'I forgive you;' but she looked at me lovingly, with her eyes full of tears. She laid her old hand gently on my head, and murmured, 'Poor child! Poor child!'" (49). This particular passage is a good example of how Jacobs more subtly bridges difference and is able to connect with those readers who may judge her. In employing sentimental conventions to divulge Flint's indecency and her own sexual trespass, she wants to evoke the same sort of sentimental response from her reader that her grandmother has upon hearing the truth. But it should be pointed out that for Jacobs there is a fine line between sympathy and empathy, the former, as she asserts in her preface, being what she does not want (5). Considering this, it is significant that Jacobs makes clear her grandmother does not forgive her. By not forgiving her granddaughter

yet consoling her, Jacobs's grandmother makes a gesture of support without sanctioning Jacobs's actions. This is exactly what Jacobs wants from her white Northern female reader. She does not expect her audience to forgive her, but to offer aid in the name of sisterhood to victimized enslaved black women. In a letter to Amy Post, she stresses this point, writing, "I ask nothing - I have placed myself before you to be judged as a woman whether I deserve your pity or contempt - I have another object in view" (242). By presenting her grandmother as an upright woman who lives by strict moral codes, who nonetheless is capable of making the emotional transition from outrage to empathy, Jacobs implicitly argues so, too, can her audience.

Returning to the whispers and silences in surrounding sex and sexuality in *Incidents*, two of the more significant episodes that need to be explored involve Jacobs's relationship with Mrs. Flint and Mr. Sands. In the chapter entitled "The Jealous Mistress," Jacobs describes how her mistress was complicit in her victimization. Despite, as Jacobs puts it, Mrs. Flint "possessing the key to her husband's character before [I] was born," she directed her animosity and the blame for her husband's inappropriate behavior towards Jacobs. In her article on the sexual jealousy of plantation slave mistresses, Minrose C. Gwin writes, "Far from adhering to the code of the Cult of True Womanhood, which demanded piety and morality, the white women became evil creatures, nurtured by the institution which allows them and their husbands absolute power over other human beings. It is as if white women perceive the slave woman's stereotypical association with sexuality to mock her mistress's socially imposed purity."¹⁶ When she learns of Flint's plans to have Jacobs share his sleeping quarters under the subterfuge of her serving as a nurse for his young daughter, Mrs. Flint interrogates Jacobs, and it is then the lack of sisterhood between the slave mistress and the enslaved woman becomes glaringly apparent for Jacobs. She recalls, "As I went on with my account her color changed frequently, she wept, sometimes groaned. She spoke in tones so sad, that I was touched by her grief. The tears came to my eyes; but I was soon convinced that her emotions arose

from anger and wounded pride. She felt that her marriage vows were desecrated, her dignity insulted; but she had no compassion for the poor victim of her husband's perfidy. She pitied herself as a martyr; but she was incapable of feeling for the condition of shame and misery in which her unfortunate, helpless slave was placed" (30). Significantly, Jacobs's words have the power to affect Mrs. Flint, but it is not in the way they were meant to. The tears Mrs. Flint weeps are not sentimental ones, nor are the wounds she receives. Instead, as Garfield correctly observes, "The duped spouse arrays her husband's connubial sins as the backdrop for her own more magnified persona as mythic wife-victim" (35). Ironically, the only one in this exchange who reacts with the expected emotional response is Jacobs, who is initially emotionally affected by Mrs. Flint's words, showing her anguish in noting she was "touched" and "tears came to [her] eyes." Jacobs's ability to feel for Mrs. Flint and Mrs. Flint's incapability of feeling for the female slave's plight is not just a not-so-subtle critique of Southern slave mistresses, but it is also an implied message and challenge to Northern white women reading *Incidents*. They have a choice in how they react politically to the sentimental power of Jacobs's narrative and the delicate subject it addresses; they can respond as Mrs. Flint does and blame and judge Jacobs, or they can respond like Jacobs and show their capacity to feel and empathize in spite of racial and class difference.

What is especially worth noting in the tense relationship between Jacobs and Mrs. Flint is how Mrs. Flint's jealousy causes her to become a participant in the sexual harassment of Jacobs. (The slave mistress's participation in the degradation of a female slave is also a subject in Mary Prince's narrative.) Wise to Dr. Flint's intentions, Mrs. Flint arranges for Jacobs to sleep in a room adjoined to hers. Then, appropriating one of her husband's preferred methods of violation, repeating indecencies into Jacobs's ear, she uses Jacobs's proximity to torment her. Of her mistress's behavior, Jacobs says, "Sometimes I woke up, and found her bending over me. At other times she whispered in my ear, as though it was her husband who was speaking to me, and listened to hear what I

would answer” (31). Mrs. Flint’s act of repeating sexual speech into Jacobs’s ear not only replays the auditory rape of Jacobs by her husband but also taints Mrs. Flint’s own womanhood in her willingness to say “foul words.” The slave mistress inflicting this sort of suffering on another woman makes her as dangerous and as threatening as the lascivious slave master. As Jacobs informs her reader, “you can imagine, better than I can describe, what an unpleasant sensation it must produce to wake up in the dead of night and find a jealous woman bending over you” (31). Sánchez-Eppler has an interesting reading of this scene, asserting, “As she bends over her sleeping slave, her mouth at Linda’s ear, Mrs. Flint occupies precisely the position of erotic dominance repeatedly denied the doctor. This is the most explicitly and graphically sexual representation in the entire narrative . . . Since this scene, despite all of its erotic content, purports to represent jealousy rather than lust, it falls safely within the bounds of acceptable feminine discourse” (97). While Sánchez-Eppler makes a good point about how sexually suggestive the scene becomes in Mrs. Flint’s miming the role of seducer, I disagree that it is the most explicit and graphic representation of sex in *Incidents*. Instead, as I will address later, it is Jacobs’s account of a runaway slave named Luke that is the most thinly veiled passage related to the sexual in her narrative. In any case, it is not only through whispering in Jacobs’s ear that Mrs. Flint makes complicit in her abuse and the tainting of Jacobs, but she also damages Jacobs’s character when she exposes Jacobs to her grandmother. Although Mrs. Flint falsely accuses Jacobs of having intimate relations with her husband, she puts Jacobs in a position where she is forced to tell her grandmother about Flint’s indecency. In revealing this information, she also has to reveal to her while Flint is the source of her troubles, he is not the source of her fall, meaning she had to reveal her relationship with the unmarried Mr. Sands and her pregnancy. It is hard not to note how this incident of exposure echoes the one that later occurred involving Jacobs, Stowe, and Mrs. Willis. There is the same betrayal of sisterhood and

the slight against Jacobs's womanhood, with Jacobs being forced to reluctantly tell the truth of what happened to her on her own terms.

While Jacobs's readers can reasonably deduce what was whispered to Jacobs by Flint and his wife, which is what Jacobs depends on and what allows her to be vague, the circumstances surrounding her relationship with the unmarried white neighbor Mr. Sands are more heavily cloaked in comparison. It is this part of the narrative in which her use of sentimentalism to draw a veil is most overt, beginning with her plea to her audience: "O, ye happy women, whose purity has been sheltered from childhood, who have been free to choose the objects of your affection, whose homes are protected by law, do not judge the poor desolate slave girl too severely!" (46). Referring to this point in Jacobs's life, Fagan Yellin has also noted the veiling which follows Jacobs's sentimentalized introduction to her sexual transgression, stating, "When confessing her sexual history, [Jacobs] utilizes the euphemisms and the elaborate sentence structures characteristic of genteel discourse, which, conflating class and gender, the patriarchy assigned to true women."¹⁷ Shrouded in sentimental rhetoric, Jacobs's involvement with Sands lacks the detail she provides when she addresses her interactions with Flint, and even her Flint-forbidden romance with a free black carpenter. In explaining how her relationship with Sands developed, Jacobs says, "He expressed a great deal of sympathy, and a wish to aid me. He constantly sought opportunities to see me, and wrote to me frequently. I was a poor slave girl, only fifteen years old. So much attention from a superior person was, of course, flattering; for human nature is the same in all. I also felt grateful for his sympathy, and encouraged by his kind words. It seemed to me a great thing to have such a friend. By degrees, a more tender feeling crept into my heart. He was an educated and eloquent gentleman; too eloquent, alas, for the poor slave girl who trusted him. Of course I saw whither all this was tending" (47). Although this passage reveals the nature of Sands's character and the initial phase of their association, what Jacobs is silent on and what is missing are the logistics of how and where it occurred. Where did she and Sands

rendezvous? How did she slip away from the ever-present, ever-watchful Dr. Flint or from her grandmother's home to carry out their affair? What were the words he used to seduce her? Such questions in light of what she *is* confessing about her relationship with Sands may seem inconsequential, but the unknown information is advantageous. Its absence de-emphasizes the illicitness of their relationship, which is Jacobs's strategy, even while she acknowledges the inappropriateness of her actions.

Another example of this de-emphasizing in another context is when she reasons about the immorality of her fateful choice, "the wrong does not seem so great with an unmarried man, as with one who has a wife to be made unhappy" (47). Still, even though she qualifies "the wrong," Jacobs nevertheless assumes full responsibility over her decision, defiant to her master and defiant to her reader, she says, "I knew what I did, and I did it with deliberate calculation" (46). Thomas Doherty calls this declaration "downright boastful," but I disagree and feel his assessment negates one of the most powerful moments in the narrative.¹⁸ While Jacobs does admit to receiving some pleasure from the various acts of cunning she enacts against Flint from the garret of her grandmother's home, she does not feel pride in choosing to have a sexual relationship with Sands, which Doherty's comment suggests. Instead, she feels powerful and autonomous in exercising what limited control she can over her own body. Jacobs is too acutely aware that her victory is a Pyrrhic one to take glory in her actions. Her remark is not "downright boastful" but an indication of her agency and statement of her resolve. In another context, it is also the statement of a dignified adult: like a classic tragic hero or self-respecting penitent, Jacobs faces (and in some senses faces down) her own responsibility for past moral transgressions. This is integrity, not boasting.¹⁹ In any case, the question of her immorality between how she sees it and how she knows her audience will perceive it is best exemplified by her famous comment: "I know I did wrong. . . Still, in looking back, calmly, on the events of my life. I feel that a slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standards as others" (48).

Here, Jacobs's comment links her to Mary Prince. Her statement is a moment of voice agency, one of several occurring in *Incidents*. As in Prince's narrative, Jacobs's voice agency both empowers her and is a demonstrative act of aggression. Though her statement is tempered by her accountability ("I know I did wrong"), Jacobs openly challenges her white female audience and their values. By emphasizing that she has made this assessment about how her history should be judged "calmly," she takes away the emotionality of it. Speaking with detached reason, she presents it in such a way that it is not an excuse or an apology but a fact, which is what gives her comment its tone of defiance. In addition, there is another powerful example of her voice agency that needs citing and also illustrates a connection between Jacobs and Prince. Like Prince, Jacobs provides her reader with a scene in which she verbally spars with her master and critiques his behavior. Outraged by Jacobs's request to marry her black lover, Dr. Flint confronts her and asks if she loves the carpenter. When she responds that she does and that he loves her because she is a virtuous woman, Dr. Flint strikes her in anger. When he accuses her of provoking him to hit her and warns her he could kill her, she tells him, "You have tried to kill me, and I wish you had; but you have not right to do as you like with me" (35). Just as one of Prince's master cautions her to "hold her tongue" after she calls him on his ill behavior, Dr. Flint orders Jacobs to be silent, but she will not be censured.²⁰ This is an illustration of a recurring sentiment that appears throughout Jacobs's text: there are discretionary, forced times to remain silent, and other times, even though it is called for, silence is intolerable. In response to his threat to send her to jail for her insolence, she says, "I know I have been disrespectful, sir, but you drove me to it; I couldn't help it. As for the jail, there would be more peace for me there than there is here" (35). This passage recounting her argument with Dr. Flint in which she offers a stinging critique of him is the first major act of open resistance in the narrative. Beneath the thin veneer of her deliberately controlled words to him is barely contained hostility. Significantly, after this scene, she acknowledges to her reader that she hated "but once,"

leaving little question as to who she is referring (36). Physically disempowered, her speech is her only recourse and defense, which is also reflected by the production and the body of the narrative itself.

Besides Jacobs's small silences surrounding her relationship with Sands, there is a larger one. Her sexual relationship with Sands allows Jacobs a "loophole of retreat," the first of several symbolic and literal ones throughout the narrative. Her resulting pregnancy gives her limited power over Flint, but the immorality of it and the question of illegitimacy pose another problem for Jacobs in relation to how a sentimental reader would perceive it. Jean Fagan Yellin notes the delicate issue surrounding pregnancies and how Jacobs's pregnancy is one of the ways her text diverges from the norm, observing, "Pregnancy outside wedlock presented a serious problem in nineteenth-century American fiction and life [. . .] Popularly, the cult of motherhood enshrined the relationship of a mother and child only if the mother was first a wife; in popular fiction, pregnant girls found their way to the riverbank and drowned themselves."²¹ Just as she earlier chose to sacrifice her virtue over her life, Jacobs again rejects sentimental law by choosing to give birth and to live, a choice, as Yellin suggests, reflected by Jacobs's referring to her children as her "link to life." The birth of her first child, a son, successfully frees her from Flint's clutches, in that his wife refused to have Jacobs in their home and he could only harass her in her grandmother's home, a comparatively preferable situation. But while she relates the circumstances that led to her son (her first tie to life) being born in such a way her reader can pardon his existence, she does not do so with the birth of her second child. Her pregnancy with her daughter appears very abruptly in the narrative and is announced in a single sentence. This textual arrival of her second pregnancy is somewhat startling because in the chapters leading up to her daughter's birth, there is little suggestion Jacobs's intimate relationship with Sands is ongoing. Jacobs again remains silent on what she does not want emphasized or noticed, for the question which arises is: If the birth of her son saved her, in that it she was

removed from the Flint home, why did she continue her involvement with Sands? Her decision to do so really cannot be attributed to romantic reasons, because Jacobs is careful to say she experienced a “tender feeling” for Sands instead of love (47). She does not speak of love for him in the way she does for the free carpenter who proposed to her and wished to buy her freedom. Sands is only a tactical weapon of convenience. In her reading of *Incidents*, Mary Vermillion also makes this observation, noting that “Unlike the stock seduced maiden, Brent has no uncontrollable passion for Sands.”²² Since Jacobs asserts her actions were out of desperation and convenience more than romantic love, it would be difficult for Jacobs to justify to her reader why she kept seeing Sands even after she is under the protection of her grandmother. Therefore, she says little.

Even though it mostly takes place offstage, part of the reason she continued the sexual relationship can be found in a few textual clues Jacobs gives. Before addressing her first pregnancy, she stresses her innocence, reminding her reader that during this period she was only a youth, and of Sands, to quote her again, she says, “I felt grateful for his sympathy, and encouraged by his kind words. . . He was an educated and eloquent gentleman; too eloquent, alas, for the poor slave girl who trusted him.” Behind these more wiser, adult Jacobs’s sentiments is the implication that Sands took advantage of her youth and naivete. Her description of him as “too eloquent” suggests she was seduced not just by his kindness but also by his words. This relationship between words and Jacobs’s sexual experience here as it relates to her corruption is important because it connects Sands to Flint, for it can be argued Flint and Sands are opposite sides of the same coin. There is the suggestion that while Sands’s method was different, (Flint used “foul words” and he used “kind words”) his object was not. The Flint/Sands parallel becomes even stronger when considering how, like Flint, Sands also sought every opportunity to meet with Jacobs and sent her letters as well, the conversations and contents of which Jacobs does not reveal. The kind words he spoke and wrote made it difficult for a vulnerable Jacobs to discern his character and his true intentions. In many

ways, Sands is the seducer masked as a courtly lover and Jacobs the object (and Clarissa-like victim) of his seduction. Nonetheless, for the most part, Jacobs portrays Sands in a positive light during this section of her narrative. Sands behaves in a caring manner towards her and their children, and he eventually buys both children to prevent Flint from selling them away, sparing Jacobs from the usual tragic fate of a slave mother. Only later in *Incidents*, when he breaks his promise to Jacobs that he will free their children, are the questionable, deceptive aspects of his character made more visible to Jacobs and the reader. The message apparent in both Flint's explicit harassment and Sands's more subdued courting of Jacobs is that black women were seen as sexual objects and as available sexual property by white men, with the enslaved status of many black women making them all the more vulnerable and susceptible.

Another less-addressed issue in *Incidents* involving the veiling of sex and sexuality is how Jacobs also broaches the subject of corrupt and corrupted manhood. While in male slave narratives the sexual abuse of female slaves is often only briefly addressed, Jacobs inverts this tradition and offers a short, cloaked reference to the sexual victimization of a male slave. Near the end of her narrative after she has escaped north, she relates the story of a slave named Luke, with whom she was acquainted. After his master's death, Luke was inherited by his master's son, whom Jacobs describes as having "become prey to the vices growing out of the 'patriarchal institution'" (147). As she tells more about the master's son, it becomes clear the vices of the patriarchal institution of which Jacobs speaks are code for homosexuality. Upon his return home from school in the North, she describes how the son is bed-ridden with illness and severely ill-tempered, with Luke as the object of his venom. Discussing the excessive physical abuse Luke suffers, Anne Bradford observes, "As with much antislavery polemic addressing the victimization of slave women, where whips and cowhides stand for sexual assault as much as for physical beating, Jacobs has used those operative symbols but reversed the gender."²³ Jacobs recalls that the son kept Luke in a state of near nakedness, which she

says was to make it easier for him to flog Luke; however, given the nature of the comments she makes later in the same passage about the son, one can conclude it was also for other purposes. Jacobs remarks, “As he lay there on his bed, a mere degraded wreck of manhood, he took into his head the strangest freaks of despotism; and if Luke hesitated to submit to his orders, the constable was immediately sent for. Some of these freaks were of a nature too filthy to be repeated. When I fled from the house of bondage, I left poor Luke still chained to the bedside of this cruel and disgusting wretch” (148). With Luke’s nakedness, his forced proximity to his master’s bed, and Jacobs’s undisguised disgust, it is hardly difficult to deduce, in the most literal sense of the term, that Luke is a sex slave.

Jacobs’s discomfort with Luke’s situation is caused by the issues of homosexuality and male on male sexual assault.²⁴ Although she does not explicitly identify Luke’s master as homosexual, Jacobs indicates the son’s homosexuality by emphasizing his unnaturalness, calling him a “degraded wreck of manhood” and his vices and behavior freakish. While Luke’s story is Jacobs’s acknowledgment that black men are also suffering under the slavery system, something she also does by including brief accounts of her brother and her uncle’s experiences, her motivation for including the Luke passage works further to illustrate her point about the utter depravity of southern slave masters. Also, Burgett suggests Jacobs might have included Luke’s story because his circumstances closely paralleled her own, noting, “Just as Luke’s experiences of sodomy bar him from access to ‘true manhood,’ Jacobs’s enslavement threatens to undercut the claims to ‘true womanhood’ that mediate her relation to her Northern audience”(20). In presenting Luke’s experience, Jacobs broaches a most unsentimental and indelicate topic for the time in and audience for which she was writing, perhaps even more so than the subject of her own history. I think what is especially intriguing in Jacobs’s account of Luke’s life is that in many ways she is less discreet (or cloaked) in

exposing what happened to Luke than she is about the sexual events surrounding her own experience.

In the chapter entitled “The Confession,” Jacobs recounts how she decided to tell her daughter Ellen the truth about her history and the identity of her father lest she learn of it from another source. Jacobs reveals to Ellen her early experiences in slavery but before she can tell her about her sexual transgression, Ellen stops her and says she already knows. The title of the chapter, then, is somewhat ironic, because Jacobs does not actually fully disclose all to her daughter. (The title also reflects Jacobs’s shame, because the word “confession” connotes not just an admission but an admission of guilt.) The near confession mirrors the veiling Jacobs employs earlier in the narrative, with the difference being it is her daughter who assumes the role of censor. In response to Ellen’s assurance that she loves her, Jacobs experiences a sense of relief in not having to repeat sexual speech and experience, saying, “I had not the slightest idea she knew that portion of my history. If I had, I should have spoken to her long before; for my pent-up feelings had often longed to pour themselves out to some one I could trust. But I loved the dear girl better for the delicacy she had manifested towards her unfortunate mother” (147). The scene between Jacobs and Ellen is a counterpart to the one in which Jacobs is forced to reveal to her grandmother her harassment by Flint, her relationship with Sands, and her pregnancy. Although she does not explicitly make the connection, it is clear Jacobs means for her audience to read her daughter’s reactions against the grandmother’s. Ellen does not judge or reject her mother but instead embraces her. The physical embrace Ellen gives Jacobs is the symbolic one Jacobs wants from her white female readers, which is for them to take up, or embrace, the cause of the black female slave. On another note, Ellen’s act of embracing Jacobs also mirrors Lydia Maria Child’s sisterly act of risking contamination by association in Ellen’s willingness to touch her mother’s tainted body.²⁵

For Jacobs, it is not just her daughter’s love that redeems her, but also the fact that her daughter’s acceptance proves she has been a good mother. Sánchez-Eppler has noted

that “Maternity, of course, is an alternative means of locating the domestic: children replace houses as signs of a title to domesticity and an ability to engage in feminine discourse or to claim the status of a virtuous and valuable woman” (89). If Jacobs’s virtuous readers can not identify with her as a darker version of sentimental heroine because of her sexual experience, then they can identify with her as a mother and judge her on those terms. When Jacobs first plans to go into hiding to thwart Flint and leave her children under her grandmother’s care, functioning as the voice of sentimental reason, her grandmother discourages her, telling her, “Stand by your own children, and suffer with them till death. Nobody respects a mother who forsakes her children” (75). Jacobs does sacrifice her freedom, staying in slavery to be with her children and watching over them for seven years from the stifling confines of the prisonlike garret over her grandmother’s kitchen. The garret, or loophole of retreat as she famously calls it, is also the space from which Jacobs plans and executes her campaign of cunning in her battle with Flint, in which she sends letters that fool him into thinking she has escaped North. In struggling to fulfill her domestic duties as mother in the same space from which she wages psychological warfare against Flint, Jacobs offers her readers a different portrait of the slave mother in terms of a sentimental stereotype. Challenging a common trope found in abolitionist literature, she is not the tragic slave mother who has been torn from her children or abandons them, which is a depiction of passive black womanhood and black motherhood. Instead, in the cause for her children, she is reactive and proactive. In her demonstration of self-determining agency as a mother, her sacrifice of her freedom in some ways compensates for the moral wrong of the earlier sacrifice of her body that precipitates her becoming an unwed mother. Consequently, Caroline Levander observes, “Focusing specifically on the motherhood upon which domestic culture depends indicates that, rather than obscuring the reality of her experience as a slave woman, motherhood, more than other domestic tropes, becomes the idiom through which Jacobs reveals in extensive detail the extremity of her condition as a slave woman.”²⁶

Aside from the garret passages in *Incidents* symbolizing Jacobs's re-claiming of domestic space and authority in motherhood, they also illustrate how, in the physical and emotional suffering she endures in stifling confinement, she also embodies the representation of a sentimental heroine. In her grandmother's attic, although she is not a "madwoman" in the manner of how Gilbert and Gubar have defined it, (Jacobs retains her sanity and reason), Jacobs does exhibit some of the characteristics of such a depiction. Addressing this, Vermillion says, "It is in this part of the text that Brent -- tearful, hysterical, and sleeplessness -- most resembles the sentimental heroine. . . . During the second winter, in which cold stiffens her tongue, Brent's muteness and delirium echoes that of a "fallen" and dying sentimental heroine" (249). This positioning of Jacobs as a fallen, near death sentimental heroine is substantiated by the coffinlike space of the garret. In her "coffin," her experience of a symbolic death enacts the sentimental drama of the death Jacobs was expected to have met after her sexual transgression and illegitimate pregnancy. What also needs noting is that in her description of the numerous afflictions she suffers during her imprisonment, such as frostbite, heat, insect bites, cramped limbs, she calls attention to the physicality of her body. If Dr. Flint was close enough to Jacobs to whisper in her ear, there is no doubt he was also close enough to touch her inappropriately, yet her body is absent in her discussion of his harassment. Throughout her narrative, her body is largely obscured, or as Vermillion argues, "[she] privileges an interior self over her body and nearly erases its presence in her text" (247). Comparatively, in Prince's *History*, she does the opposite of Jacobs. In her text, there is emphasis on her physical body. In Jacobs's case, she can relate the attacks against her body in the attic because they are not within a sexual context. When she discusses her sexual harassment, the only part of her body she addresses being assaulted is her ear, effectively making it a separate, detached organ from the whole body symbolizing her fragmentation.

As an indication of this fragmentation, Jacobs's use of sentimentalism to render her body invisible displays a higher level of guilt attached to her shame than Prince's usage does. Her aversion of the body is yet another silence in *Incidents*. In Prince's narrative, she literally strips before her reader, re-enacting her stripping by her master and mistress before she is whipped. Rather than this public presentation of her body "victimizing" her all over again, by doing it largely on her own terms, she makes it a political act as opposed to one of violation. Forcing the sentimental reader to visualize her naked, scarred skin, Prince casts the female slave's body not as a site of sexual pleasure, but one of physical and sexual violence. Though Prince cannot help focusing on her body (and those of others) in *History* because of her anxiety, I wonder if what may have also allowed her to address it was her religious conversion. The absolution of her sins and her redemption reflects a distinct demarcation from her former self and life as a slave and her identity at the end of her narrative as a saved Christian; that Mary Prince was her but no longer is. For Jacobs, this seems to have been more complicated. True, in *Incidents*, there is same type of distinction made between Jacobs's life as a slave and as a free woman, as well as one between Jacobs's real self and her fictional self, Linda Brent, but even though she presents an argument absolving herself of her "sins," Jacobs still feels unclean. The sentimental reasons, then, for covering up her body, are just as much psychological ones. Jacobs is unable to fully present her reader the body she would not present to Dr. Flint. Also, the disappearing act of her body in her text could be read as Jacobs fulfilling her urgent desire during her "perilous passage" to "disappear" in the Flint home. As her body is all but erased in her narrative, she can only talk around it in the same way she talks around her sexual abuse and indiscretion. Whereas in Prince's *History*, her external wounds (the scars on her back) serve most powerfully as a sentimental sign, in Jacobs's *Incidents*, the internal ones serve as hers.

The rhetorical shift Jacobs makes from put-upon sentimental heroine to ideal mother is aided by the silences and whispers throughout the narrative, because they

enable her to control the emphasis her reader places on her right to claim those roles. To put it simply, we remember more what she does fulfill as opposed to what she does not. The impression one is left with at her story's end is not Jacobs as a scarlet woman but instead a virtuous one, one who demonstrates her ladylikeness by being delicate and discreet throughout her telling of a troubling tale. Likewise, instead of focusing on her motherhood being outside of wedlock and the illegitimacy of her children, one finds oneself focusing on how, in her devotion to her children, she is the model of a good mother. True, Jacobs may challenge the sentimental tradition at the conclusion of her narrative by placing her experience outside of it, stating, "Reader, my story ends with freedom; not in the usual way, with marriage," but her strategic cloaking allows her to still appeal to the sentimental aesthetics and values of her time (156). As current readers and scholars of her narrative, we know Jacobs exists both within and outside sentimental laws, but her contemporary audience needed to feel as though she lay firmly within them, because it is what gives her text its sentimental and political power.

In *Incidents*, the conflicting subtext of sexual anxiety and the text of sentimentality are the source of the narrative's duality -- its adherence to and critique of sentimental values. In her appeal to northern white women, what allows Harriet Jacobs to successfully present those two contradictory positions and vacillate between them is that she remains guarded. Reading the silences and whispers against what she says more openly in her narrative adds another layer to understanding the complexity of Jacobs as subject and author, as well how she achieves the balance between being exposed and exposing. Her skillful employment of sentimentalism to reveal yet not reveal is an authorial magic act, giving us the illusion that we are seeing and hearing more than we actually are. We know but yet we do not *know* what happened to her. This revealing/reveiling is integral to her argument because doing so enables her to position herself as a sentimental heroine and a devoted mother, which are the identities that could connect with her audience most effectively. In this context, the sentimental silences are

empowering, for as Joanne Braxton and Sharon Zuber note, “[her] inscription of these silences of her own choosing -- which often involves radically turning traditionally imposed silences to her own purposes-- represents the supreme assertion of autonomy and require[d] that she subvert sexual and racial stereotypes”(147). Nevertheless, in spite of the silences and despite the authority and agency Jacobs gains in the revising and claiming sentimental roles to make them inclusive of the black female slave experience, she is still a suffering victim of her circumstances. While the triumph for Jacobs is that her political purpose outweighed her personal concerns, putting her self on public display, throughout her text it is evident she remained an emotionally and psychologically wounded speaking subject.

NOTES

¹ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987) 242.

² Although I use Jean Fagan Yellin's edition of Jacobs's narrative as a source for Jacobs's correspondence, the edition I use for the text of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* is the recently published Norton Critical Edition edited by Nellie Y. McKay and Frances Smith Foster. All parenthetical citations throughout my argument refer to the McKay and Foster edition.

³ Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Noonday Press/Farrar, Straus and Giroux) 12.

⁴ See Nudelman, "Harriet Jacobs and the Sentimental Politics of Female Suffering" in *ELH* 59 (1992) 939-964 and Dalton, "The Devil and the Virgin: Writing Sexual Abuse in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*" in *Violence, Silence, and Anger: Women's Writing as Transgression* ed. Deirdre Lashgari (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1995): 38-61. Though not in the context of sentimentalism, Joanne M. Braxton and Sharon Zuber have also co-written an article exploring the significance and power of Jacobs's use of silence in her narrative. Braxton and Zuber "Silences in Harriet 'Linda Brent' Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*" *Listening to Silences* eds. Elaine Hedges and Shelly Fisher Fishkin (New York: Oxford UP, 1994) 146-155. My argument differs from Braxton and Zuber's, in that I explicitly connect Jacobs's use of sentimental conventions to effect the silences in *Incidents*.

⁵ In my discussion of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, I will refer to the people involved in Jacobs's experience by the pseudonyms she gives them, with the exception of Jacobs herself who I will refer to as Jacobs as opposed to Linda Brent.

⁶ Sánchez-Eppler, *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body*. (Berkeley: U. of California P, 1993), 92.

⁷ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987) 235.

⁸ Doriani, "Black Womanhood in Nineteenth-Century America: Subversion and Self-Construction in Two Women's Autobiographies" in *American Quarterly* 43.2 (1991), 201.

⁹ Foster, *Written by Herself: Literary Production by African American Women, 1746-1892* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993) 81.

¹⁰ Mullen, “Runaway Tongue: Resistant Orality in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin, Our Nig, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, and Beloved*” in *The Culture of Sentiment* ed. Shirley Samuels (New York: Oxford UP, 1992) 246.

¹¹ Foreman, “The Spoken and the Silenced in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*” in *Callaloo* 13.2 (1990) 316.

¹² Stowe, *The Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin* ed. William Loren Katz (Salem, NH: Ayer Publishers, 1854) 1.

¹³ Walter, “Surviving in the Garret: Harriet Jacobs and the Critique of Sentiment” in *American Transcendental Quarterly* 8:3 (1994) 204.

¹⁴ Garfield, “Speech, Listening, and Female Sexuality in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*” in *Arizona Quarterly* 50:2 (1994), 30.

¹⁵ Randle, “Between the Rock and the Hard Place: Mediating Spaces in Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*” in *African American Review* 33:1 (1999) 46.

¹⁶ Gwin, “Green-Eyed Monsters of Slavocracy: Jealous Mistresses in Two Slave Narratives” in *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition* eds. Marjorie Pryse and Hortense J. Spillers (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985) 45.

¹⁷ Fagan Yellin, *Women and Sisters: The Antislavery Feminists in American Culture* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989) 92.

¹⁸ Doherty, “Harriet Jacobs’s Narrative Strategies: *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*” in *The Southern Literary Journal* 19:1 (1986) 88. There are other aspects of Doherty’s article on Jacobs with which I take issue. One of them being how he undermines Jacobs by suggesting she exploits her motherhood in a calculating manner. He writes, “As a cynical strategic device, the bond between mother and child promises an emotional force, and hence a propagandistic pull, to which an audience of ‘happy free women’ is especially susceptible. For Jacobs, the opportunity to enhance anti-slavery politics with the power of familial melodrama is irresistible. . .If the narrative strategy is cold-blooded, the execution is not” (90).

¹⁹ This observation was made in a discussion with Tricia Lootens.

²⁰ Prince, *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself* introduction by and ed. Moira Ferguson (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan P, 1997) 60.

²¹ Fagan Yellin 88.

²² Vermillion, “Reembodying the Self: Representations of Rape in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* in *biography: an interdisciplinary quarterly* 15:3 (1992) 247.

²³ Bradford, “Santa Claus Ain’t a Real Man: *Incidents* and Gender” in *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts* eds. Anne Goodwyn Jones and Susan V. Donaldson (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1997) 194.

²⁴ Jacobs’s account of a sexual relationship between a white master and black male slave factualizes the fictional representation of homoerotic/homosexual tension I addressed in Edgeworth’s portrayal of Caesar and Mr. Edwards in *The Good Negro* and Melville’s portrayal of Babo and Benito Cereno in *Benito Cereno*. Unlike Edgeworth, Melville intentionally plays around with the issue of homosexuality and degraded manhood, i.e. Delano’s perception of Cereno. Although there is not the brutal act of rape in Melville’s novella, his text does suggest the potential threat of sexual violence between men when one has power over the other.

²⁵ Curiously, Jacobs does not reveal whether she informed her son of her history and the events that led to his birth.

²⁶ Levander, “‘Following the Condition of the Mother’: Subversions of Domesticity in Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* in *Southern Mothers: Fact and Fictions in Southern Women’s Writing* eds. Nagueyalti Warren and Sally Wolff (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1999) 29.

AFTERWORD

In the introduction to her analysis of the textual connection between Melville's "Benito Cereno" and Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Ulrike Nüßler addresses the advantages of her critical approach. Calling her work a "critical collage," she says that "On the one hand, the practice of juxtaposing two different types of texts helps to make the blurred boundaries graphically visible on the surface of the overall body of [this] analysis. On the other hand, this dialogical approach is a useful tool with which to highlight and illuminate deliberate grey zones of one text by applying another more explicit text to them."¹ Nüßler speaks directly to my own approach in my analysis of sentimentalism in the juxtaposition of four different narratives that cross borders of class, race, nationality, and gender. In my own "critical collage," I want to address briefly the collective intertextual "grey zones" between Edgeworth's "The Grateful Negro," Melville's "Benito Cereno," Prince's *History*, and Jacobs's *Incidents* in my analysis.

In the Introduction, I laid the foundation for reading the Edgeworth/Melville and Prince/Jacobs pairings as comparative, complementary chapters. Thematically speaking, these constructions were to stress and to set up the authors's and their texts's critical relation to each other as I meant to approach them in my argument, but my pairings are not fixed. During the writing of my dissertation, a question arose for me: what are other ways the texts speak to one another outside of the way I have paired them? For example, how does Prince's narrative connect to Melville's novella? How can Prince's text be read as a response to Edgeworth's, or Jacobs's to Edgeworth's? Thinking about the works like this revealed just how intertwined they are, which opens up the potential of other critical investigations between them. Both Prince and Jacobs are female Babos, but unlike him,

they do not remain silent. Their defiance of their masters is the same revolt of the slave Melville sanctions in his portrayal of Babo. The connection between the fictional Babo and fictionalized Jacobs as Linda Brent is particularly notable, for they both use cunning as a means to gain freedom. As actors of masquerades, their intelligence is what imbues them with power and marks them as threats. In addition, Prince and Jacobs give voice to the female slave experience that is missing from “Benito Cereno.” In Melville’s story, what is presented is a sentimentalized portrait of the female slave as a sexualized (by Delano) object to be gazed upon and, and one who welcomes this gazing. In their narratives, Prince and Jacobs reject this gaze by their positioning of the female slave’s body as a site of physical and sexual trauma, preventing any romanticizing of black womanhood.

In addition, Edgeworth’s sentimental imagining of West Indian slavery in “The Grateful Negro” is challenged by Prince’s account of her experience. Prince’s story and the scars on her back are testimonies to the truths about slavery in the British colonies that Edgeworth tries not to confront. It is Edgeworth’s skirting of the horrors of slavery that makes her like Melville’s Delano, a seemingly well-meaning sentimentalist who espouses the rhetoric of abolitionism as long as blackness is contained and the proper social order of things is maintained. When they are not, the guise slips and the agenda is altered. Edgeworth’s problem with the rebellious Hector and black power in her novella is the same problem Delano has with Babo once the masquerade is revealed. And finally, countering Edgeworth’s portrayal of black womanhood in her stereotyped depictions of the passive, marginalized Clara and the aggressive, monstrous Esther, Jacobs humanizes female slaves, by presenting herself and her circumstances as more complex than clichés. The comparisons illustrate how, in the supplementary nature of the four works collectively, gaps are filled and bridges crossed.

Because of its hybridity as a transatlantic study on sentimentality, my project invites the interests of a wider audience, and purposefully so, in the hope of initiating a

fresh dialogue in the existing discourse on sentimentalism in antislavery writing. The significance of my work is that it proposes an original, intriguing way of reading sentimental conventions and techniques in both British and American literary studies. By juxtaposing and linking British and American, white authors and black authors, fictional and non-fictional texts, my dissertation challenges the limitations those labels might suggest, and illustrates that a transnational, transcultural examination of sentimentalism enhances our understanding of how literary traditions and influences are exchanged and adapted.

NOTES

¹ Nüßler, “‘Across the Black’s Body’: Herman Melville’s ‘Benito Cereno’ and Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* -- A Critical Collage” *Blurred Boundaries: Critical Essays on American Literature, Language, and Culture*. Eds. Klaus H. Schmidt and David Sawyer (Frankfurt au Main: Peter Lang, 1996) 55. While Nüßler posits possible textual connections between Melville and Jacobs’s narratives, posing such questions as “Could Captain Amasa Delano’s ideological myopia have been corrected had he been given a chance to learn the story of Linda Brent?” and “How different a story would Melville have written had he allowed the negress to speak?!” she neglects to make explicit the link between them in her analysis and to offer answers to the questions she proposes.

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