

PRINT AND PERFORMANCE  
IN AMERICAN ABOLITIONISM,  
1829-1865

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

by

Alex William Black  
May 2013

© 2013 Alex William Black

PRINT AND PERFORMANCE  
IN AMERICAN ABOLITIONISM,  
1829-1865

Alex William Black, Ph.D.  
Cornell University 2013

“Print and Performance in American Abolitionism, 1829-1865” examines the relationship between the printed and performed work of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Abraham Lincoln. It argues that each kind of work contributed to the other’s creation and presentation. The failure of their early efforts showed once and for all that the abolitionists would not have access to a system that allowed for the disembodied distribution of texts. Even if they continued to use the medium of print to publish their message, there would be immediate demands on their bodies for its circulation. They would need texts that could be easily distributed, but that could also elicit more distribution. These texts would instruct the reader how to perform them and how to get others to do the same. The proliferation of abolitionist literature is generally understood to have been a product of reprinting. In fact, reprinting worked in cooperation with reenacting. To date, studies of slavery and abolition have considered one medium or another. “Print and Performance in American Abolitionism, 1829-1865” investigates the coordination of material process and embodied practice that distinguished the abolitionist movement.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Alex William Black was born in Bakersfield, California. He holds degrees from Highland High School, the University of California, Berkeley, and Cornell University.

For my family

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank the members of my special committee: Shirley Samuels, Margo Crawford, and Nick Salvato. My dissertation began as a seminar paper in one of Nick's seminars in my third semester. Nick has had an incalculable impact on my scholarship and on my pedagogy. Margo has never failed to offer insight and enthusiasm when I needed both. Shirley has offered untold support for this project, and myself, from the beginning. I would also like to thank Eric Cheyfitz, who sent me to the Futures of American Studies Institute, where much of my work got an early hearing. I appreciate the feedback that Don Pease, Eric Lott, Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, Soyica Diggs Colbert, and Lloyd Pratt, at the Institute, and Martha Schoolman, Robin Bernstein, Meredith McGill, and Elisa Tamarkin, elsewhere, have given me.

I have participated in two writing groups while at Cornell. Thanks are due to Toni Jaudon, Jon Senchyne, and Brigitte Fielder, in one, and Jill Spivey Caddell, Tom Balcerski, and Nolan Bennett, in the other. I am grateful for their helpful feedback, as well as for the opportunity to read their own rich scholarship.

My greatest thanks are due to the American Reading Group: Melissa Gniadek, Jon Senchyne, Brigitte Fielder, and Jill Spivey Caddell, in particular, are great colleagues, and better friends. They have my gratitude and my love.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Biographical Sketch .....	iii
Dedication .....	iv
Acknowledgements .....	v
Table of Contents .....	vi
List of Figures .....	vii
INTRODUCTION: Bodies and Texts in Motion in Walker's <u>Appeal</u> .....	1
CHAPTER ONE: Melodrama and Time in Aiken's <u>Uncle Tom's Cabin</u> and Watkins's "Eliza Harris" .....	16
CHAPTER TWO: Blackface Minstrelsy and Violence in Conway's <u>Dred</u> and Delany's <u>Blake</u> .....	56
CHAPTER THREE: Sympathy and Douglass's <u>The North Star</u> .....	84
CHAPTER FOUR: The Realization of African American Performance in Stowe's <u>The Christian Slave</u> .....	109
CHAPTER FIVE: Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in Print and Performance .....	135
Bibliography .....	162

## LIST OF FIGURES

### Figure

1.	<u>Appeal</u> . . . . .	7
2.	“The Strategem” . . . . .	47
3.	“The Black Swan” . . . . .	129
4.	“The Stafford House” . . . . .	130
5.	“The Black Siddons” . . . . .	132
6.	“First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation of President Lincoln” . . . . .	139
7.	“Final Emancipation Proclamation” . . . . .	143
8.	“Reading the Emancipation Proclamation” . . . . .	153
9.	<u>Proclamation of Emancipation</u> . . . . .	155



## **Introduction**

### **Bodies and Texts in Motion in Walker's Appeal**

In 1835, the American Anti-Slavery Society launched a mailing campaign that took full advantage of the era's technological advances in communication and travel. Bankrolled by Arthur Tappan, the wealthy New York philanthropist, and planned by his brother, Lewis, the two-year-old organization mailed hundreds of thousands of pieces of abolitionist literature throughout the southern United States. The goal was reach 20,000 citizens who had an influence on the slavery debate. But for all of the steam driven presses and trains behind them, few of the publications reached their destinations. The mails were intercepted in the South by mobs, often with the explicit consent of government officials. Agents found with the documents in their possession were beaten. The Tappans, hundreds of miles away from where they were burned in effigy, feared for their lives. They had been targeted the year before by antiabolitionist rioters in New York City.

The failure of the mailing campaign showed once and for all that the abolitionists would not have access to a system that allowed for the disembodied distribution of texts. Even if they continued to use the medium of print to publish their message, there would be immediate demands on their bodies for its circulation. They would need texts that could be easily distributed, but that could also elicit more distribution. These texts would instruct the reader how to perform it and how to get others to. The proliferation of abolitionist literature is generally understood to have been the product of reprinting. Reprinting worked in cooperation with reenacting. "Print and Performance in American Abolitionism, 1829-1865" argues, then, that the printed and performed work of abolition contributed to each other's creation and presentation.

Recent studies of abolitionism portray performance as the exception to the rule of print. Performance is either the work of minor figures or the minor work of major figures. I argue that performance drove the whole movement, its printed work especially. The titles of the first and last texts of my study illustrate how vital performance was to the production of printed texts. David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World and Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation both have celebrated, if unknown, publication histories. Both of their names—appeal, proclamation—announce the way that they were circulated. Both authors, that is, planned for their texts to have a corporeal component, to be performed. These same studies that focus on the role of new technologies—namely, steam power—in the abolitionist movement tend to overlook the changes, in demography and strategy, that marked the decades-old movement's radical turn in the 1820s. In highlighting mass print campaigns made possible by innovations in communication and large amounts of capital, these studies see a continuity between the earlier movement that was dominated by powerful white men and the later movement that included a much broader coalition of free born and formerly enslaved black men and women and white men and women. They also neglect the fact that, as the nineteenth century progressed, abolitionists of both races were increasingly denied access to these print networks of publication and distribution.

The organized abolition movement, like the United States, began in the 1770s in Philadelphia. The Pennsylvania Abolition Society, formed in 1775, included Thomas Paine and Benjamin Franklin in its all white, all male membership. In its fifty years of operation, it concentrated its efforts on suing for the freedom of individual slaves in the courts and petitioning for the freedom of all slaves in the legislature. There were other societies in the early republican

era, but they were all located in the Northern states. The New York Manumission Society, founded in 1785, included John Jay and Alexander Hamilton as members. Like the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, the New York Manumission Society pursued political means for the abolition of slavery. It also organized boycotts of businesses that profited from the slave trade. Black societies existed, as well, though they worked separate from the white ones. The Free African Society, led by Richard Allen and Absalom Jones and formed in Philadelphia in 1787, operated as a mutual aid society for the city's free black population. Abolitionism was transformed in the Jacksonian period. The radical abolition movement of the 1830s was characterized for its renovated tactics and by the makeup of its ranks. Black men and black and white women were allowed to participate for the first time in mainstream organizations. Strategy changed with the new demographic. Abolitionists would no longer appeal to authority (the church, the state) if those authorities would not listen. They would appeal directly to the people. The cause had gained a new urgency with the establishment of the American Colonization Society in 1816, which promoted the repatriation of free (and freed) African Americans in Africa.<sup>1</sup>

Scholars of literature tend to portray the activities of radical abolitionists as following one of two models: a performance model or a print model. In the performance model, abolitionists work mainly as lecturers. In the print model, which is often represented as superseding the performance model, they work mainly as editors and novelists. The long history of depicting Frederick Douglass's career as moving from the former to the latter is an example of the inability to imagine both models coexisting, even within the work of a single figure.<sup>2</sup> The unprecedented

---

<sup>1</sup> This condensed history of abolitionism in the United States is drawn from Mayer and Richard S. Newman.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Fishkin and Peterson, and DeLombard.

success of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin would also seem to support this notion, despite the fact that the unauthorized dramatizations may have reached more people.<sup>3</sup>

The problem with the print model is that it emphasizes actions like the mailing campaign. The problem with emphasizing the mailing campaign is that it necessarily focuses our attention on the rich, white men who funded and organized them. In the early history of the radical abolitionist movement especially, it was rare to see women and African Americans occupy leadership positions. Even when they did, they rarely had the same influence as an Arthur Tappan. Though the actions of the radical abolitionists differ from those that came before, the actors are the same. The print model unintentionally downplays the role of women, blacks, and the poor in radical abolitionism. The people who were responsible for the changes in the movement, in other words, do not get credit for their contributions. The other problem with the print model is that these large campaigns did not work. The mailing campaign was a failure never to be repeated. A similar campaign, which sought to send Bibles to the slaves, was tried over the course of two decades, with even less success.<sup>4</sup>

The performance model did not offer a solution to the situation either. After 1835, abolitionist activities were limited to the "free" states, though, even there, they were limited by legislative and mob action. Abolitionists wrote and signed thousands of petitions to Congress. John Quincy Adams, Representative of Massachusetts, would present them to the House. The Gag Rule, first passed in 1836, required that all antislavery petitions be tabled without comment.<sup>5</sup> That the American Anti-Slavery Society repeated the Hundred Conventions campaign, which sent multiple lecturers throughout New York State and New England at the

---

<sup>3</sup> See Gossett.

<sup>4</sup> See Nord for more on this campaign.

<sup>5</sup> See William Lee Miller.

same time, might seem to indicate that they went away from the print model after these early setbacks.<sup>6</sup> But throughout the movement's first decade in particular, abolitionist speakers were attacked, their meeting spaces destroyed.<sup>7</sup> I propose that abolitionists drew on both the print and performance models to do their work. The premiere example of this kind of activity is that of David Walker, who attempted it in the years before the foundation of radical abolitionism. I begin with Walker because his hybrid strategy of printing texts that would circulate through the actions of individuals anticipated how emancipation would work three decades later.

Walker was born in North Carolina to a free mother and an enslaved father. He lived in South Carolina and Pennsylvania before moving to Massachusetts. There, he joined the Prince Hall Freemasons, helped found the Massachusetts General Colored Assembly, and wrote, and acted as an agent, for Freedom's Journal. In 1829, he published his Appeal, which addressed "the coloured citizens of the world, but in particular, and very expressly, ... those of the United States of America." In four articles, he described "our wretchedness in consequence of slavery," "ignorance," "the preachers of the religion of Jesus Christ," and "the colonizing plan." The Appeal circulated in the North and the South. Walker employed sailors and laborers as agents. It is, of course, difficult to give a perfect account of the Appeal's circulation, though Peter Hinks suggests that it was "understandably much broader than we can document" (160). The practice of black literacy and mobility were necessarily untraceable. What can be documented was enough to strike fear in interested whites (Hinks 151). Walker's agents took the Appeal to Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Louisiana. Walker gave written instructions to each agent, explaining how, and to whom, they were to be distributed (Hinks 138). At each place it was discovered, local and state governments took action to limit its circulation. People found

---

<sup>6</sup> See Lampe for more on this campaign.

<sup>7</sup> See Richards.

with it in their possession were arrested. They were charge with breaking new laws against seditious literature. Black sailors were quarantined. The movements of free black laborers were controlled. Slave literacy was banned.

Walker used the same tactics that free and enslaved African Americans had employed for their organization (Hinks 172). Agents for the black press acted as representatives for the areas in which they worked (Levine 93). The representativeness of Walker's agents is what made them so threatening. Every black man with a copy of the Appeal was another Walker. Scholars tend to call the text David Walker's Appeal, when, in fact, the title that appeared on the title page was Walker's Appeal. Walker is both a proper and a common noun, a specific man and a mobile one. In composing the Appeal, Walker called for black solidarity. In circulating the Appeal, these men enacted it. In a prefatory note to the third edition, Walker stated that "it is expected that all coloured men, women and children, of every nation, language and tongue under heaven, will try to procure a copy of this Appeal and read it, or get some one to read it to them, for it is designed more particularly for them" (n.p.). This instruction, like those given to Walker's agents, supplemented the explicit and implicit instructions that Walker fashioned into his text. His mode of address—the second person—as well as his typography—which emphasized important passages, or indicated changes in tone—all taught his readers how to teach the text to others.<sup>8</sup> Walker used all of these strategies when he addressed the "[m]en of colour, who are also of sense": "I call upon you ... to cast your eyes upon the wretchedness of your brethren, and to do your utmost to enlighten them—*go to work and enlighten your brethren!*" (28). These once "ignorant brethren" would then, upon reading the Appeal themselves, teach it to others. Education, as well as violence, counts as resistance, as "[t]he bare name of educating the

---

<sup>8</sup> See Dinius.

coloured people, scares our cruel oppressors almost to death” (32). Walker even demonstrates reprinting, in his discussion of various newspapers and texts, and in his repetition of the Declaration of Independence.

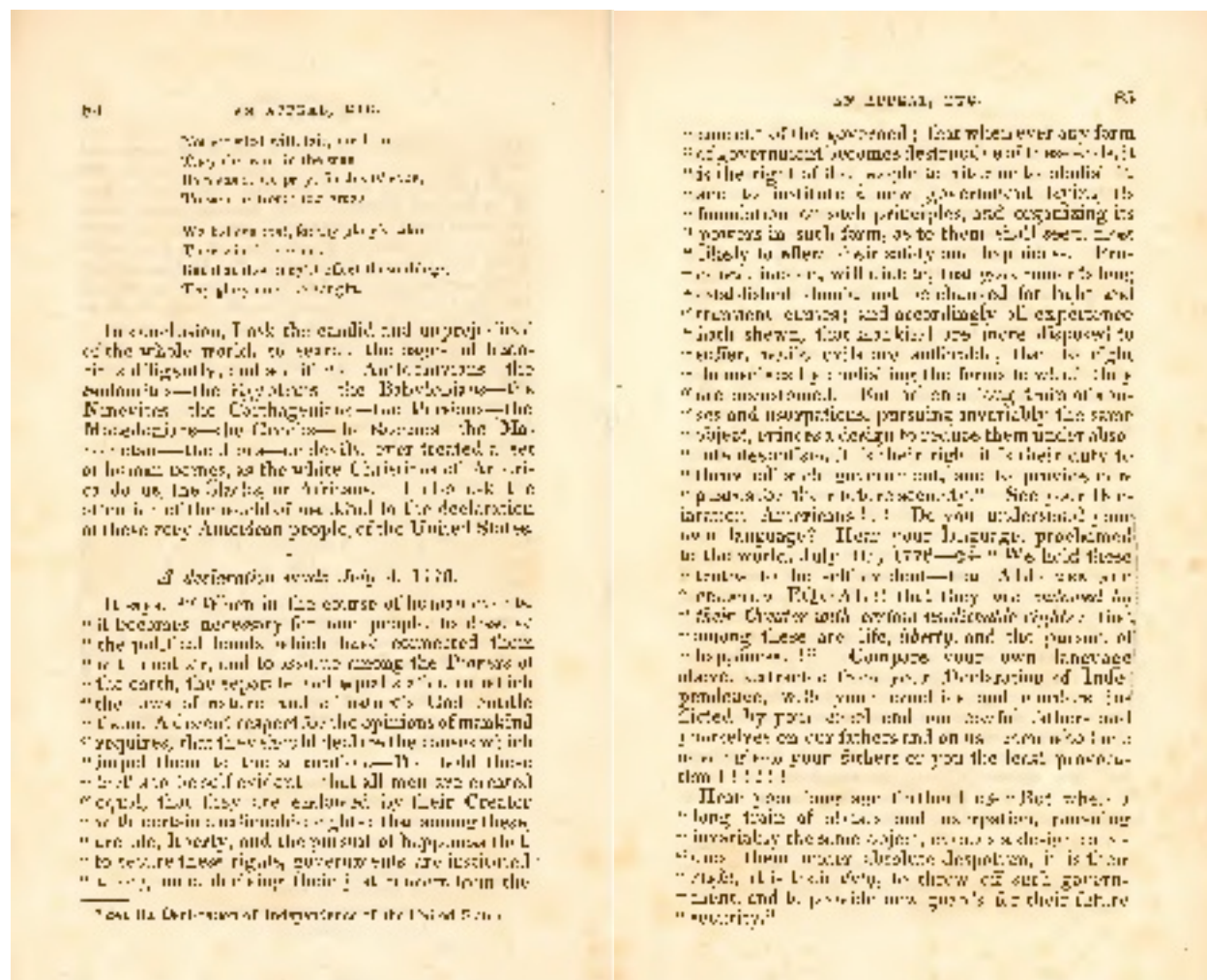


Figure 1. David Walker. Appeal. 1830.

Marcy Dinius points out that, through his typography, Walker “rewrite[s] the declaration, even as he quotes it word for word” (67). But it’s also important to note that he reprints it. When he asks “Why do they search vessels, &c. when entering the harbours of tyrannical States, to see if any

of my Books can be found, for fear that my brethren will get them to read,” he answers that, “perhaps the Americans do their very best to keep my Brethren from receiving and reading my ‘Appeal’ for fear that they will find in it an extract which I made from their Declaration of Independence, which says, ‘we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,’ &c. &c. &c.” (72). The typography of the extract he quotes matches that of his initial quotation (all men are created equal), not his revision (ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL). The plain text alone would have been enough to agitate his readers.

My method combines theory and practice from book history and performance studies. From book history, I take an interest in the material processes through which a text is written, printed, and distributed. From performance studies, I take an interest in the embodied practices through which a performance is enacted. Both print and performance had a role in Walker’s work. I analyze the words that make up the Appeal as well as the paper on which it appears, the people who are tasked with delivering it, and what use it was put to by its readers. I use the word production to indicate the composition, publication, and circulation of the texts and performances I study. Production can refer to the creation or the presentation of a text or performance.

Let me say more about my use of the word “performance.” As Marvin Carlson has observed it is a term that has become widely used, and so can mean many things (70). I take my basic definition of performance from Susan Manning. She defines performance as “a mode of cultural production composed of events bound in time and framed in space” (777). At first glance, this definition of a circumscribed action may seem to foreclose a relationship with documents that can circulate beyond the time and place of their creation. Indeed, most performance theory views writing and performing as two separate, even opposing, enterprises.



Peggy Phelan has influentially argued that “performance’s only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance” (146). This is because, she argues, “performance in a strict ontological sense is nonreproductive” (148). A reenactment of a performance can “reactivate” that performance, but it cannot “reproduce” it (Taylor 32). The notion of reactivation, though, could apply equally well to texts as it does to performances. A newspaper printing and a volume printing of Uncle Tom’s Cabin may have the same *words*—just as a reenactment of a performance may have the same gestures—but they are not the same *things*. Phelan’s discussion of the “attempt to write about the undocumentable event of performance” rejects the possibility that a written document may be part of that performed event (148). Her idea of writing as something that “seeks to preserve, record, and remember” does not take into account the other uses to which writing can be put (24). Diana Taylor addresses the issue of the preservation of text and performance. She proposes we think of them as an interaction between the archive and the repertoire. Though she includes in her inventory of archival materials “texts, documents, buildings, bones,” once again, her focus is on writing (19). “Writing,” she argues, “has served as a strategy for repudiating and foreclosing the very embodiedness it claims to describe” (36). The benefit of the work of Robin Bernstein is that she can see the archive and the repertoire working, even existing, together. She views archival materials as things that script behavior. These things are vehicles of potentiality, not preservation. They prompt, they do not record, performance.

Another use for language rather than description is enactment. J. L. Austin wrote about the performative uses of language: Language, in other words, that performs the action it describes. This idea has had a profound influence on scholars interested in identity. This usage

has popularized performance more than any other in literary studies. Although performativity, following Judith Butler, deals with bodily behavior, it has had the effect of disembodiment performance. Dwight Conquergood once asked, “What are the consequences of thinking about performance and textuality as fluid, exchangeable, and assimilable terms? What is at stake in the desire to blur the edges, dissolve the boundary, dismantle the opposition, and close the space between text and performance? What are the costs of dematerializing texts as *textuality* and disembodiment performance as *performativity*, and then making these abstractions interchangeable concepts?” (25). My emphasis is on maintaining awareness of the materiality of these texts and the embodiment of these performances while not conflating them. They complement each other.

As Taylor and others have explained, text-centered methods don’t account for nonliterate cultures. Texts have often been the instruments to disempower, or dehumanize, certain groups. So Conquergood wrote about the “intextuation” of slaves, the complex of texts (like bills of sale, advertisements) that effect and maintain their subjection. Still, as Saidiya Hartman has so forcefully explained, performance could have the same effects. The coercion to act the part of the happy slave—on the auction block and on the plantation—shows how African American culture could be appropriated to deny self-expression. “Print and Performance in American Abolitionism, 1829-1865” is especially concerned with showing how black abolitionists managed the restrictions that were placed on them. It is especially important to keep in mind the differences of experience that different abolitionists faced. Even if white activists had their freedoms and their persons assaulted, these assaults still differed in kind and degree from what black activists suffered. William Lloyd Garrison might be mobbed for speaking, but he was not attacked, as Frederick Douglass was, for traveling to speak.

The two most recent studies of race, slavery, and abolition show the payoff to my approach. Robert Fanuzzi's Abolition's Public Sphere investigates the role that print played in the creation of an abolitionist counterpublic. But it figures that counterpublic as abstract, disembodied—unless it's talking about Douglass. By examining only the embodied experience of black abolitionists, Fanuzzi fails to consider how those like Douglass emphasized white abolitionists' own embodied experience in and through his texts. Heather Nathans' Slavery and Sentiment on the American Stage surveys the performances that took up these issues, but because it's limited to the theatrical, it doesn't address major abolitionists, for whom the theater seemed to be the one arena of culture they did not participate in.

“Print and Performance in American Abolitionism, 1829-1865” contributes to the fields of American Studies and African American Studies. To the latter, it helps recover the early history of black performance. To the former, it more fully accounts for the work of central figures like Douglass, Stowe, and Abraham Lincoln. It combines traditional concerns in form and history with the methodologies of book history and performance studies. It shows how the two can be put into conversation with another. Meredith McGill's usage of the concept of format is an example of the kind of work this project does. In bibliography, format “describes a relation between paper size and number of pages.” Different formats were chosen for different reasons: a volume has a different cost and different uses than a broadside. Format “directs our attention to the set of choices printers and publishers make in publishing a work, with the potential field of a book's reception very much in mind” (55). McGill uses the pamphlet as an example of the priorities of abolitionist print culture. Pamphlets were cheap to produce and easy to transport. The pamphlet format was often chosen for hymnals and songsters—that is, for texts intended for

group performance. Walker's decision to print his Appeal as a pamphlet, then, was done for practical reasons, but also for the associations that format would have had with collective action.

"Print and Performance in American Abolitionism, 1829-1865" begins with the advent of radical abolition in the late 1820s and early 1830s and ends with the conclusion of the Civil War in the middle 1860s. It considers the two principal genres of antislavery writing—sentimental fiction and the slave narrative—and the laws that they helped create. A review of the subject of my first chapter, a dramatization of Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, called the play "abolition dramatized." Dramatization could be a way to describe my own critical practice. I put texts back into their performance contexts.

The first part of this dissertation examines popular revisions of abolitionist texts and abolitionist responses to those revisions. Most discussions of Uncle Tom's Cabin and performance culture concentrate on influence and adaptation. Stowe was influenced by blackface minstrelsy, which, in turn, was influenced by her novel. Even with this influence, scholars tend to think of the novel and the tomitudes as occurring in a sequence. The further the story moved away from its initial publication, the less it had of Stowe's politics. In fact, many of the criticisms made of the play applied to the novel. Moreover, the play was aware of the peculiar challenges that melodramatic representation made for the kind of critique Stowe was after. The first chapter reads the tomitudes, including George Aiken's popular theatrical adaptation and Frances Ellen Watkins's "Eliza Harris," for what they can tell us about the novel. Uncle Tom Mania brought the novel and the theater to new audiences. Abolitionists talked about wanting to abolitionize Americans. Uncle Tom's Cabin on stage and in verse dramatized abolition.

Just as Stowe's second novel lets us see the changes in her stance on various issues, so did the dramatizations of it. The productions of Dred that ran in the same theaters as proslavery

productions of Uncle Tom's Cabin can tell us something about the changing fortunes of the more aggressive antislavery critique that characterized the later 1850s. Blackface minstrelsy, which played a large part in the Tom plays, as well as the whole of antebellum performance culture, featured ambivalent representations of raced characters. Comic minstrelsy had been associated with insensitivity to the welfare of enslaved people. The second chapter examines the use of comic minstrelsy to create identification with its working class audiences. Labor abolitionism was still a fraught enterprise in the later 1850s, but Dred demonstrated new possibilities for solidarity. Martin Delany's Blake features a scene in which the originary violence of blackface minstrelsy is restaged. Though texts like Dred show a willingness to trouble blackface minstrelsy's comedy, even by suggesting the violence that went into creating it, Blake goes even further to suggest that all blackface minstrel performances depended upon the violence perpetrated on black bodies. Blackface minstrel culture was not the product of borrowing or theft, but of torture.

The second part of this dissertation adopts a case study approach. Each chapter examines a text that reproduced itself through performance, and vice versa. The antebellum career of Frederick Douglass demonstrates the connection between abolitionism's printed and performed work. Timelines of Douglass's life measure it in texts. An alternative timeline could consist entirely of performances. Yet another could concentrate on his editorial work. Each of these alone would give an incomplete account of his career. And yet most scholarship on Douglass restricts itself to one of these kinds of work. This scholarship portrays Douglass's work as transitioning from performance to print, despite the coproduction of each form. This, the third, chapter focuses on Douglass's "Letter to His Old Master, Thomas Auld," published in 1848 in The North Star and republished in 1855 as part of the appendix to My Bondage and My

Freedom. Of the seven texts that make up the appendix, the letter is the only one that was not a speech. Douglass saw the letter as part of a performance, one, in this case, that aimed to involve a hostile audience.

Harriet Beecher Stowe was involved with supporting two African American women artists. Elizabeth Greenfield, a singer, and Mary Webb, an actress, filled their performances with a wide selection of materials from antebellum culture, some of which were Stowe's. These women have mostly been neglected because of the apparent conservatism of their performances. Most of their material, like their self-presentations, was genteel. The fourth chapter examines where these women toured and how their performances circulated in the popular press. Both challenged the culture's notion of what was allowable and the ways that they were represented. Reviews reproduced the disruptive routines, so that their effects could be felt outside the homes and halls where they were performed.

Abraham Lincoln was not an abolitionist; he was antislavery. He was a longtime proponent of gradual emancipation with compensation. He did not think that the Constitution gave him the power to abolish slavery. He prosecuted the first year of the war for reunion. In 1862, he began to advocate gradual emancipation with confiscation. The Emancipation Proclamation indicated that the war would now be for liberation as well. The fifth and final chapter argues that the Proclamation was composed to circulate with the same kind of procedure as Walker's Appeal.

The 1863 presidential act, the last in my chronology, revisits the material processes and embodied practices that have preoccupied the rest of my study. It builds on the fourth chapter's interest in authorized substitution. It builds on the third and second chapters' interest in sympathetic and nonsympathetic audiences. It builds on the first chapter's interest in stages of

composition and realization. It builds, finally, on this introduction's interest in the circulation of texts through the movement of bodies.

## Chapter One

### Melodrama and Time in Aiken's Uncle Tom's Cabin and Watkins's "Eliza Harris"

A history of Uncle Tom's Cabin is necessarily a history of its escalating materializations. The novel gained a wide readership as a serial publication in The National Era (1852-53), and had sold 10,000 copies within its first days—and 300,000 within a year—of being published as a book (Gossett 164). Each succeeding edition featured more illustrations. Eventually, fifty people would see a stage version of Uncle Tom's Cabin for every one who read it (Gossett 260).

George Aiken's critics tend to fault the play, as well as Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin (1851-52), for its lack of a unified political vision. In criticism of both the novel and the play, critics disparage the divide between a critique of a society for the wrongs of slavery on the one hand, and, on the other, the tendency either (in Stowe's case) to advocate individual responsibility for the redress of those wrongs or (in Aiken's case) to represent individuals as responsible for those wrongs. Of the novel, Bruce McConachie writes that "Uncle Tom's Cabin uses an 'individual appeal for anti-individualist ends,' and the resulting contradiction harms her politics" (7).<sup>9</sup> Of the play, he concludes that even though Aiken "retained much of [Stowe's] sentimental abolitionism," he "softened Stowe's objections to slavery as an institution" (5).

Critics lay as much blame on the generic framework in which Aiken was working as they do on the playwright. David Grimsted judges that "the specific limitations of the play vis-à-vis the novel tend to be ones endemic to the stage rather than those of gross distortion" (236). Sarah Meer writes "that melodrama's 'substructure' was conservative, since it tended to individualize issues and reduce them to matters of private choice. Where suffering or a social problem could be blamed on the villainy of a single character, there was little room to denounce an oppressive

---

<sup>9</sup> McConachie's quote is from White 113.



class or institution” (Meer 109).<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey Mason suggests that “Aiken authorized his audience to disapprove of the specific abuses that he represented on stage, but he excused them from doing anything about the reality beyond the stage door” (119). The result of Aiken’s treatment is that “Uncle Tom’s Cabin becomes a self-contained world, resolving its own momentary inconsistencies and offering no correlation to the genuine issues it purports to address. Stowe traced the quest for human value within the destructive oppression of slavery, while Aiken followed the stylized mumming of simplified characters within the neat limits of melodrama” (Mason 124-25).

What if the limits, I want to ask, aren’t always so neat? What if the melodrama isn’t as self-contained as Mason claims? Does Uncle Tom’s Cabin resolve its “momentary inconsistencies,” and if so, how? Mason’s totalizing account ignores the moments in which the play offers something like a social critique. Though the play contains both tendencies (to blame the wrongs of slavery on a society or on an individual), and though I feel that it finally attempts to contain them both (or, as I’ll argue, one in the other), the play can be read as an indictment of society over the individual, society through (and in) the individual. The play, in fact, dramatizes the very problem of responsibility that so many critics take up. The first half presents a model of social culpability, the second individual. We have here, to quote Harry Birdoff’s account of the play’s “spontaneous[] subtitle[],” something like “Abolition Dramatized” (77).

Over the course of the play we can see a transition from one model to the other. We can read the second half of the play as an allegory of the first. Melodrama, like allegory, presents a “represented world” that “is [...] being used metaphorically, as sign of something else” (Brooks Melodramatic 11). Aiken’s 1852 version of the play allegorizes the problem of slavery as it

---

<sup>10</sup> Meer’s quote is from Mason 12.

illustrates the process by which the stuff of life is turned into melodrama. If reality, according to Peter Brooks, is “the scene of drama and mask of the true drama that lies behind,” we can think of the first half of the play as a mask, and the second half as “pressuring the surface of reality [...] in order to make it yield the full, true terms of [its] story,” an “intense, excessive representation[] of life which strip[s] the facade of manners to reveal the essential conflicts at work—moments of symbolic confrontation which fully articulate the terms of the drama” (Melodramatic 2, 1, 3).

Just as the play is not consistent with its source’s message (which critics find is not consistent either), it does not consistently undermine that message. Grimsted notes a transition that takes place between the two halves of the play: “In his first effort, which later became the first section of the play, Aiken followed Mrs. Stowe in incident and theme closely; in the sequel, and second half of the final play, he compromised much more for ‘theatrical effect,’ to fulfill the preconceptions of his actors and audiences. Here ... the emphasis on personal villainy impeded the aesthetic and moral thrust of the play most seriously” (244). Though I agree that a shift in mode occurs in the play, I do not agree that it necessarily impedes the “aesthetic and moral thrust of the play.”

In the first half of the play there is no single villain in which the culpability for the outrages of slavery is collected. What we have instead are vague notions of dark, abstract forces at work in the world. If, as Brooks asserts, “in the clash of virtue and villainy, it is the latter that constitutes the active force and motor of plot,” slavery is here present only to the extent that we see its effects (Melodramatic 34). Its first act is to break up the domestic space. In “‘classical’ melodrama,” “the play typically opens with a presentation of virtue and innocence, or perhaps

more accurately, virtue *as* innocence. We see this virtue, momentarily, in a state of taking pleasure in itself, aided by those who recognize and support it” (Brooks Melodramatic 28-29). Though “there swiftly supervenes a threat to virtue, a situation ... to cast its very survival into question,” Uncle Tom’s Cabin, on the contrary, begins in a “Plain Chamber,” with the advent of conflict. There is no representation of virtue free from persecution (Brooks Melodramatic 29). Our first impression is of a “fragile and fleeting space[] of innocence and freedom embedded within larger corrupt social orders” (Williams 28).

Eliza greets her husband happily until, noticing that he “*regards her mournfully*,” she is moved to ask him, “Why don’t you smile, and ask after Harry?” Eliza is under the impression that this *is* a “space of innocence” (Brooks Melodramatic 30). George answers, “*bitterly*,” “I wish he’d never been born! I wish I’d never been born myself! ... Oh! how I wish you had never seen me—you might have been happy!” Eliza, nervous, asks, “What dreadful thing has happened, or is going to happen? I’m sure we’ve been very happy till lately,” as surely they had been until the raising of the curtain (375). Eliza—ignorant of the cause of his apprehension—tries to comfort George, telling him to “trust in heaven and try to do right.” If in melodrama “nothing is *understood*, all is *overstated*,” we are clearly not there yet (Brooks Melodramatic 41; his emphasis). Drawing out her suspense, George tells his wife: “You couldn’t, in my place, you can’t now, if I tell you all I’ve got to say; you don’t know the whole yet” (376). His original utterance did not say enough; it must be supplemented. He tells her that their master intends to sell him and their son, and concludes: “That is why I wish I’d never seen you—it would have been better for us both—it would have been better for our poor child if he had never been born” (377).

As vague as George's delivery of the news of the crisis is, so are the reasons for the crisis itself. Mason writes of Tom's first owner: "Shelby's situation is a melodramatic cliché; Stowe reveals nothing about the nature or cause of his embarrassment and so makes him seem like a helpless victim of Business as an impersonal and mysterious force" (92). Shelby tells the slave trader Haley that, "it's only hard necessity makes me willing to sell at all. I don't like parting with any of my hands, that's a fact" (378). In the end, Shelby can't help it. He complains to the audience: "If anybody had ever told me that I should tell Tom to those rascally traders, I should never have believed it. [...] So much for being in debt, heigho! The fellow sees his advantage and means to push it" (380). The only other mention of Shelby's crisis is an exchange between Chloe and Eliza. Chloe, unable to believe what's happened, asks Eliza "what he has done that master should sell *him*?" Eliza responds: "He hasn't done anything—it isn't for that. Master don't want to sell, and mistress—she's always good. I heard her plead and beg for us, but he told her 'twas no use—that he was in this man's debt, and he had got the power over him, and that if he did not pay him off clear, it would end in his having to sell the place and all the people and move off" (380).

The implication of Shelby's crisis is clear: "If ownership corrupts, then so does the trade itself" (Mason 92). Indeed, the tradesman (Haley), perhaps because of his closer proximity to the slave trade, comes off as guiltier than the well-meaning Shelby. The slave system creates people like Haley, puts people like Shelby in these positions. Slavery not only demeans everyone involved, it also sets everyone up to be exploited. Shelby pleads with Haley to let Tom "cover the whole balance of the debt, and you would, Haley, if you had any conscience." Haley replies, with the cool air of a pragmatist: "I've got just as much conscience as any man in business can afford to keep, just a little, you know, to swear by, as 'twere" (378). The play is peppered with

other avowals of bad faith. When Phineas Fletcher tells Marks the lawyer that he freed his slaves to appease his Quaker mistress, Marks tells him that that was “very noble, I dare say; but rather expensive” (384). Swearing himself to be a principled man, Gumption Cute tells Marks that “my principles are to keep a sharp lookout for No. 1” (415). Profit from the slave trade is also what drives Haley, Marks and Loker to hunt Eliza and her son. Marks proposes that once they catch them they will give the boy “to Mr. Haley—[then] we takes the gal to Orleans to speculate on. Ain’t it beautiful?” (285).

There are, in this half of the play, no explicit signs of violence—of the power that slavery gives to the masters of slaves—beyond the violence done to the domestic space. There are, again, only minor signs that gesture toward a powerful undercurrent of evil. In the scene where Shelby sells Tom and Harry to Haley, the latter is seen to drink copious amounts of alcohol. We learn from the stage directions that he “*drinks,*” “*fills [his] glass,*” “*fills [his] glass again,*” and, finally, “*drinks and smacks his lips*” during his conversation with Shelby (377, 378, 379). Any audience member familiar with temperance drama would see this as a sign of intemperance broadly construed. The stage direction notes, quite casually, that as he leaves Haley “*rises and puts on his overcoat, which hangs on a chair.—Takes hat and whip*” (379; emphasis mine). This sign of violence, placed in the text so subtly, and in the hands of an inebriate, intimates the more overt violence that will occur in the second half of the play.

Brooks calls melodrama “an expressionistic form. Its characters repeatedly say their moral and emotional states and conditions, their intentions and motives, their badness and goodness. The play typically seeks total articulation of the moral problems with which it is dealing; it is indeed about making the terms of these problems clear and stark” (Melodramatic

56). Melodrama, Linda Williams writes, pursues its goal “to make visible occulted moral distinctions through acts and gestures that are felt by audiences to be the emotional truths of individual, but not too individualized, personalities” (40-41). Melodrama, with its “desire to express all,” tends to “exteriorize[] conflict” (Brooks Melodramatic 4, 35). Grimsted complains that Uncle Tom’s Cabin is not “complexly suggestive.” The drama is “stripped of its intellectual counterpoint.” Stowe’s message “that slavery as system makes hapless victims of even moral paragons and victimizers of the best-intentioned of masters” is weakened because of the lack of abstract discussions about slavery. All this is to say that Aiken chooses “action” over “idea,” “includ[ing] action-packed scenes showing thematically insignificant incidents” while “sh[ying] away from major passages where the action consists in the interplay of ideas” (238). Like pantomime, melodrama is “basically a language of action and presence. It is emphatically incapable of expressing abstractions, hypotheses, preferential or optative situations” (Brooks Melodramatic 69). Nor can melodrama express abstract political discourse. Rather than discuss things absent or unrepresentable on its stage, it manifests them in its characters and in the visible movements of the world around them.

Grimsted writes that in adapting Stowe’s novel, “Aiken’s method was simple; he selected the major incidents in the novel and transcribed Mrs. Stowe’s dialogue often intact, but more frequently with some *condensation*” (236; emphasis mine). Condensation, not of narration alone, occurs throughout Aiken’s play. Brooks writes that there are times when it is “necessary” to have “a further register of the message [...] furnished by visible emblems and symbols” (Melodramatic 63). On the banks of the Ohio River, running from her potential captors, Eliza exclaims:

Powers of mercy, protect me! How shall I escape these human bloodhounds? Ah!  
the window – the river of ice! That dark stream lies between me and liberty!  
Surely the ice will bear my trifling weight. It is my only chance of escape – better  
sink beneath the cold waters, with my child locked in my arms, than have him  
torn from me and sold into bondage. He sleeps upon my breast -- Heaven, I put  
my trust in thee!” (385)

How could the severity of her situation be any clearer? Though not present in the original, actual bloodhounds became a staple in later productions of Uncle Tom’s Cabin. The image of Eliza running across the Ohio with bloodhounds chasing her became one of the images that was most often associated with the play. The shift from “human bloodhounds” to bloodhounds proper represents part of the melodramatic impulse. (Frances Ellen Watkins will include bloodhounds in her poem, “Eliza Harris.”) A metaphor is too subtle—why not get what is actually being referred to? The second half of the play condenses, in a similar way, elements of the first half. What is particularly allegorized over the course of the play are the basic elements of melodrama, the lines along which the melodramatic imagination draws the world: good and evil. The more the melodrama is heightened, the more “theatrical,” to use Grimsted’s phrase, the play becomes. Not only is personal villainy stressed, so too is the power of good. As the play continues, it includes more songs, more tableaux, more, in a word, melodrama. Things that before were left in the abstract, things that were only seen in their effects are now made explicit, are now given full expression.

Melodrama employs “polarization ... not only [as] a dramatic principle but [as] the very means by which integral ethical conditions are identified and shaped, made clear and operative” (Brooks Melodramatic 36). Its purpose is to work “toward revealing” the “presence and

operation” of good and evil “as real forces in the world” (Brooks Melodramatic 13). This polarization, which represents the condensation of good or evil traits in characters, “is both horizontal and vertical: characters represent extremes, and they undergo extremes, passing from heights to depths, or the reverse, almost instantaneously” (ibid). Meer finds that in his characterization of Tom and Eva, Aiken “*distill[s]* the novel’s many virtuous characters . . . , the script intensifies Tom’s and Eva’s roles and charges the slave and the sick child with a superhuman religiosity” (114; emphasis mine). In a sign of this religiosity, both Tom and Eva see the world allegorically, and can be read allegorically themselves.

Tom’s characterization is as intense as Eva’s. We hear “*music*” the first time we see Uncle Tom’s cabin. (Other, later recourses to music will recall the memory of this first home.) The stage, “*dark*,” forebodes the tragedy that approaches its inhabitants, as well as shows its murkiness, that even though we see it on stage, it’s already going away (380). Tom’s first act is to “hold[] [a] light towards Eliza” and to say “Lord bless you!” Tom is indeed bringing light to the benighted, and not to the black characters alone. When he says that “the Lord’s given me a work among these yer poor souls, and I’ll stay with ‘em and bear my cross with ‘em till the end,” these “poor souls” could refer either to the black or the white characters (381).

Tom’s saintliness increases in the second half, even before his Passion-like death. Tom, of course, quotes the Bible throughout the play. Most times, though, he indicates that that’s what he’s doing. So in the scene where Tom admonishes St. Clare about his drinking, Tom says: “The good book says ‘it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder,’ my dear mas’r” (406). While Tom and Ophelia wait for Eva’s death, Tom tells Ophelia that “You know it says in Scripture, ‘At midnight there was a great cry made, behold, the bridegroom cometh!’” (411). When they speak after Eva’s death, St. Clare expresses to Tom his continuing spiritual doubt:



ST. CLARE: Ah, Tom! I do look up; but the trouble is, I don't see anything when I do. I wish I could. It seems to be given to children and poor, honest fellows like you, to see what we cannot. How comes it?

TOM: "Thou hast hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." (415)

This is taken from the Book of Matthew (11:25-26); Jesus speaks the words. Jeffrey Richards' edition of the play has quotation marks around Tom's speech; others do not.<sup>11</sup> As the play was being performed and not read, this should not make a difference. But, as I've already shown, whenever Tom had previously quoted scripture, he set it off in his speech by indicating that he was quoting it. Here Tom is speaking the words of Christ as if they were his own. Punctuation aside, this adds to the process of divination that Tom undergoes during the second half of the play, which will of course culminate in his own death. Tom, who had earlier remarked his similarity to a scene in the Bible, ends up giving it body through his speech and his actions.

That scene opened with a tableau of Tom and Eva sitting together, reading the Bible, a tableau whose motive is to give "the spectator the opportunity to see meanings represented, emotions and moral states rendered in clear visible signs" (Brooks *Melodramatic* 62): "*A Garden. Tom discovered, seated on a bank, with Eva on his knee – his buttonholes are filled with flowers, and Eva is hanging a wreath around his neck. Music at opening of scene. Enter St. Clare and Ophelia, observing.*" St. Clare and Ophelia, in an example where the audience's role as voyeur is doubled by a character on stage, look on. Tom puts Eva down, turns to them and says: "Look yer, I'm like the ox, mentioned in the good book, dressed for the sacrifice" (389).

---

<sup>11</sup> Gerould's edition, for example, does not have quotation marks (110). Moody's edition does (381). Unfortunately, none of these editors give detailed information about their source texts. Samuel French's acting edition does not have quotation marks there.

Tom himself can see the potential to allegorize the scene, can easily see how “the creation of drama” can be affected “from the banal stuff of reality” (Brooks Melodramatic 2). The effects of Tom’s and Eva’s comments are not only to show us what’s happening (in their eyes), but to tell us how to interpret what we’re seeing.

Of a similar instance of commentary, Grimsted complains that, however “true to the character and emotions” of the scene it may be, “its verbalization, especially in such trite phrases, cheapens the impact of the event” (236-37).<sup>12</sup> Speeches like this one illustrate, for Grimsted, “one of the central weaknesses of nineteenth-century drama: its tendency to substitute for expressions of feeling explanations of it” (237). “The dramatic soliloquy,” he concludes, “came to be used in the nineteenth century not to increase the intellectual and emotive complexity of the situation, but to make everything obvious to the audience” (ibid). These characters, to put it another way, say too much, just as characters in a melodrama usually “tend to say, directly and explicitly, their moral judgments of the world” (Brooks Melodramatic 36). There are utterances in this play, however, that both express and explain an affect. When Ophelia tells Tom and Topsy that St. Clare is dying, Topsy cries, “Oh dear! what’s to become of de poor darkies now?” (419). That cry both expresses her own despair, and asks the question—if they had not already thought of it—that must be on the audience’s mind. Similarly, Chloe tells Tom, unnecessarily, what happens to slaves who are sent South, when she tells him to run away: “Will you wait to be toted down the river, where they kill niggers with hard work and starving?” (381). This is being said for the audience’s benefit.

Mason realizes the purpose of this kind of simplification: “Aiken is employing exegetical representation, ... choosing allegorical images to accentuate the message that action and

---

<sup>12</sup> Stowe’s narrator had also “perform[ed] for the reader melodrama’s interpretive work, explicitly drawing out the text’s moral meanings” (Merish 197).

dialogue have conveyed. The very purpose of [this kind of] speech ... is to communicate directly to the audience, to involve them, and to teach them, explicitly, the meaning of the staged incident” (120). This is what Brooks means when he calls the melodramatic mode “radically democratic,” in that it “striv[es] to make its representations clear and legible to everyone” (15). Contrary to what Grimsted may think, Mason asserts that “this does not mean that the play lacked subtlety or that the audience was unduly dense; it means, rather, that the form [i.e., melodrama] placed ideas and their delineation in the foreground, rather than attempting to imply them in a more delicate fashion” (120-21).<sup>13</sup> The play, in other words, can show *and* tell. All of these signs “have a depth of symbolic meaning. We are not, however, asked to meditate upon their connotations, to plumb their depths. On the stage they are used virtually as pure signifiers, in that it is their spectacular, their visual, interaction that counts” (Brooks Melodramatic 28). If “mute gesture,” then, like melodrama, “can then perhaps most pertinently be considered as a trope and analyzed on the plane of rhetoric. It is a sign *for* a sign, demanding a *translatio* between the two signs. It hence resembles metaphor, the transference or displacement of meaning,” then we can interpret the exegetical impulse as manifesting the text’s attempt to supply its own *translatio*, combining Uncle Tom’s Cabin and its Key (Brooks Melodramatic 71-72).

Much of the exegesis, then, is concerned with illuminating just how good—or bad—a character is. The following scene is the last before Eva’s death. Eva and Tom sit and read on the banks of Lake Pontchartrain. Eva points to the lake, beginning the following exchange:

TOM: What, Miss Eva?

---

<sup>13</sup> This kind of representation is so important because it helps counteract a problem that arises “when sentimentality meets politics[:] it uses personal stories to tell us of structural effects, but in so doing it risks thwarting its very attempt to perform rhetorically a scene of pain that must be soothed politically” (Berlant 641).

EVA: Don't you see there? There's "a sea of glass, mingled with fire." (408)

Tom sees the justness of her observation:

TOM: True enough, Miss Eva. [*Sings.*]

Oh, had I the wings of the morning,

I'd fly away to Canaan's shore;

Bright angels should convey me home,

To the New Jersusalem. (408-409)

Eva responds as if his song were a usual part of the conversation:

EVA: Where do you suppose New Jersusalem is, Uncle Tom?

TOM: Oh, up in the clouds, Miss Eva.

EVA: Then I think I see it. Look in those clouds; they look like great gates of pearl; and you can see beyond them—far, far off—it's all gold! Tom, sing about "spirits bright." (409)

Eva had earlier told Topsy about them during Eva's conversion of Topsy: "Only think of it, Topsy—you can be one of those spirits bright Uncle Tom sings about!" (400)

TOM: [*Sings.*] I see a band of spirits bright,

That taste the glories there;

They are all robed in spotless white,

And conquering palms they bear.

Eva, again responding to Tom's verses as in a conversation, swears, "Uncle Tom, I've seen *them*" (409; emphasis in the original). Tom's response heightens the element of vision in the scene, taking her literal reading of the song even more literally:

TOM: To be sure you have; you are one of them yourself. You are the brightest spirit I ever saw.

EVA: They come to me sometimes in my sleep—those spirits bright—

After repeating the last two lines of Tom's song, she continues, in speech that rhymes with the last line she sang ("And conquering palms they bear," a rhyme that crosses the divide between song and speech): "Uncle Tom, I'm going there."

TOM: Where, Miss Eva?

EVA: [*Pointing to the sky.*] I'm going *there*, to the spirits bright, Tom; I'm going before long. (409; emphasis in the original)

Before they come forward, leaving the Bible by the lake, Tom turns toward the audience and says: "It's jest no use tryin' to keep Miss Eva here; I've allays said so. She's got the Lord's mark on her forehead. She wasn't never like a child that's to live—there was always something deep in her eyes" (409). Of Tom's aside Mason observes: "Tom has stepped out of the story to address the audience, but not in the manner of the standard aside, and Eva sits next to him, an icon, the Bible in her lap, her finger pointing up to heaven; because he speaks as though she is not there at all, Tom reminds us of Eva's symbolic value. Aiken has, in essence, staged a religious tract, and the moment offers a hint of the tableau that will close the play" (121).

St. Clare interrupts Tom and Eva's Bible lesson. If the significance of Eva's life (and death) had not yet been made clear to us, St. Clare, after Tom and Eva finally leave, "*gaz[es] mournfully after*" them, and asks the audience, in almost the identical terms of Tom's aside:

Has there ever been a child like Eva? Yes, there has been; but their names are always on grave-stones, and their sweet smiles, their heavenly eyes, their singular words and ways, are among the buried treasures of yearning hearts. It is as if

heaven had an especial band of angels, whose office it is to sojourn for a season here, and endear to them the wayward human heart, that they might bear it upward with them in their homeward flight. When you see that deep, spiritual light in the eye when the little soul reveals itself in words sweeter and wiser than the ordinary words of children, hope not to retain that child; for the seal of heaven is on it, and the light of immortality looks out from its eyes! (410)<sup>14</sup>

The significance of this scene is charged by a song that Eva sings right before St. Clare's aside. The song begins:

When your little Eva's there,  
Rob'd like those in spotless white;  
And the conquering palm I bear,  
Bless'd with love and Heaven's light,  
Shall poor Uncle Tom be free?  
Papa promise this to me.

Lines 2-3, of course, repeat (with a difference) verses from Tom's earlier song: "They are all robed in spotless white, / And conquering palms they bear." Her imminent departure from this world to the next is marked here in the change of pronoun. In each succeeding verse she moves from referring to herself in the third person to the first person, mirroring the larger movement marked in the changed lyrics. The plot is condensed into this song—Little Eva alive (though always already dead), and then dead, a martyr of her own love.

---

<sup>14</sup> This speech is spoken by the narrator in the novel. Here we have another example where the omniscience of the narrator is devolved onto the characters. As those same characters are our surrogates, we share in that omniscience. The play, like the novel, gives us the power to read its representations.

Eva's influence does not end with her death, however. Brooks remarks that "children, as living representations of innocence and purity, serve as catalysts for virtuous or vicious actions. Through their very definition of unfallen humanity, they can guide virtue through perils and upset the machinations of evil, in ways denied to the more worldly. Their actions, as their very existence, take on an aura of the providential" (34). Eva's goodness is distilled into the personal effects that she leaves behind. They have the power of holy relics. The first time Tom is shown on Legree's plantation, he says: "My heart sinks at times and feels just like a big lump of lead. Den it gits up in my throat and chokes me till de tears roll out of my eyes; den I take out dis curl of little Miss Eva's hair, and the sight of it brings calm to my mind and I feels strong again. [*Kisses the curl and puts it in his breast...*]" (426). He takes comfort while fondling one of her possessions. It has the power to soothe him, even in his darkest hour.

It also has the power to baffle the villain. Tom had already been beaten twice when Sambo comes to Legree with "a witch thing"—"something that niggers gits from witches. Keep 'em from feeling when they're flogged. He [Tom] had it tied round his neck with a black string" (436). Legree "*takes the paper and opens it.— ... a long curl of light hair twines around his finger.*" "Damnation," he cries, "*stamping and writhing, as if the hair burned him*" (ibid). Cassy confirms to Legree that "that golden tress was charmed; each hair had in it a spell of terror and remorse for thee, and was used by a mightier power to bind thy cruel hands from inflicting uttermost evil on the helpless!" (438). McConachie writes that the point of this scene is to "demonstrate[] Legree's guilt by having a long curl of Eva's hair, reminiscent to the villain of his mother's golden locks, twine around his finger" (19). Legree's mother's goodness, then, and the wrong he did her is tied up with Eva, as if in this moment Eva is hindering Legree's evil designs from beyond the grave. At the same time, this scene looks backward, as if Legree was somehow

involved with what happened to Eva. The confusion of the two parties,—Legree, “Where did he get that hair? It couldn’t have been that! I *burn’d* that up, I know I did! It would be a joke if hair could rise from the dead!”—the way the two are collapsed, is another manner in which Legree is equated with slavery (438).

The two are tied even closer together when we reflect on the causes of Eva’s and Tom’s deaths. The structural parallelism of the deaths—what Williams calls “black-and-white mirror reversals”—indicates their similar causes (48). The play’s “first three acts—depicting the flight of Eliza and the death of Little Eva—were paralleled in the second three by the more audacious suffering and death of Uncle Tom,” a structure that “retains the fundamental mirror relation between white racial suffering recognized by blacks and black racial suffering recognized by whites” (Williams 81). Here as elsewhere, the religious resonances of the play resemble biblical typology. “White readers are effectively ‘set up’ in the first half of the novel,”—and the same is true for the play—“by the more conventional display of docile African grief for the death of Eva, for the (then) much more revolutionary display of white sympathy for virtuous black victims in the second half” (Williams 48). All of the first half, and Eva’s death, is a ‘set up’ for what the audience will see in the second half, and Tom’s death. For all the conviction we have that Legree is responsible for Tom’s death, matched only by the amount of bewilderment we feel when we think about Eva’s, it turns out that they’re linked.

What killed Little Eva? There are a few moments when other characters express anxiety over her health, so that we assume she has tuberculosis. But as we see her wasting away, she shows no obvious symptoms. Meer feels that “while Legree’s persecution of Tom translates easily into the tradition of the stage villain, it is difficult to fit Eva’s death with that pattern, since it involves no human agency” (114). But, as Williams stresses, Little Eva’s “suffering becomes



newly powerful once it becomes clear that tuberculosis is simply the outward symptom of a much deeper ailment: the wrongs of slavery that the young girl takes to heart. Each time Eva learns more of the sufferings of slaves, she sickens a little more (47-48). “I feel sad for our poor people,” she says, “they love me dearly, and they are all good and kind to me. I wish, papa, they were all free!” (410). Eva is able to see beneath the surface of things; her ailing health worsens when she sees what ails her. So Eva in her speech and song expresses her worry over the fate of the slaves, but particularly of Tom. She makes an affective contract with her father: she gives her life for (or frames the end of it in such a way to make its final meaning attached to) Tom. Their fates are linked. Then, finally, when we reach the final allegorical tableau, the three deaths are bonded together in the audience’s mind. The final “‘picture’ effectively duplicated all three deaths in the text” (Meer 114). It is the final gesture of the play, the final connection it is trying to make.

And Tom? Who killed him? If, as Mason proposes, “to kill Legree is to abolish slavery,” then we must say that slavery too, killed Tom (124). Hence my disagreement with critics like McConachie who believe that “unlike Stowe’s character, ... the Legree of Aiken ... is not the embodiment of a social institution that systematically exploits other people” (15). To say that “Legree’s evil is reduced to his personality,” that “Legree dies for his personal sins, not for his role in perpetuating a system that exploits and degrades others,” is to overlook the structural, as well as thematic, similarities that the play draws between Legree and slavery (McConachie 15, 16).

The biggest problem critics have with the play, as I remarked earlier, is with the characterization of Legree. Meer summarizes the problem: “Poetic justice kills off” Legree, an act that “potentially dulls the antislavery outrage of the plays. If the problem is solved with

Legree's death, then there is no larger social question to worry about" (112). Mason writes that "melodrama itself is a means to incarnate and expiate its audience's fears; 'evil' is the name of those fears, and the villain is its agent. The villain must die to lay fear to rest, and virtue must triumph to affirm the world view that melodrama's audience cherishes and to restore the moral order" (125). Mason fails to consider that "betrayal is a personal version of evil," and that "the force of evil in melodrama derives from its personalized menace, its swift execution of its declaration of intent, its reduction of innocence to powerlessness. Evil is treachery in that it appears to unleash a cosmic betrayal of the moral order and puts all appearances into question" (Brooks *Melodramatic* 33, 34). Legree must first personify that evil before he can be driven out.

In the latter acts of the play evil becomes more visible. Cassy, at one point, tells Legree: "I'd rather, ten thousand times, live in the dirtiest hole in the quarters, than be under your hoof!" (436). She later tells Tom that "You had the right on your side; but it's all in vain for you to struggle. You are in the Devil's hands: he is the strongest, and you must give up" (433). Simon Legree first appears at the beginning of Act 5, the auction scene. His first acts are to spit on one of the slaves, and then to manhandle Tom: "Holloa, you! [*To TOM.*] Let's see your teeth. [*Seizes TOM by the jaw and opens his mouth.*] Strip up your sleeve and show your muscle. [*TOM does so*]" (421). Previous to this scene, slaves had never had violent hands laid upon them by their masters. Here we see Slavery (to me interchangeable with "Legree") manipulating its victims, dehumanizing them. Tom is being treated like an animal, and is utterly powerlessness to resist.

The malevolence of the transaction is increased with Skeggs's, the auctioneer, subtle hints that Emmeline is being sold to be a concubine: "Gentlemen, I now offer a prime article—the quadroon girl, Emmeline, only fifteen years of age, *warranted in every respect.* [*Business as before.* EMMELINE is sold to LEGREE for one thousand dollars]" (421; emphasis mine).

Legree then buys Tom and says, again unnecessarily for our understanding (we know Tom and Emmeline have just been sold to Legree), but important to the melodramatic impulse to overstate, “Now look here, you two belong to me” (421). “Melodrama tends toward total theatre, its signs projected, sequentially or simultaneously, on several planes. One of the most important of these planes or registers is that of stage setting, conceived to support the rhetoric of moral recognition” (Brooks Melodramatic 46). This is because “words, however unrepressed and pure, however transparent as vehicles for the expression of basic relations and verities, appear to be not wholly adequate to the representations of meanings, and the melodramatic message must be formulated through other registers of the sign” (Brooks Melodramatic 56). In tableau, Brooks reminds us, “we grasp melodrama’s primordial concern to make its signs clear, unambiguous and impressive” (Melodramatic 48). Such a tableau ends the scene: “TOM: Heaven help us, then! [*Music.—LEGREE stands over them exulting. Picture*]” (422). This is one of many scenes where power is staged in terms of the placement of the actors’ bodies over and against each other. If “melodrama handles its feelings and ideas virtually as plastic entities, visual and tactile models held out for all to see and to handle,” then we can perceive an extra level of explanation in Legree’s position over Tom and Emmeline (who, I assume from Legree’s standing “*over them exultingly*,” have fallen to their knees). They are totally within his power, as this image illustrates (Brooks Melodramatic 41).

Slavery had earlier ruined the homes of the Harris’ and the St. Clares’. Once Tom is sold to Simon Legree, it (embodied in Legree) breaks up Tom’s home song. If melodramas usually begin in a ‘space of innocence,’ with innocence in the act of ‘enjoying itself,’ Aiken’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin, as I’ve already discussed, does not follow this tradition. The play began with the domestic space already broken up, though we, like Eliza, are initially unaware of the fact.

Similarly, when we first see Tom (and his cabin) we see a home about to be broken apart. Nevertheless, “melodrama is fueled by nostalgia for a lost home” (Williams 58). Williams writes that “even if this space is not literally represented, and the narrative cannot begin there, even if it has never been possessed, the most enduring forms of the mode are often suffused with nostalgia for a virtuous place that we like to think we once possessed, whether in childhood or in the distant past of the nation” (28). “This home,” then, “constituted a particularly poignant and elusive ‘space of innocence’” (Williams 58). When we first see Tom on Legree’s plantation, he sings a home song that seeks to (re)establish the home that, in the world of the play at least, never was. Brooks writes that “music seems to have been called upon whenever the dramatist wanted to strike a particular emotional pitch or coloring and lead the audience into a change or heightening of mood” (*Melodramatic* 48-49): “*A Rude Chamber. TOM is discovered, in old clothes,*”—at St. Clare’s he had been “*nicely dressed*” (387)—“*seated on a stool. He holds in his hand a paper containing a curl of EVA’S hair. The scene opens to the symphony of “Old Folks at Home*” (426). With the Stephen Foster original playing in the background, Tom moans: “I have come to de dark places; I’s going through the vale of shadows” (426). At the end of the speech, we have the stage direction, “*SONG—“Old Folks at Home”*” (426). Though the script does not include any of the lyrics, or indicates that Tom sings, a playbill for the 1852 Howard-Aiken production at the National Theater lists—in the section that announces that “the Play is beautifully interspersed with **Singing and Dancing**”—“Old Folks at Home” as the first song, and ascribes its performance to “Tom.” The song runs for nine stanzas. It begins:

Way down upon de Swanee ribber,  
Far, far away,  
Dere's wha my heart is turning ebber,

Dere's wha de old folks stay.

All up and down de whole creation,  
Sadly I roam,  
Still longing for de old plantation,  
And for de old folks at home.

All de world am sad and dreary,  
Ebry where I roam,  
Oh! darkeys how my heart grows weary,  
Far from de old folks at home.

Again, because the stage directions fail to indicate exactly when the song starts, and how much of it is sang, I'm forced to speculate. No matter if Tom sang the whole song or not, Legree's words on entering the stage are forceful: "Shut up, you black cuss! Did you think I wanted any of your infernal howling?" (426). He, in effect, breaks up the (recreated) space of innocence, as "the violation and spoliation of the space of innocence stands as a recurrent representation of the dilemma confronting innocence" (Brooks Melodramatic 30).

Legree's villainy is nowhere more pronounced than in his murder of Tom. "*Grimly confronting* TOM," he says, "Well, Tom, do you know I've made up my mind to *kill* you?" (441). Tom, of course, faces him with courage, and forgiveness. Legree expresses the basic, violent logic of slavery when he tells Tom that "I'll *conquer ye or kill ye!* one or t'other (442). "Tableau was used theatrically as a silent, bodily expression of what words could not fully say" (Williams 30). Birdoff details the extreme tableau the actors struck before "LEGREE *strikes*

TOM *down with the butt of his whip*" (442): "When Legree raised his whip to strike Tom, he stood over him for a fully sixty seconds; the respite taken out for gloating made his crime the more heinous" (50-51). After Sambo and Quimbo carry Tom off, Legree reflects, "I believe he's done for finally. Well, his mouth is shut up at last—that's one comfort" (442). Legree believes that he's accomplished the principal goal of the melodramatic villain: to silence the virtuous once and for all, to block his way to recognition.

For all of Legree's incredibly stylized evilness, however, there are still reminders of something larger than "mere personal villainy" behind the later events of the play (Grimsted 241). When Cassy tells Tom that there is no point for him to be kind, that all of the slaves for whom he suffers "would turn against you the first time they get a chance," Tom asks her: "What made 'em cruel? If I give out I shall get used to it and grow, little by little, just like 'em" (433-34). Cassy and Tom are referring to Legree's slaves, of course, so Tom could have asked her, "*Who* made them cruel?" but he doesn't. By emphasizing the *what*, the acts that made these slaves cruel, Tom suggests that Legree behaved as any other slave owner might, thus tying the play's message back to a larger, social critique. In the same way, Legree's exclamation "I *hate* him—I *hate* him! And isn't he *mine*? Can't I do what I like with him? Who's to hinder, I wonder?" both reflects personal viciousness and a system that allows the exercise of personal viciousness (441).

Just as the play changes over the course of its six acts, the Aiken version of Uncle Tom's Cabin was altered considerably over the course of the decades it was produced. As early as 1854—two years after the six act version of the play debuted in upstate New York—"the play at the National Theatre had been revised so much ... that it hardly resembled the one compiled in Troy. [C. W.] Taylor," who was responsible for the very first dramatization of the novel, also

performed at the National Theatre, “added so much new material, that George L. Aiken protested vigorously” (Birdoff 101). By the time the standard 1852 text (published in 1858) had been in print it had already undergone a number of changes. There were Aiken’s earlier two plays of four acts each that were combined into this six-act form, which was first performed in Troy. *This* publication clearly shows revisions that would have been made sometime during its performance in New York City (see the allusion in V.2 to P. T. Barnum’s competing production at the American Museum). Later changes to the script radically affect the way we understand, and audiences would have understood, the play. A scene that Richard Moody reprints from a promptbook at the New York Public Library shows how St. Clare receives his otherwise ambiguous “death wound” (420).<sup>15</sup> There we see Legree stab St. Clare, an act that augments his villainy, even if it was an accident (St. Clare was “*attempt[ing] to separate*” Cute and Legree). Later changes eliminated the productive dissimilarity of the representation of responsibility in the two halves of the play that I’ve been tracking. In an 1869 promptbook version of the play, “Legree is brought into the story and onto the stage almost from the start, and is involved in the (fraudulent) sale of Tom to St. Clare. ... This version adds a scene (4, 3) in the barroom where he is mortally wounded, only now it is Legree who kills him (in part to cover up the earlier fraud).”<sup>16</sup> With these changes Legree better conforms to Brooks’ account of the traditional melodramatic villain: “Opposed to virtue and innocence stands the active, concerted denial of them in the person of evil, known traditionally as *le traître*, no doubt because he dissimulates, but also because he betrays and undoes the moral order” (*Melodramatic* 33). This Legree would not been, “as in Stowe, the inevitable symptom of a vicious institution” (Meer 112).

---

<sup>15</sup> See Richards’ note (16) on 511, and a reprinting of the incomplete scene in Moody 383.

<sup>16</sup> See <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/onstage/scripts/69prompthp.html> for more information.

In 1853, the actor G. C. Germon initially turned down the part of Uncle Tom because he thought he was being asked to play a Jim Crow role. He worried that his “very make-up as a Negro means burlesque, and Uncle Tom will make everybody laugh” (qtd. in Birdoff 42). Producer George Howard’s assurances to the contrary, the first time Germon walked on to the National Theatre’s stage in character he was met with laughter. This in itself was not surprising. The black body of minstrelsy had been made to be an object of ridicule for New York City audiences at least since Dan Emmett’s Virginia Minstrels performed their first show at the Bowery Theatre a decade before.

Blackface minstrelsy was, to some extent, *the* way that whites in U.S. antebellum culture represented African American characters.<sup>17</sup> Appropriating it caused problems for abolitionists, and for those who sought to profit from adaptations of their popular works. Melodrama—which was active in abolitionist fiction and the popular theater alike—was a mode concerned with the welfare of virtuous characters, and with the establishment of a comprehensive and comprehensible moral order. It was a drama of recognition, in which the imaginary and real worlds recognized a character to be virtuous. The inclusion of elements of blackface minstrelsy raised the possibility, however, that a virtuous character like Tom could be *mis*recognized, as Germon feared. The playwright George Aiken, as well as the novelist Harriet Beecher Stowe, then, had to find a way to gain sympathy for characters the sight and sound of whom had come to invite derision.

Minstrelsy reveled in disorder and instability, and yet both it and melodrama imposed order on their subjects in a similar way, if for dissimilar ends, and to dissimilar effect.

---

<sup>17</sup> When Harriet Beecher Stowe explained in her preface that the object of Uncle Tom’s Cabin was “to awaken sympathy and feeling for the African race, *as they exist among us*,” she may have recognized that, for many white Americans living in the North, the “African race” was what one could have seen and heard at a minstrel show (xiii; emphasis added).



Melodrama identified virtue through the threat or enactment of violence, much the same way as melodrama determined the racial statuses of ambiguously raced characters. The chapter to this point has asserted that melodrama attempted to counteract the tendencies that later scholars have criticized it for. It has, in other words, considered how melodrama may have actually aided the creation of an abolitionist critique that was capable of placing blame on self and society. The remainder of this chapter and part of the next one will be spent examining the use of blackface minstrelsy in melodrama of the later 1850s and the ways that it used misrecognition to the benefit of the abolitionist cause.

Melodrama, as Daphne Brooks has observed, “operated as an instrument designed to impart order and stability” (*Bodies* 36). In blackface minstrelsy, “the corporeal enactment of blackness [was] a pained one” (Hartman 27). Indeed, the same is true for the corporeal enactment of virtue in melodrama: “The convergences between the bodily politics of minstrelsy and those of melodrama might be said to center on the redemptive and recreational use of violence” (Hartman 29). In fact, “blows caused the virtuous black body of melodrama to be esteemed and humiliated the grotesque black body of minstrelsy” (Hartman 26). For a moment, we could interpret Saidiya Hartman as stating that the melodramatic body is both “esteemed *and* humiliated.” That is, of course, until we realize that “humiliated” refers to the minstrel body. My misreading makes my point: The black body of minstrelized melodrama is esteemed as virtuous *because* it is humiliated. Hartman’s opposition—that “whippings were to minstrelsy what tears were to melodrama” (30)—is a false one, because melodrama featured both. In both modes “blows invested [the body] with meaning” (Hartman 30). Though Hartman’s comment is about minstrelsy, it applies equally well to melodrama. Violence in minstrelsy does not so much invest

the body with meaning as arrest the play of signification of the racialized body.<sup>18</sup> Melodrama invested the black body with a *new* meaning.

Peter Brooks writes that “the bodies of the virtuous victims are typically subjected to physical”—or some other kind of—“restraint.” The body is thus “unable to assert its innocence.” Melodrama, he continues, cannot “reach its denouement until the virtuous bodies have been freed, and explicitly recognized as bearing the sign of innocence” (“Melodrama” 18). It is my claim that this restraint, or any other related impediment, *is* the sign of virtue. The villain writes the sign of virtue on the hero’s body. The moment of victimization and recognition are one. The classic moment of this articulation of good and evil in Uncle Tom’s Cabin is Simon Legree’s whipping of Uncle Tom.

But first, it’s worth discussing what many have argued to be *the* moment of recognition in Uncle Tom’s Cabin. In her discussion of film melodrama, Williams gives two examples in which “the victim-hero’s virtue is initially misrecognized,” or, in other words, who are temporarily believed to be vicious (48). This is not the case for either of the two examples she gives from Uncle Tom’s Cabin: Tom’s witnessing of Little Eva’s death, and George Shelby, Jr.’s witnessing of Tom’s. In neither case does the witness misrecognize the sufferer’s virtue. In fact, in neither scene is the sufferer’s virtue first recognized. By this point in the action, their virtue has already been proved.

Aiken’s play recreates the scene of Tom’s death from the novel almost verbatim:

*George.* Oh! dear Uncle Tom! do wake—do speak once more! look up! Here's  
Master George—your own little Master George. Don't you know me?

---

<sup>18</sup> Hartman and Brooks discuss how the “racially liminal body” (Brooks Bodies 37) of Zoe, the tragic mulatta heroine of Dion Boucicault’s The Octoroon, “becomes legible as a black one by virtue of the violence that threatens it” (Hartman 210 n. 24).

*Tom.* [*Opening his eyes and speaking in a feeble tone.*] Mas'r George! Bless de Lord! it's all I wanted! They hav'n't forgot me! It warms my soul; it does my old heart good! Now I shall die content!

*George.* You shan't die! you mustn't die, nor think of it. I have come to buy you, and take you home.

*Tom.* Oh, Mas'r George, you're too late. The Lord has bought me, and is going to take me home.

*George.* Oh! don't die. It will kill me—it will break my heart to think what you have suffered, poor, poor fellow!

*Tom.* Don't call me, poor fellow! I *have* been a poor fellow; but that's all past and gone now. I'm right in the door, going into glory! Oh, Mas'r George! *Heaven has come!* I've got the victory, the Lord has given it to me! Glory be to His name!

[*Dies.*] (443)

This scene, like that of Eva's death, is about the admiration of virtue rather than the recognition of it.<sup>19</sup> Shelby's recognition of Tom's virtue comes too late for that recognition to be anything new. "The victory" was never in doubt. The only real threat to it was not Legree's machinations or Shelby's late arrival, but to the method of racial representation that made Tom representable as "black" in the first place. The possibility that Tom could be misread had been overcome "the moment Simon Legree's whip first lent Uncle Tom a paradoxical visibility and dignity as a suffering, and thus worthy, human being" (Williams 43).

---

<sup>19</sup> If anything, we recognize young Shelby's virtue in coming to rescue Tom. (In the novel, but not the play, he had promised to bring Tom back home.) He arrives just in time to see Tom, but too late to save him. We have, of course, already recognized Tom's virtue. Furthermore, if we agree with Rosemarie Bank that "George Shelby ... remains unredeemed by an unsuccessful eleventh-hour attempt to rescue Tom that leaves Shelby still a slaveowner," then it becomes even more clear that Shelby is not a "recognizer" on the level of Eva or Tom (149).

Williams asserts that “the key function of victimization is to orchestrate the moral legibility crucial to the mode, for if virtue is not obvious, suffering—often depicted as the literal suffering of an agonized body—is” (29). In Uncle Tom’s Cabin, suffering is not merely a sign of virtue—it is the enactment of virtue. Williams states that “even happy-ending melodramas are heavily invested in displays of bodily suffering as the means to the recognition of virtue.” “Indeed,” she continues, “the reward of virtue ... is only a secondary manifestation of the more important *recognition* of virtue in a world in which such recognition is not obvious” (29; her emphasis).<sup>20</sup> Virtue is obvious, or becomes so, at the moment of victimization. The moment of victimization is the moment of recognition—at least for the audience.<sup>21</sup>

Tom’s beating is quickly passed over in the novel. Each of Tom’s whippings by Legree gets one short sentence: “‘D—n you!’ said Legree, as with one blow of his fist he felled Tom to the earth” (330) and “Legree, foaming with rage, smote his victim to the ground” (358). Stowe spends much more time apologizing for her “lack of graphic description” than on description itself (Williams 52): “Scenes of blood and cruelty are shocking to our ear and heart. What man has nerve to do, man has not nerve to hear. What brother-man and brother-Christian must suffer,

---

<sup>20</sup> Here Williams is echoing Brooks: “The *reward* of virtue [...] is only a secondary manifestation of the *recognition* of virtue” (Melodramatic 27; his emphasis).

<sup>21</sup> Hartman almost agrees with my reading of victimization and the recognition of virtue, but she focuses exclusively on the interrelated ideas of racial and moral misrecognition. In her examples, she finds that “the disparity between identity and appearance contributed to the hero’s or heroine’s affliction and his or her usually tragic end. In these moral dramas, the battle of good and evil was waged at the site of the tortured and chaste black body; suffering announced virtue” (28). Her example is Zoe. But unlike The Octoroon, racial status does not play a part in Uncle Tom’s Cabin—at least not with Tom.

cannot be told us, even in our secret chamber, it so harrows the soul” (358).<sup>22</sup> The scene in the play appears to be equally brief:

*Legree.* Well, Tom, do you know I've made up my mind to *kill* you?

*Tom.* It's very likely, Mas'r.

*Legree.* *I—have—done—just—that—thing*, Tom, unless you'll tell me what do you know about these yer gals? [TOM *is silent.*] D'ye hear? Speak!

*Tom.* I han't got anything to tell, mas'r.

*Legree.* Do you dare to tell me, you old black rascal, you don't know? Speak! Do you know anything?

*Tom.* I know, mas'r; but I can't tell anything. *I can die!*

*Legree.* Hark ye, Tom! ye think, 'cause I have let you off before, I don't mean what I say; but, this time, I have made *up my mind*, and counted the cost. You've always stood it out agin me; now, I'll *conquer ye or kill ye!* one or t'other. I'll count every drop of blood there is in you, and take 'em, one by one, 'till ye give up!

*Tom.* Mas'r, if you was sick, or in trouble, or dying, and I could save you, I'd *give* you my heart's blood; and, if taking every drop of blood in this poor old body would save your precious soul, I'd give 'em freely. Do the worst you can, my troubles will be over soon; but if you don't repent yours won't never end.

[LEGREE *strikes* TOM *down with the butt of his whip.*] (441-42; emphasis in the original)

---

<sup>22</sup> Williams also points out that Hammatt Billings, Stowe's first illustrator, only showed Tom being beaten by Sambo and Quimbo—and that only in the second illustrated edition of 1853 (50).

As a matter of fact, this scene features what may be the longest tableau in the play: As I stated earlier, “when Legree raised his whip to strike Tom, he stood over him for a full sixty seconds” (Birdoff 50). Stowe inserted a similar pause in the novel. After Tom tells Legree to “Do the worst you can, my troubles’ll be over soon; but if ye don’t repent, yours won’t *never* end!”:

Like a strange snatch of heavenly music, heard in the lull of a tempest, this burst of feeling made a moment's blank pause. Legree stood aghast, and looked at Tom; and there was such a silence, that the tick of the old clock could be heard, measuring, with silent touch, the last moments of mercy and probation to that hardened heart.

It was but a moment. There was one hesitating pause,—one irresolute, relenting thrill,—and the spirit of evil came back, with seven-fold vehemence; and Legree, foaming with rage, smote his victim to the ground. (358)<sup>23</sup>

Both in the newspaper publication (18 Mar. 1852 in The National Era) and first volume edition (273), a row of asterisks were inserted between these paragraphs and Stowe’s apology. It closes the scene like a curtain drop. Stowe then steps forward to apologize for what she had just shown. Legree pauses to ready himself. The novel pauses so the narrator can apologize. What, then, happens on stage and in the audience in the sixty seconds of silence and static between the rise and fall of Legree’s whip?

---

<sup>23</sup> Also, the chapter in which this scene appeared was split into two issues of The National Era, so that scene was paused for its original readers.

For the National Era.  
 (CONTINUED FROM THE PREVIOUS PAGE.)  
**UNCLE TOM'S CABIN:**  
 OR,  
**LIFE AMONG THE LOWLY.**  
 BY MRS. H. B. STOWE.

CHAPTER XXXIX.—Continued.  
 Legree drew in a long breath, and, suppressing his rage, took Tom by the arm, and, approaching his face almost to his, said, in a terrible voice—  
 "Shut up, Tom, ye think cause I've let you off before, I don't mean what I say; but this time I've made up my mind, and counted the cost. You've always stood out against me; now I'll squeeze ye or kill ye, one or t'other. I'll count every drop of blood there is in ye, and take 'em one by one till ye give up."  
 Tom looked up to his master, and answered—  
 "Master, if you was sick, or in trouble, or dying, and I could save ye, I'd give ye my heart's blood; and if taking every drop of blood in this poor old body would save your precious soul, I'd give 'em body, so the Lord gives blood;—ye. Oh, master, don't bring this great sin on your soul; it will hurt you more than it will me. Be the worst you can, my troubles will be over soon; but if ye don't repent, yours won't never end."  
 Like a strange match of heavenly music, heard in the fall of a trumpet, this burst of feeling made a moment's blank pause. Legree stood against, and looked at Tom, and there was such a silence that the tick of the old clock could be heard, measuring with silent beats the last moments of mercy and prohibition to that hardened heart.  
 It was but a moment. There was one hesitating glance, one moment's relaxing thrill, and the spirit of evil came back with avenged vengeance, and Legree, foaming with rage, made his victim to the ground.  
 "— — —"  
 "Scenes of blood and cruelty are shocking to our ear and heart! What man has nerve to do, men has not nerve to hear; what brother man and brother Christian must suffer, cannot be told us in our secret chambers; it so harrows up the soul; and yet, oh my country, these things are done under the shadow of the cross! Oh, Christ, thy church sees them almost in silence!"

Figure 2. Harriet Beecher Stowe. "The Strategem." The National Era. March 18, 1852.

Some may consider this a moment when the audience would feel the most helpless. Marc Robinson, on the contrary, sees in tableau a moment of possibility: "After stopping a narrative episode before the climax happens ... the playwrights ask us to consider, in the silence that the tableau creates, some of the possible alternatives to an event that would otherwise seem inevitable. Just the fact that other routes through such a crisis exist, this theater implies, is important to recognize, even if this narrative and these particular characters aren't going to take them" (35). This tableau opens up a space for reform, for conversion, for action. Aiken's Uncle Tom's Cabin shows us that Tom dies, but did not have to. Williams writes that melodrama's "recognition of virtue involves a dialectic of pathos and action—a give and take of 'too late' and 'in the nick of time'" (30). Christine Gledhill writes that melodrama contrasts the world as it is and as it should be (21). In this moment, Legree's villainy, and Tom's virtue, are *about-to-be*

completed. Standing between the two contrasting moments in these temporalities is an instant in which the spectator can imagine his or her interruption of the event being staged. Time is working differently here than in Williams' examples that deal with suspense. There, time is felt in two contradictory ways: individual actions feel fast, and yet the ultimate duration of all those combined actions feel slowed down (Williams 33). Those deferrals, while augmenting the suspense of the scene, are also supposed to have the effect of assuring us of their positive outcomes. While this model of eventual success may fit with George Shelby's nick-of-time arrival before Tom's death, it does not affect Tom's fate. And yet there is a logic behind this tableau: It is because Tom is about-to-be made a martyr that the audience can sympathize with him. If he were not threatened, they would not recognize his virtue. If he were already dead, their sympathy would be worthless. Many argue that the only widespread reaction to Uncle Tom's Cabin's melodrama was crying, that the audience thus lost themselves, and the play's argument, in their own feelings. In the end, melodrama moves us to tears—and little else.

In the December 16, 1853 issue of The Liberator appeared "Eliza Harris," a poem by Frances Ellen Watkins.<sup>24</sup> A subtitle, which did not appear in Watkins's Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects, unnecessarily tells us that the title character is "from 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.'" I say "unnecessarily" because Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel would have been familiar to most Americans, and most likely to all of those who subscribed to William Lloyd Garrison's paper.<sup>25</sup> And yet, neither The Liberator nor Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects identify the author whose work inspired Watkins. An editorial introduction to the Frederick Douglass' Paper run of the

---

<sup>24</sup> Watkins did not become Harper until her marriage to Fenton Harper in 1860.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, the following issues of The Liberator for mentions of Stowe and/or her novel: 3/26/1852, 4/2/1852, and 6/11/1852.



poem, which appeared there a week after it did in The Liberator, tells us that “the following effusion ... from the pen of a young lady of color ... speaks for itself.” It is my contention that Watkins’ poem does not speak for itself, but rather speaks to the “mania,” to use Sarah Meer’s phrase, of cultural productions that surrounded Stowe’s novel. The influence of these earlier versions on Watkins’ poem manifests itself not just in the poem’s content, but in its form as well. Watkins’s poem, in other words, synthesizes the novelistic and melodramatic modes.

Watkins’s adaptation of Eliza Harris’s flight to freedom has a different goal. Eliza, “a young quadroon woman,” runs away to save her child, Harry, whom her hapless master has sold to settle a debt (Stowe 3-4). She is on her way North when she notices Haley, the slave trader that has purchased her son, begin to close in on her. (She had reached the Ohio River, but had been unable to obtain passage on a ship across it because the river was frozen.) In a moment in which “a thousand lives seemed to be concentrated in that one moment to Eliza,” she grabs her child, and runs to the river. Stowe charges the moment with an extreme intensity. Time, in the form of a thousand lives (of other runaways slaves—Eliza is functioning as a type here) is felt to weigh especially heavily on this moment, this woman. Eliza herself seems to defy laws of time and space in her flight: “In that dizzy moment her feet to her scarce seemed to touch the ground, and a moment brought her to the water's edge.” Finally, “nerved with strength such as God gives only to the desperate, with one wild cry and flying leap, she vaulted sheer over the turbid current by the shore, on to the raft of ice beyond.” Eliza’s pursuers, seeing his hopeless act, react as a sympathetic audience would: “It was a desperate leap—impossible to anything but madness and despair; and Haley, Sam, and Andy, instinctively cried out, and lifted up their hands, as she did it.” With great energy, Stowe represents Eliza’s crossing: “The huge green fragment of ice on which she alighted pitched and creaked as her weight came on it, but she staid there not a

moment. With wild cries and desperate energy she leaped to another and still another cake;—stumbling—leaping—slipping—springing upwards again!” These dashes, like the one in the preceding quotation, recreate on the page Eliza’s awkward and frantic movements across the ice. Stowe adds to the immediacy of the scene by shifting into the present tense: “Her shoes are gone—her stockings cut from her feet—while blood marked every step; but she saw nothing, felt nothing, till dimly, as in a dream, she saw the Ohio side, and a man helping her up the bank” (52). The zeugma in the last sentence makes it seem as if Eliza sees herself being helped up. Both her and her pursuers are taken in by what they see.

When Watkins’s Eliza “was nearing the river—in reaching the brink, / She heeded no danger, she paused not to think!” (5-6) The speaker then tells us what she would have thought if she had had the time to pause: “For she is a mother—her child is a slave— / And she’ll give him his freedom, or find him a grave!” (7-8) The speaker, in fact, recalls Aiken’s Eliza’s words before she takes her leap: “Courage, my child!—we will be free—or perish!” (386) Like Aiken, Watkins makes the terms of the event explicit. Stowe’s narrator “pause[s] not to think,” but is, like Eliza and her pursuers, swept up in the events being narrated. Though Eliza or Stowe’s narrator do not pause to think, Watkins’s narrator forces her reader to do just that. The narrator continues to set up Eliza’s crossing in the fourth stanza: “She was nerved by despair, and strengthen’d by woe, / As she leap’d o’er the chasms that yawn’d from below; / Death howl’d in the tempest, and rav’d in the blast, / But she heard not the sound till the danger was past” (13-16). As in the second stanza, Eliza is still unaware of the full significance of her situation. And just in case Watkins’ audience is similarly in danger of losing sight of the political reality that frames the action, Watkins arrests it: The reader is anxious to learn of Eliza’s fate, but the speaker defers telling it for two stanzas:

Oh! how shall I speak of my proud country's shame?

Of the stains on her glory, how give them their name?

How say that her banner in mockery waves—

Her 'star-spangled banner'—o'er millions of slaves?

How say that the lawless may torture and chase

A woman whose crime is the hue of her face?

How the depths of the forest may echo around

With the shrieks of despair, and the bay of the hound? (17-24)

This aside recalls the kind of denunciation Stowe's narrator usually engages in. Though a melodrama's exegetical representation usually tells the audience the immediate, if less than obvious, significance of an event—what happens to slaves that are sent South, for example—it rarely takes the long view seen here.

This delay, absent from Stowe's text, while it displays an omniscience characteristic of a novelistic narrator, nevertheless has the effect of reproducing a specifically melodramatic temporality. Stowe represented the speed of Eliza's crossing with dashes. Watkins uses anapests. And yet Eliza's escape is delayed by the narrator's digression. Just as Eliza "hear[s] not the sound" of Death's howlings—that is, she doesn't recognize "the true stakes of the drama" (Brooks *Melodramatic* 19)—"till the danger is past," so is the reader not allowed to breathe a sigh of relief until the speaker's exclamation draws the connection between this individual act and the national abomination of slavery. And when Eliza reaches the opposite shore, her achievement is stressed in terms of its larger significance: "With her step on the ice, and her arm

on her child, / The danger was fearful, the pathway was wild; / But, aided by Heaven, she gained  
a free shore, / Where the friends of humanity open'd their door" (25-28).

The confused temporality continues in the next section, which documents Eliza's fear, even though she has, by this time, reached safety: "So fragile and lovely, so fearfully pale, / Like a lily that bends to the breath of the gale, / Save the heave of her breast, and the sway of her hair, / You'd have thought her a statue of fear and despair" (29-32). The aestheticization that occurs when Watkins calls Eliza a statue—an aestheticization that stands as a microcosm for the whole poetic project and that of all other representations of Eliza—would be better expressed as a theatrical tableau, which stops time in order to render more legible Eliza's emotions, or, in Peter Brooks's account of the function of tableau, provides "a visual summary of the emotional situation" (*Melodramatic* 48).

This arrested affect carries over into the next stanza: "In agony close to her bosom she press'd / The life of her heart, the child of her breast:— / Oh! love from its tenderness gathering might, / Had strengthen'd her soul for the dangers of flight" (33-36). The poem's general use of the past tense could imply that this is a belated description of Eliza's feelings before her escape, but the succeeding lines have to remind us that she is, in fact, on the free side of the Ohio: "But she's free!—yes, free from the land where the slave / From the hand of oppression must rest in the grave; / Where bondage and torture, where scourges and chains / Have plac'd on our banner indelible stains" (37-40). This reassurance also gives Watkins another opportunity to link Eliza's story with a political issue, expressed, as before, in the desecrated flag, lest her readership, overwhelmed with sympathy for Eliza, and made complacent at the relief they feel now that she is safe, forget the other slave mothers of which she is a type. Watkins manipulates the situation

in such a way as to combine the audience's desire for affective release with political enlightenment.

Two stanzas follow that appear only in the original newspaper publications: "Did a fever e'er burning through bosom and brain, / Send a lava-like flood through every vein, / Till it suddenly cooled 'neath a healing spell, / And you knew, oh! the joy! you knew you were well? // So felt this young mother, as a sense of the rest / Stole gently and sweetly o'er *her* weary breast, / As her boy looked up, and, wondering, smiled / On the mother whose love had freed her child" (41-48). These lines make the first direct appeal to the reader, and so recall some of Stowe's comments in her "Concluding Remarks" to Uncle Tom's Cabin.<sup>26</sup> Unlike Stowe's famous appeal to white Northern women's experience of infant mortality to win their sympathy for slave mothers' losses, Watkins locates this sickness within her readers' own "bosom and brain." The danger to the mother's life is given precedence here. Eliza is then cured by her son's smile, a smile made possible by her love and sacrifice. In this way, the saved child recognizes the virtue of his own mother. Initially, we are told that Eliza "was nerved by despair, and strengthen'd by woe" (13). Later, we learn that "love from its tenderness gathering might, / Had strengthen'd her soul from the dangers of flight" (35-36). The change in motivation, from fear of death to love of family, makes sense when we remember that, in melodrama, the role that children like Harry (or Eva) play. The confused agency in this reciprocal-blessing is exemplified by the word "wondering," which could either indicate that Harry causes, or shows, wonder. The exclusion of these two stanzas in Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects denies Eliza recognition of her virtue within the poem—that is, it denies her recognition from one of the other characters, a common

---

<sup>26</sup> Compare, for example: "By the sick hour of your child; by those dying eyes, which you can never forget; by those last cries, that wrung your heart when you could neither help nor save; by the desolation of that empty cradle, that silent nursery,—I beseech you, pity those mothers that are constantly made childless by the American slave-trade!" (384)

feature of melodrama. And this happy ending involves, as Williams recognizes with melodrama more generally, includes the “display[] of bodily suffering as the means to the recognition of virtue” (29). The child can only cure his mother with a smile after she is struck with a fearful fever.

The poem’s penultimate stanza casts a glance back across the river: “The bloodhounds have miss’d the scent of her way; / The hunter is rifled and foil’d of his prey” (49-50). Watkins again likens the hunters and their dogs, both in their identical grammatical positioning, and in the metaphorical use of “foil’d,” which is used to describe a hunting dog’s tendency “to spoil his own scent” (OED). The hunters are further unmanned by one of Watkins few substantive revisions to the poem in Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects. In the later version, the next two lines read: “Fierce jargon and cursing, with clanking of chains, / Make sounds of strange discord on Liberty’s plains” (51-52). In the earlier newspaper versions, the first line reads: “The cursing of men and clanking of chains.” The omission of the word “men” adds to their dehumanization, as does the word “jargon,” “a term of contempt for something the speaker does not understand,” which, in representing their speech as incomprehensible as the sound of shackles, ends in denying them the faculty of speech altogether (OED).

Watkins concludes by turning again to the mother and child: “With the rapture of love and fullness of bliss, / She plac’d on his brow a mother’s fond kiss:— / Oh! poverty, danger and death she can brave, / For the child of her love is no longer a slave!” (53-56) As in Aiken’s play, Eliza drops out of the picture once she’s free, and yet the assurance that “she can brave” whatever may come next gestures toward the residual plot of the novel. That the poem ends not with the contradiction of such a scene occurring “on Liberty’s plains,” but with resolution and

resolve does not guarantee that Watkins does not fall into the problem she had been trying to avoid of losing sight of social issues in an individual's story.

The task of resignifying blackness was not accomplished in one run. As Brooks writes of the recognition of “true moral identities,” so it was with the creation of the sympathetic slave: Its success was “never finally assured; that is why it must be repeatedly dramatized” (Melodramatic 53). Just as Billings' sole illustration of Tom's beating “condenses separate moments in the novel” (Williams 50-52), we can think of Legree's beating of Tom as representing a culmination of a series of acts that interpollate Tom as virtuous victim. We first become aware of Tom's virtue—and placement in the social order—through slavery's assaults on the domestic space, either in the breaking up of the cabin, or Legree's later interrupting Tom when he sings a home song. Just as Tom's victimization must be repeated over the course of many performances, he is repeatedly victimized within each performance as well. Similarly, abolitionists had to repeatedly stress the connection between the personalized narratives they told and the larger structures that shaped them.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Blackface Minstrelsy and Violence in Conway's Dred and Delany's Blake**

Uncle Tom's Cabin was reworked considerably after the Civil War. Legree's villainy, as has been noted, was remarkably worse. But even before the war, the play, along with its audience, underwent significant change. The politics staged in P. T. Barnum's American Museum had changed considerably over the course of four years. The Lecture Room's first dramatization of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, adapted by H. J. Conway in 1852 and produced by Barnum a year later, took a much different political stance on slavery than Stowe had.<sup>27</sup> That play ended with Uncle Tom freed by George Shelby and reunited with his family. Barnum, defending a revision that weakened Stowe's attack on the slave system, wrote that Conway had "wisely consulted dramatic taste by having Virtue triumphant at last, and after all its unjust sufferings, miseries and deprivations, conducted to happiness by the hand of Him who watches over all" (qtd. in Birdoff 89). To those—including Stowe—upset with the new ending, a reviewer for the New York Morning Express responded that there was "no good reason why Uncle Tom should be whipped to death by a brute in a moral drama, because from the popular character of the drama itself, such closing triumph for vice and defeat of virtue would leave a most pernicious impression upon the general mind" (qtd. in Birdoff 89-90). An audience familiar with melodrama, this reviewer argued, would reject Uncle Tom's murder by Simon Legree. Though, in other adaptations, Legree was punished, having the hero die was not acceptable. Within the polarized ethical world of melodrama, justice must be done. If melodrama is nostalgic for, and seeks the reestablishment of, a lost home, having Tom restored to his family

---

<sup>27</sup> See Adams (129-39) for an account of the play's complicated "Compromise politics."



is a fitting end (Williams 28). Barnum and Conway, and their critics, had very different ideas about moral drama.

Barnum claimed that his production was “the only just and sensible dramatic version of Mrs. Stowe’s book that has ever been put upon the stage.” He contended that the play represented “Southern Negro SLAVERY AS IT IS embracing all its abhorrent deformities, its cruelties, and barbarities,” that it “deal[t] with FACTS, INSTEAD OF FICTION.” Barnum criticized the other great New York City production of Stowe’s first novel. In a veiled reference to the George Howard-George Aiken production at the National Theatre, he wrote that his production “exhibit[ed] a true picture of negro life in the South, instead of absurdly representing the ignorant slave as possessed of all the polish of the drawing room, and the refinement of the educated whites.” Even though he claimed that Conway’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin “appeal[ed] to reason instead of the passions,” and that his work would “be more salutary than those of any piece based upon fanaticism without reason, and zeal without knowledge,” he would later come to produce the adaptation that William Lloyd Garrison felt instilled “the strongest and the sublimest anti-slavery sentiments!” (qtd. in Birdoff 89, 77). Something must have changed, then, for Barnum to adopt Aiken’s script for his Lecture Room productions.<sup>28</sup>

Eric Lott writes that the rivalry between the Barnum-Conway and Howard-Aiken productions revealed deep political divisions within the antebellum northern working class. These “struggles over [Stowe’s] text mediated struggles over sectional allegiance” (Lott 224). In what Lott characterizes as a fusion of “theatrical taste and political devotion,” those who preferred Aiken’s version were thought to hold Northern, antislavery views, while those who preferred Conway’s were thought to hold Southern, proslavery views. The two plays, Lott

---

<sup>28</sup> See Adams 139.

continues, “introduc[ed] sectional controversy into the theater ... by foregrounding and even thematizing the vagaries of racial representation”: “Aiken and Conway each took up one of the minstrel show’s contradictory representational strategies in regard to blacks—Conway its hard-edged ridicule, Aiken its sentimentalism” (219-20). In foregrounding a formalized sectionalism, the plays made “visible the antagonism between America’s two modes of production” (Lott 221). The agrarian South became associated with “the minstrel show’s racial meanness” and the industrial North with “a [Stephen] Fosteresque pathos” (Lott 220). Debates over the two Uncle Tom plays showed that “the comic and the sentimental, the cornerstones of minstrelsy,” and, by extension, Northern and Southern modes of production, “no longer seemed entirely compatible” (Lott 226).

In 1852, then, a production’s representational strategies determined, and its sectional allegiances were indicated by, the extent to which its “particular iconography did or did not suggest an irreverence for the plight of slaves” (Lott 220). That the political lines of racial representation had shifted by 1856 can be seen as much by the fact that Barnum began producing Aiken’s Uncle Tom as by the content of Conway’s follow-up, Dred, based on Stowe’s sequel to Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Dred recounts the fate of the people of two Southern plantations: the Gordons and the Claytons. Tom Gordon terrorizes his sister, Nina, and his secret half brother, Harry, who is a slave. The novel follows the efforts of Harry, Edward Clayton (Nina’s fiancé), and Dred (the leader of a fugitive slave community in the Dismal Swamp) to frustrate Tom’s evil plans. If “the Uncle Tom’s Cabin plays did not at all mark something so unequivocal as a turn in working-class racial perspective,” neither did Conway’s Dred (Lott 231). But if the former plays showed there to be a split between “‘northern’ and ‘southern’ portions of the northern popular classes,” a split indicated and instituted by the rift between the comic and the sentimental modes

of racial melodrama, the latter play forces us to rethink the applicability to the late 1850s of Lott's paradigm of sectionalized racial representation, which he theorized in relation to the early 1850s. Though the sentimental, antislavery mode remained current (thanks to the continued popularity of Aiken's Uncle Tom's Cabin), Conway's Dred promoted a comic vision of the slave south while still insisting on the ultimate abolition of slavery. If comic racial representation had previously denied the cross-racial sympathy that was indispensable to the success of labor abolitionism, it now reaffirmed it through a figure who crossed racial boundaries and with whom the audience was invited to sympathize. The next chapter will examine the abolitionist practice of forcing interracial sympathy. This chapter starts by looking at popular representations of accidental sympathy between working class whites and enslaved blacks.

Conway suggests the relevance of the plight of slaves to the working classes by creating a working class character that is constantly mistaken for a slave. Conway bases this alliance between slave and worker on a shared legacy of revolution and education. The role of this alliance in the play is to rid the South of its most pernicious elements—the racist, proslavery mob that threatens to replace the rule of law with lynch law. The play's support for labor abolitionism is tentative, insofar that the movement has a short, though powerful, life within the play. The alliance is so successful that, in the end, it becomes unnecessary to the welfare of the state. The three most powerful figures of the movement—Dred, Harry, and Cipher Cute—are either sacrificed for the safety of that society, in the case of the first, or are absorbed into the dominant culture, in the case of the latter two. While labor abolitionism is struck down almost as quickly as it was brought up, the play is still remarkable for its movement beyond the Uncle Tom's Cabin plays toward envisioning a significant partnership between black slave and white worker.

Cipher is an addition to Stowe's text, drawn from the stage tradition of the Yankee character. His most immediate ancestors are Gumption Cute, from Aiken's Uncle Tom's Cabin, and Penetrate Partyside, from Conway's. As his name suggests, he is "a person who fills a place, but is of no importance or worth, a nonentity, a 'mere nothing.'" But just as a zero is "of no value by itself," Cipher "increases or decreases the value of other figures according to [his] position." This "acute, clever, keen-witted, sharp, shrewd" character goes south "to calculate, cast in the mind, think out" the slave system (OED). In the process, he is placed in relation to other characters in order to prove their value.

Harry introduces Cipher to Uncle John and company as "a gentleman [who] has been thrown from his horse. ... I assisted him out of the swamp, sir, and directed some of the people to show him this way to the house" (11). Cipher is associated, like Dred, with the swamp. He brings it with him to the Canema plantation: "*He is muddied all over, his hat crushed*" (12). Cipher appears, that is, in a sort of full-body blackface. He explains how he came to look this way:

Just as I came reound the turn at the eend of the big swamp you told me of, where the niggers run away and hide in; wal, just as I turned the corner, eout jumps a big buck nigger, black as the ace of spades, in a red flannel shirt, his neck like a bull's, and his arms naked; he throws 'em high in the air, and yells eout, 'Beware! Return to thine own people! Listen not to him who would teach thee; justice is only for the white man!' Then he gin a yell like the bull of Bashan; you might have heard it from Maine to Georgy, and vanished intew the swamp head-first, and my tarnal crittur of a horse vamoosed in tew, tail first. (11)

Though it appears that CIPHER fell into the swamp at the end of Dred's rant, Dred's warning seems to take CIPHER's current, muddled appearance into account. With "thine own people," Dred seems to be registering the difference between himself and CIPHER, though along what lines it's unclear (whites? Northerners?). His statement that "justice is only for the white man" makes less sense, unless Dred does not consider him to be white. Dred may be making a greater distinction than race: justice is for the white aristocrat, and as CIPHER is not the latter, he may as well not be the former.

Dred enters the swamp "head-first," CIPHER "tail first," but they both enter it. CIPHER's initial association with Dred may have been fortuitous, but their histories soon substantiate the link. JEKYL says that Dred is "a true son of his father, Denmark Vesey, who headed a bloody insurrection of the niggers in South Carolina." CIPHER prides himself on his own revolutionary background. He introduces himself as belonging to "the Cutes of Connecticut, formerly of Messachusetts, and hull soul'd right deown patriots. Helped tew plant the tree of liberty in Bosting, and start all the tea in tew the river" (12). Before Harry can draw on the legacy of American rebellion to justify slave insurrection (30), the close introduction of both Dred and CIPHER connect the two traditions. CIPHER does so more explicitly. JEKYL tells his nephew that Dred has been outlawed "for running away from his master, and for aiding and abetting other slaves to do the same; and now, it's pretty well known, endeavoring to stir up other slaves to revolt." CIPHER: "Re-volt! That's tew syllables of *our* revolution. Want tew know if the men that stirred up our revolution was educated or ignorant? Seems tew me, Uncle Judas, if I'm studying law in order tew meet eout justice, 'tis but right I should cipher this eout" (12; emphasis in the original). CIPHER then questions JEKYL:

Neow, I want tew know what you call educated niggers?

MR. JEKYL. Those that are taught to read and write; that always makes them dangerous.

CIPHER. Heow so?

MR. JEKYL. Why, don't you see what dangerous weapons you put into their hands. They spread their knowledge; bright smart niggers will pick it up; for, the very fellows who are most dangerous are the very ones who'll be sure to learn.

CIPHER. Jist so; and what harm if they do? (12-13)

An exasperated Jekyl tries to close off the discussion: "What harm? You are yet a stranger to this part of the country, or you wouldn't ask such a question" (13). Cipher, heretofore unaware of such sectional distinctions, is outraged:

This part of the country! Isn't all this country the United States? Isn't the same Heaven over this part of the country as over any other part of the country? Don't the stars and stripes float over this part of the country and over all 'The land of the free and the home of the brave?' Want tew know.

HARRY. (*Aside.*) The question, the question; 'my heart asks it.' (13)

Cipher, unbeknownst to himself, has become a spokesman for emancipation.

Uncle John reads Cipher's asectionalism as working class ideology. He advises Jekyl that "the first portion of your nephew's studies should be to obtain a thorough knowledge of our Southern institutions, and then he would understand his subject better, and talk in a very different strain. He is a little too democratic for us." "Democrat!" Cipher responds, "Guess I be. I'm one of the people, one of the working class" (13).<sup>29</sup> It turns out that John is against education for

---

<sup>29</sup> Cipher's professions of working class identity are as much results of interpolation—Uncle John had previously, in an aside, called Cipher a "low fellow," and other characters like Dakin and Tom Tit call him "trash"—as they are of self-originating affirmation. He identifies himself

slaves and laborers: “What do working-men want with education? Education ruins ‘em, sir, ruins ‘em. ... It raises them above their station” (13). Uncle John repeats his command to Jekyl “to school this person that he may not introduce any of his Northern fanatical notions, subversive of order, peace and Southern liberty” (13). (Now we realize the import of the other part of Dred’s warning, “Listen not to him who would teach thee.”) It appears that an educated working class is as threatening to southern society as educated slaves. Jekyl suspects Harry of the same kind of subversive behavior with which John charges Cipher: Dred “is in communication with *other educated* niggers on plantations not a hundred miles from here. (*Looks at Harry.*)” (12; emphasis in the original).

Jekyl ends the conversation by telling Cipher that, if he intends to earn any money in the South, he’ll need to “learn the difference between Southern and Northern liberty, and black and white. Till then, keep your mouth shut” (13). Cipher intends to do no such thing. He turns to Harry, who “helped me out of the swamp,” and who, he hopes, “can help me to cipher this eout—What’s right North’s wrong South, eh?” Harry responds that he “may have an opinion, but it would not become a slave to express it” (14). Cipher is surprised that this “next to white” man who “knows more than any free man” (John’s words) could be a slave. He asks Harry if he can read and write, to which Harry replies in the affirmative.

CIPHER. And what does your reading teach you? Speak eout. I’m a man, so are you. So, man tew man, and eout with it.

HARRY. Sir, you are a stranger to me, but the free expression of your own sentiments but now, emboldens me to utter mine. I will speak the truth, and only

---

against some, that is, as well as with others. In this way Cipher’s class identify is formulated in much the same way as his racial identity.

the truth; and if that is wrong, and brings punishment on me, why 'tis the will of Heaven, and I submit. Then, sir, I will trouble you with—

*(Distant shouts outside.)*

Hark! that shout announces the arrival of Miss Nina, my dear young mistress.

Another time, sir; I must now hasten to meet her. (14)

Just as Dred inspired Cipher to interrogate Southern society, Cipher enables Harry to speak against it. This overture to black empowerment is interrupted by the arrival of Nina, and with her, the courtship plot.

Cipher's second experience with racial passing exploits even more the potentially terrifying hilarity (or hilarious terror) of being (mistaken for) a slave. Ben Dakin and Bige Skinflint are on the trail of Jem, one of Tom's runaway slaves. It's a rainy night, and Cipher, without an umbrella, comes onstage in "*a very long skirted old homespun cover coat*" which Jem had dropped in his escape (24). Cipher, unknowingly taking up the coat of a slave, takes on the issue of slavery:

I begin to cipher out prutty smart that I darn't make my stay very long in this Southern country. There's nothing about it, don't hitch with my ideas. No doubt property's property, and all on us humans has, more or less, a kinder hankering arter acquiring on it. But darn it, it somehow seems to me niggers shouldn't be any body's property, any how; if they be, they're a dreadful skeany property. (24)

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "skean" as "a form of knife or dagger," and in this situation slavery cuts both ways. On his way to deliver the document that will reenslave Tiff, Cipher comments that he would "sooner belong to the old boy [i.e., the Devil] than to him" (24). There is instantly the sound of "*distant shouts, horn, and baying of dogs*" and Cipher realizes



that “they be hunting me down” (25). Out of nowhere, Dred appears to meet Dakin “*with levelled rifle,*” and cries: “Back, human hell hounds; back, back. (BEN *backs out*. DRED, *with wild laugh.*) For the swamp! for the swamp.” Dred temporarily saves Cipher, and calls him to the sanctuary of slaves, as well, now, of a white man who, temporarily, occupied the position of one. (Dred may even mistake Cipher for Jem. If that’s so, it may not be the first time he thought Cipher was black.)

Later, when Tom tells the Canema residents that he owns Tiff, and that if he tries to run away to the swamp he will set Dakin and his dogs “on his heels, as they now are on Jem’s,” Tom is interrupted by “*noise outside, of follow! follow! and barking of dogs*. CIPHER *rushes over balcony, through windows, with only the upper part of the old overcoat on—all the skirts, up to the armpits, entirely torn off*” (30). Cipher is, once again, helped by a black character. Harry orders Dakin to retreat, threatening to shoot his dogs if he doesn’t. Cipher tells him to “shoot ‘em, darn ‘em; and if you can make a miss, and hit the fellow that owns ‘em, you’ll shoot a bigger hound than either of the dogs”—Cipher, in other words, is authorizing black violence. In response to Clayton and Uncle Tom’s obtusely asking “What’s the matter?” Cipher answers: “The matter is, I’ve been taken for property, and hunted down with dogs.” His choice of verb is apt. “Taken” connotes “*mistaken*” while drawing attention to the possession of human property. The effect of these scenes of mistaken identity is to show the mutability of the concept of race, of the false distinctions between the white and black underclasses. Any white man can be mistaken for, can be taken as, a black man. The uneasy comedy of these scenes suggests the tense recognition of this fact. It is meant to disarm what must have been for Barnum’s audience a frightening proposition.

Race, then, like class, is not an essential attribute. (Though the play's is a sectionally-inflected notion of class.) Hoping to buy the already free Tiff from Dakin, Cipher comes "*disguised in overcoat and slouched hat, and heavy whip—belt under overcoat, with two very long pistols in it*" (36). His disguise is first tested by Tom Tit, who "*eyes him from head to foot with supreme disgust*" (26) and calls him "common" and "white trash!" (37). So far, so good; Cipher looks like he could be one of Dakin's associates. The real test comes when Cipher meets the kind of character he's attempting to counterfeit. Cipher tells Dakin he needs a cook. Dakin recommends Tiff. Cipher offers to "buy that nigger, and give you my note for him." Cipher has violated protocol, it seems, and is forced to identify himself:

BEN. Your *note*! And who are you, any how? Where from—North or South?

CIPHER. Well, North, I guess.

BEN. I thought so. Its [*sic*] only such trash talks about giving notes.

CIPHER. Who do you call trash?

BEN. You, and every cussed Yankee like you. (40; emphasis in the original)

Dakin's similar, if not lower, class status is misleading here. In the play's organization of class, sectional loyalty trumps occupation or relative wealth. Dakin's definition of "trash" differs from Tom Tit's in that it includes a sectional element. Tom Tit, who, according to himself, "ain't a common nigger," (6) means any non-refined person, black or white; Dakin means Northerners.<sup>30</sup>

If Cipher and Tom personify North and South, Northern and Southern arguments about slavery are condensed into objects. Dakin "*draws a long bowie knife*" on Cipher, who "*coolly*

---

<sup>30</sup> Cipher's characterization of Southerners likewise conflates class with sectional identity, at least as far as those who are not liberal slaveholders, like Clayton, are concerned. Cipher calls Dakin Tom's "friend," and when Tom resents this, Cipher replies, "Birds of a feather, you know" (30).

*rises—goes up to the knife—brings his eye down to the handle, and then lets it travel up to the point slowly.”*

BEN. That’s what I call a particeler Southern argument agin Northern abolition.

CIPHER. Shouldn’t wonder. How long will such an argument reach?

BEN. About arm’s length—it’s mighty cutting. (*Stretches out his arm.*)

CIPHER. Jest so. (*Deliberately draws a very long pistol from his inside belt, and levels it at BEN.*) And this is a popping rejoinder. ‘Tis but fair tew meet men with their own arguments. (40)

Cipher is willing to match violence with violence, unlike the white protagonists of Stowe’s novel, who are opposed to it.<sup>31</sup> In place of a principled, but pacifist, notion of white masculinity that values self-control, Cipher “sets a masculine tone by drinking, fighting, and boasting about his manhood” (Adams 146). Cipher’s hyper-masculinity wins the drunken Dakin over. Over a drink, Dakin “*admiringly*” tells him, “You’re a man, any how—so am I” (40). These competitions in the play always concern recognition. That both of the combatants are well matched proves each (and the other) character’s manhood.

These moments of recognition are significant when viewed in light of Cipher’s contrast between law and justice. Originally, he tells the audience, “I come to study law under Uncle Judas; but I’ve gin up, and took tew t’other side, justice” (36). Cipher later divides these two aims between Tom and himself: “He’s a man of action. ... I am a man of action; and as he’s only *law* to back him, and I have justice on my side, we’ll see who’ll come out at the right end of the

---

<sup>31</sup> Much, if not most, of their reticence is a product of their religious beliefs. Cipher is not at all religious, as his few confrontations with the play’s only clergyman, Obadiah Orthodox (or “Shovel Hat,” as Cipher calls him), show.

horn” (37; emphasis in the original).<sup>32</sup> These equations of manhood can cross race. So when Dakin says, “He’s a hard un, is Tom Gordon, and so’s Dred,” he’s stating that both are equal parties in the contest (24). In Southern law, a slave’s personhood is not recognized. (Tom is correct when he reminds Nina and Uncle John that “a slave not being a person in the eye of the law, cannot have a contract made with him!” [43].) In the realm of justice, a slave’s agency is operative. That’s why Dred and the other runaways in the swamp can swear vengeance against Tom, or Tiff can give his word to protect the Peyton children, and be bound to it. Similarly, Harry can challenge Tom: “Carry us to the wilderness—place us man to man! No eye to see—no hand to help, and let us grapple! Then the poor slave’s natural strength ‘gainst the proud white man’s power” (43-44). In the outlawed space of the swamp, “nature’s just laws,” or justice, can “prevail!” (44). To the extent that the swamp is extralegal, outside of the sway of the already unjust laws of Southern society that can be further abused, it is a place where justice can be done.

The recognition, on both sides, of the shared concerns of Northern laborer and Southern slave leads to cooperative action. Hence the numerous scenes in which Dred or Cipher appear with a gun to help another character’s escape. In one of the more confrontational scenes, white and black characters work collectively. In fact, agency is passed from the former to the latter. After Cipher’s close escape from Dakin’s dogs, Tom accuses him of helping Jem escape and with withholding the papers Jekyll sent to him. Cipher counters with: “I have heard from a good many that you are one of the blood-thirsty slave owners of the South, that disgrace your name and country; and my opinion is, if you say I helped off your nigger to the swamp, that you lie!”

---

<sup>32</sup> Later, Jekyll tells Tom that Cipher stole the fake wills that Tom meant to use to dispossess Nina of her property and reenslave Tiff. When Tom learns that his posse is waiting for him, he yells, “Then damn the papers! my will’s law enough—we’ll do without ‘em” (41). Lynch law, and not established law, is what actually backs Tom.

TOM. What, you scoundrel! (*Going to strike him with the butt end of his riding-whip. CIPHER pulls off coat.*)

NINA. Tom! Tom! (*Interferes. Thunder slow through this.*)

CIPHER. Let him come on. Southern—slavery against northern liberty. I'll tan his hide.

(Again, each character embodies a section of the country.) Tom “*hurls away NINA. She would fall, but is caught by HARRY*” (30). If this is, as Adams comments, “a play in which women function primarily as objects of struggle between men,” it is also a play in which conflict is communicated through and over a woman’s body (146). Harry, unable to stand aside any longer, trades a series of insults and threats with Tom. Nina pleads with him to relent, but he cannot:

My blood is up, and I must speak. The liberty of speech is one of the boasted pillars of your glorious Constitution. Strike me down for using it, as your Senators have done in Washington! Strike me down—trample on me! heap blow on blow! Yet shall my voice be heard ringing in your ears, liberty, liberty! I am a man; the same Heaven is over us—the same power that made us both, now looks down on us.<sup>33</sup> (31)

Harry speaks, and stands up, for himself. Nina had previously, and without knowing it, interrupted his speech; now, she—or, rather, Harry’s righteous outrage at Tom’s violence against her—incites it. At the end of this speech, Tom “*rushes on HARRY to strike him. HARRY wrests whip from him, and hurls him down—he raises an arm, draws pistol, is about to fire.*” But before Harry can commit an irrevocable act of violence, Dred breaks in to redirect the scene’s fury, just as he had previously arose when Harry was at his most desperate: “*Thunder bolt strikes behind*

---

<sup>33</sup> Part of the ambiguous power of this speech stems from the still tacit fact that Harry, Tom, and Nina are siblings.

*window, with loud crash. Red fire, and DRED appears holding a bleeding negro, his throat all bloody in his arms. Dred. (Points to TOM.) The blood of thy slave cries vengeance! And shall have it, I swear!” (30).*

Dred, finally, withdraws its support from labor abolitionism. These moments of black and white solidarity, elsewhere deflected and displaced, are expunged from the culture whose impotency at dealing with an increasingly violent mob called them into being and whose existence they defended. The culture contains these elements through the expulsion of some, and the promotion of others. Dred and Tom, who were the most threatening characters, are so equally matched that they cancel each other out. Harry takes his rightful place in the family. And Cipher, that other educated outlaw, is rewarded with a new class position.

Harry and Lissette escape, with the help of Cipher and Dred, to the swamp. Tom summons his underlings and makes chase. The stage for the showdown is set:

*Swamp by moonlight. DRED on the path, leading in HARRY and LISSETTE;  
OLD TIFF and the children, looking toward them as they reach the stage; TOM is  
seen on the path. TOM fires at DRED; DRED staggers—recovers himself—fires  
his gun; TOM, with a wild cry, elevates his arm, and falls back into the swamp.  
(44)*

Here, as with the earlier fight between Cipher, Harry, and Tom, black violence is justified to the extent that it is retributive. With a bullet each kills the other. But whereas Tom disappears into the swamp, not leaving a trace,—he “falls *back*,” or backward,—here it also seems as if he’s returning there, as if the swamp were the source of all violence, regardless of race. Dred, unlike Tom, gets a last word:

(*Staggers—falls, centre.*) Harry, I meant to use you in deeds of blood, to set the black man free; but ‘tis not so decreed—other means must work out Heaven’s will. Blood has been shed enough—shed no more—your greatest enemy is removed. Be patient, if made to suffer; Heaven will, in its own good time, set all free. (44)

Dred, who at one point voiced his dependence on Harry, now claims he only meant to use him. Heaven, which earlier seemed to support agitation, is summoned as a justification for inaction. (The passive construction of “‘tis so decreed” stresses this.) And though the nature of the “other means” to achieve freedom is left unstated, Clayton will soon step in to repropose his plan to educate his slaves. “Blood has been shed” equally drains the outrage out of the situation, as it covers up the fact that the blood-shedding has been pretty one-sided,<sup>34</sup> while the imperative “shed no more” puts future responsibility onto the former victims. In classically melodramatic fashion, villainy is so personalized that the destruction of “your greatest enemy”—though Dred is speaking to Harry, the ambiguity of the pronoun lets us imagine Dred is apostrophizing a larger audience (including Barnum’s) about the one he once called “the scourge of our race” (32)—so seemingly removes what is in Stowe a diffused, societal menace. But, again, the passive grammatical construction of the sentence—why does Dred fail to take credit for something he’s just done?—draws our attention to the fact that the other enemy to stability and what may have been the most worrisome aspect of the play to an audience unfamiliar with seeing such emphatic displays of black rage—Dred himself—is about to expire. Dred’s final words echo Milly’s injunction “to *ben* before de wind”—her resignation that “dere’s no use talkin’ about rights ... we must all do what we ken” (33; emphasis in the original). His assertion of an

---

<sup>34</sup> In the play, Dred runs away from his master. In the novel, he kills him. The only act of black-on-white violence in Conway’s *Dred* is Harry’s “hurl[ing]” Tom to the ground.

unspecific time of justice also prepares us for the reintroduction of the play's gradualist agenda. Dred, ironically, renounces the vital significance of black agency to the practicability of such a policy.

Cipher had commented that his aim in ciphering out Southern society was not personal gain, or, rather, that that was not his primary objective. He had confessed to Nina and Clayton that "I may go back home with my pockets empty; but if my heart is full of the knowledge that I have defended the innocent, and succored the oppressed, I shall go home happy (37). After he's foiled Tom's plans, he reiterates this sentiment: "Though I have made nothing by law, I have a prouder satisfaction than slapping a full pocket. I can slap a full heart, and say I have, at least, done justice" (46). Nina stops him right as he is about to "put for hum":

Stay! Clayton: you, as my husband; and, Harry, you, as my manager; I ask, is it not your intention, as well as mine, to administer to all on the plantation justice?  
(HARRY and CLAYTON bow.)

NINA. Then, if Mr. Cipher Cute will undertake that administration, as my legal adviser, he shall not find us unjust in our requital.

CIPHER. 'Nuff said. I'm located. (46)

Judie Newman is only half correct when she remarks that, in Dred, "the white northern man wins a victory for his own class and ethnic group" (126). As Cipher's choice of words indicates, his locatedness refers both to his new occupation and to his new sectional position. He is now firmly located within the Southern economic sphere, where he will work to keep up the plantation economy, even if he tries to do so justly. Besides losing his original sectional association, Cipher



achieves upward mobility. As Adams writes, “Conway invited Lecture Room patrons to adopt Cute’s ... views by rewarding him with a trip up the class ladder” (145).<sup>35</sup>

The empowerment and renunciation that mark the play’s treatment of Dred and Cipher (and, to a lesser extent, Harry) also operate in the courtship plot that the two make possible. Cipher had earlier reminded Nina and Clayton of the urgency of their marriage. He excuses his intrusion by reminding them that there is “yet not time for ceremony”—he means in his speech, but it will apply to the impossibility of their having a proper wedding—and that “though you are not man and wife, yet, still, ... you soon must be.” Nina, in short, “can’t no longer be without a protector, now your brother Tom’s come out in his true colors” (37). Nina concurs with Cipher’s assessment: “Clayton, all reserve must give way under present circumstances. I am indeed in need of a protector. I fear my brother; I know him to be violent and revengeful. Should he get this estate but for a day, deeds of blood, deeds shocking to think of, would be done.” Her property—she worries what will happen to Harry and Lissette—and not herself, if we can make that distinction,<sup>36</sup> is what really needs protection. Her unorthodox proposal is successful:

NINA. Give me your protection—your advice—your aid, to prevent so dreadful a catastrophe.

CLAYTON. My services, my life are at your disposal.

NINA. I accept, and will repay them.

---

<sup>35</sup> In assimilating Cipher into middle class society, the play does not erase all traces of what he was before. If nothing else, Adams is correct in saying that Cipher would not have been qualified to move up in the world if he did not have “the education most southerners lack” (145). It can recognize and retain certain elements of their character. Even with his education, for example, he maintains the dialect that distinguishes him from Clayton. In much the same way, Harry’s self-control enables him to enter the middle class, as does his whiteness more generally, which is visualized emphatically: Harry appears “*dressed in a complete suit of white*” (11).

<sup>36</sup> Cipher equates the two when he tells Clayton, “You ... have got the right Gordon will; and, what’s better, you’ve got the right Gordon gal” (46).

CLAYTON. With yourself!

NINA. I will! (*Giving hand.*)

CLAYTON. (*Kissing her hand.*) Then I have a husband's right! (38)

The proposal moves from her order ("Give me..."), to his offer ("at *your* disposal"), to her acceptance and promise ("accept/will repay"), to his question ("with yourself!"), to her assurance ("I will!") and offer ("*Giving*"), and ends with his appropriation of her (and her property) and claim for himself ("*Kissing*"/"I have"). The confused play of agency between the two—who's proposing to whom?—transforms an unceremonious proposal by Nina—the logical conclusion of "as my lord won't court the girls, the girls all court my lord" (28)—into a traditional assertion of a "husband's right!" of guardianship. Normative gender roles, already threatened by Tom's machinations, are further violated in order to preserve, while reestablishing, the patriarchal order.

The play, then, seeks to preserve the society that Stowe saw as in imminent danger of succumbing to mobocracy and lynch law. The means to this end include the temporary empowerment of educated slaves and workingmen. The final success of the plan depends both on the re-placement of these groups (Dred in a grave, Cipher in the slave economy, Harry in the family), and the reassertion of the benign, pacifying influence of what were, in the hands of those groups, potentially "dangerous weapons" (13)—namely, reading and writing. The continuation of liberal slaveholding society requires it. Just as Tom, who blocked Clayton's first proposal,<sup>37</sup> had to be killed by an educated slave, another one will be instrumental in the culmination of the courtship plot.

---

<sup>37</sup> CLAYTON. [*To Nina.*] I have thought of all you said deeply, hopefully, and I would—(*takes her hand.*)

Tom. (*Outside.*) Hallo, there! Take my horse, you white nigger, take my horse.  
(CLAYTON *retires up to back with* UNCLE JOHN.) (29)

Uncle John arrives in the last scene “*dressed as for a wedding, a Bouquet and white favor in his coat,*” and announces, not exactly in good faith, that he “came to refuse my consent, and command Nina not to have Clayton, without he promises to give up his absurd plan of educating his niggers” (45). Nina refutes Uncle John’s claim that Clayton’s plan is “all humbug” (her Uncle’s words), by presenting “an apt illustration to the contrary,” that is, Harry: “Where would have been my plantation! Ruined, and myself a beggar, had it not been for Harry; and education fitted Harry for my manager” (45).<sup>38</sup>

In another revision of Stowe, Conway includes in the final scene a public recognition of Harry and Nina’s kinship. Harry is legitimated at the same moment Nina and Clayton’s marriage is. He is responsible with convincing Uncle John to give his consent.

HARRY. As Miss Nina’s happiness—

NINA. Say your sister, Harry.

(HARRY *takes her hand.*)

HARRY. As my sister’s happiness has always been my first care and fondest desire, I am anxious that no cloud should mar it at this moment, and as Mr. John Gordon—

UNCLE JOHN. Say uncle, Harry.

HARRY. As Uncle John Gordon’s prejudices against education remain in a measure unanswered, I have prepared a little scene by which they may possibly be overcome—when he will consent to, and bless my sister’s union. (48)

---

<sup>38</sup> Education, Harry tells them, “properly directed,” will also teach slaves “that which is still of more infinite importance ... how to manage ourselves” (45). Equated here is property and those who would not be chattels personal.

Here the fate of political reform and the couple's marriage are intimately linked. Then, "TOM TIT waves his baton—all stand aside—when he waves it up at the curtain at back—which draws entirely up, disclosing,"

GRAND TABLEAUX,

*Transparency, Lettered*

"EDUCATION"

"LEADS TO PRESENT AMERLIORATION"

"AND ULTIMATE"

"LIBERTY."

*School Children } Figure of GODDESS OF LIBERTY on Pedestal. { School Children.*

Uncle John, finally convinced, "*joins CLAYTON'S and NINA'S hands.*" After this impressive combination of text and allegory that ensures the continuation—indeed, the reproduction—of the Southern aristocracy, Harry voices his support of the tableau's message: "When education is fully carried into effect, we shall need no more Dreds to protect fugitive slaves—nor read more tales of the *great Dismal Swamp*" (48; emphasis in the original).

The drama's moral, spoken by Harry, echoes Clayton's words to Frank Russell in Act 2: "Through the blessings of education, [the slaves] will all be led to ultimate freedom" (17). This expression of black agency is in fact preceded, and permitted, by an earlier expression of white agency, a move mirrored by Dred rousing Cipher to cipher out the slave South. The final stage direction indicates that there is "MUSIC. / *Chorus of children at back, as in 2d Act, as / CURTAIN DESCENDS.*" The children's earlier song, sung when Clayton first presented them to Russell, reads: "The blessings of edu-ca-tion, / The blessings of edu-ca-tion, / Make us happy on

mas'rs plan-ta-tion,<sup>39</sup> / And carry freedom throughout a nation, / A nation, a na-tion, / And carry freedom throughout a nation" (17). The unchanged lyric ("Make us happy on mas'rs plan-ta-tion") unintentionally reminds us of the play's political quietism. Barnum's audience leaves the Lecture Room with an image of children perpetually happy on the plantation.

Of the two competing discourses on education—Clayton's and Uncle John's—only one can prevail. Here, education is a gift of white, liberal slaveowners to their property. Dred's system of education takes place off the map. Slaves learn by themselves or in groups, clandestinely. "Make us happy on mas'rs plan-ta-tion" has a special resonance in view of the alternative—self-taught, educated outlaws. Its very locatedness—on the plantation, under the benevolent gaze of Anne and Edward Clayton—its rootedness, that is, within the preexisting social sphere, guarantees its safety. Education is brought back into the center now that the outside threats of lynch law and rebellion have been cast out. The final scenes of *Dred*, finally, stage a spectacle that illustrates the success of labor abolitionism, while denying its role in the defense and legitimization of Southern society.

The first part of this dissertation focused on the uses to which popular modes of representation were put: namely, melodrama and blackface minstrelsy. Not all within the movement felt that these modes were effective in promoting their cause. The chapter ends by detailing one abolitionist's efforts to expose the violence that lied beneath even the most seemingly benign blackface performance. I argue that Martin Delany aimed to defetishize the blackface minstrel act by exposing the coercion that went into the supposedly voluntary

---

<sup>39</sup> Education is essential to the ultimate emancipation of slaves, though not, it seems, to their current contentment. The plays opens with "*Plantation negroes, male and female, in their best attire*" singing: "On Canema plantation / We all is happy and gay" (3).

performance of black contentment. Delany relocated the scene of blackface minstrel performance away from Northern cultural centers and back to the country's margins, where the performance mode supposedly originated. In Blake, Delany enacts a "true Mississippi scene" that structured torture as a coerced performance in order to show that the real danger of spectacle was not in the spectator distancing himself from the scene, but in the abused becoming a spectator to his own subjection. In fact, a sympathetic white spectator's intercession in the performance is unable to save the performer. If, according to Saidiya Hartman, the black subject's forced display of pleasure masked the violence that went into the production of docile black bodies, Delany stages a performance that reveals the punishment that goes into every act of pleasure related to blackface minstrelsy. If the history of blackface minstrelsy involves a series of spatial and temporal moves to get from the scene of the plantation in the South to the scene of the play in the North, Delany condenses these times and spaces, showing that they coexist. Part One of the dissertation ends, then, on a skeptical note, with the suggestion that blackface minstrelsy may have been politically irredeemable.

Both the first and the last twenty years of the history and criticism of blackface minstrelsy have one thing in common: they focus almost exclusively on the white people who were its principal producers and consumers. When recent scholars need a representative early African American critic, they usually call on Frederick Douglass, who felt, not surprisingly, deep ambivalence toward the performance mode. Though critics have paid careful attention to the role people of color played in early accounts of the rise of blackface minstrelsy *as whites wrote it*, there has yet to be sustained attention devoted to early African American accounts of the mode's origins.

This chapter begins this critical project by considering the work of Martin Delany, cofounder with Frederick Douglass of The North Star, a Major in the U.S. Colored Troops during the Civil War, and, as he is considered by some, the “grandfather” of black nationalism. In his fiction, Delany responded to contemporary myths about the development of blackface minstrelsy. If white histories of minstrelsy removed the scene of blackface performance from the southern plantation to the northern stage, they also suppressed the violence that went into the mode’s production. In order to defetishize the blackface minstrel act, Delany historicizes blackface performance by staging it *as* a performance within the context of the slave system. Delany, in other words, restores blackface performance to its violent origins in the American South.

Lott finds that two kinds of white-authored narratives emerged about the origins of blackface minstrelsy. The first betrayed a fear of cultural, and by extension, racial, amalgamation. Transmission of the mode happened through “absorption”: the white man heard, or heard about, a black man that was “displaced and disembodied” (57-58). The second narrative “deni[ed] or forg[ot]” the mode’s relationship to “the material relations of chattel slavery” (Lott 59; Hartman 21): the white man came to possess it through purchase or theft (Lott 57).

Hartman observes the affinities between the slave auction platform and the minstrel show stage. At both sites, one person’s terror was made to be another’s pleasure (33). At both locations were produced representations of contented slaves. On the block and in the coffle, white masters compelled black slaves to present themselves as happy and healthy for white spectators. Compulsion—in the form of threat and punishment—occurred off-stage, however. As Hartman notes, “the efficacy of violence was indicated precisely by its invisibility or transparency and in the copious display of slave agency” (25).

Apologists for slavery and minstrelsy, then, both sought to conceal the violence that went into each mode's production. In the sixteenth chapter of Blake, Delany details the visit of a northern pro-slavery judge to a southern plantation. The judge's host tells him, "as you wish to become a Southerner, you must first 'see the sights,' as children say, and learn to get used to them." The host promises to show "some rare sport; the most amusing thing I ever witnessed." He chooses to withhold specifics, though he suggests that anyone "fond of Negro jokes" will enjoy it. The man the host likens to a "showman" affirms that he has "a queer animal" to show them (66). The judge and the rest of the party are escorted to the showman's "pleasure grounds," where the showman orders one of his slaves to fetch Rube, "a small black boy about eleven years of age, thin visage, projecting upper teeth, rather ghastly consumptive look, and emaciated condition" that "trembled with fear as he approached the group" (66-67).<sup>40</sup> What follows is a scene that Tavia Nyong'o finds reminiscent of a scene in Uncle Tom's Cabin in which the slave boy Harry dances, at his master's command, in front of the slave trader that will attempt to purchase him (159). What's being sold here is not a single slave, as in Uncle Tom's Cabin, but the system of slavery itself. The spectacle, we will learn, is meant to introduce the judge to the true nature of the slave system.

Stowe's reader may miss the way Harry is being forced to participate in his own subjection. Delany makes an effort to ensure his readers don't do the same.

"Now gentlemen," said [the showman], "I'm going to show you a sight!" having in his hand a long whip, the cracking of which he commenced, as a ringmaster in the circus.

---

<sup>40</sup> The judge is the real "rube" here.



The child gave him a look never to be forgotten; a look beseeching mercy and compassion. But the decree was made, and though humanity quailed in dejected supplication before him, the command was imperative, with no living hand to stay the pending consequences. He must submit to his fate, and pass through the ordeal of training.

"Wat maus gwine do wid me now? I know wat maus gwine do," said this miserable child, "he gwine make me see sights!" when going down on his hands and feet, he commenced trotting around like an animal. (67)

Two senses of showing/seeing sight come together here. We're familiar with the first. A local guides visitors through notable sites. The second pertains to the kind of experience the local is offering—one related to punishment. In the first chapter of his second autobiography, Frederick Douglass recalled that his master used this meaning when he threatened that the young Fred "will be made to '*see sights*' by-and-by." We're to understand this, I believe, as "I'll beat you so hard you'll see things." Given the spectacular nature of slave punishment, it makes sense that Delany would land on this phrase. To "show a sight" becomes a euphemism for to "mete out pain (in front of an audience)." Rube draws on this meaning and that one in Douglass. Rube could have said that his master was going to make a sight out of him, but that would not have fully expressed the way the Rube is so alienated from himself that it is *as if* he were a witness to his own subjection.

The program the showman has planned, as well as the scene's power dynamics, is what leads me to call this a scene of restored blackface performance: "Now, gentleman, look!" said [the showman]. "He'll whistle, sing songs, hymns, pray, swear like a trooper, laugh, and cry, all

under the same state of feelings" (67). We can only imagine what that state of feelings is as the showman proceeds through each part of the performance:

With a peculiar swing of the whip, bringing the lash down upon a certain spot on the exposed skin, the whole person being prepared for the purpose, the boy commenced to whistle almost like a thrush; another cut changed it to a song, another to a hymn, then a pitiful prayer, when he gave utterance to oaths which would make a Christian shudder, after which he laughed outright. (67)

Rube is made to cycle through the sentimental and comic strains of antebellum minstrelsy. Each shift is precipitated by the same cause—the master’s whip. Then, Delany continues, “from the fullness of his soul [Rube] cried: ‘O maussa, I’s sick! Please stop little!’ casting up gobs of hemorrhage” (67). At this moment, when we may worry that this final outburst is part of the master’s plan, Delany inserts one of the text’s few footnotes. It reads: “This is a true Mississippi scene” (ibid). Though it may be staged—a scene—Delany commits a rare act of editorial intrusion to assure us that it is still true. The text receives affirmation from the note, just as the interior of the slave’s body affirms the truth of the slave’s state of feelings. Rube has no agency, he is not content. He’s dying. The cruelty that animates the scene is exposed. The master’s final lack of control of the slave’s body is announced by the body itself.

It’s a harrowing scene. Most of the audience’s reactions are disturbingly banal. One man “stood looking on with unmoved muscles.” Another “stood whittling a stick.” But “when [the judge] saw, at every cut the flesh turn open in gashes streaming down with gore, till at last in agony he appealed for mercy, he involuntarily found his hand with a grasp on the whip, arresting its further application” (67). The first pronoun is ambiguous—who appeals, the boy or the judge? Even if the second pronoun is unambiguous, its referent is only a partial, if apparently

efficacious, agent. The host's response makes it clear that, at least in his mind, the judge has been the center of attention all along: "'Not quite a Southerner yet Judge, if you can't stand that!'" said [the host] on seeing him wiping away the tears" (ibid). The "ordeal of training" has been the judge's all along.

Despite the judge's sympathetic response, Rube dies. Douglass had felt that blackface minstrelsy had the potential to be politically expedient. He believed that certain blackface performances could raise sympathy for the slave, and that that was better than nothing.<sup>41</sup> Delany is not so sure. His history, finally, is a critique. Given its origins and continuing, if invisible, connection to the violence of slavery, regardless of the sympathy it could gain for the enslaved, blackface minstrelsy was irredeemable.

---

<sup>41</sup> In the 1855 speech "The Anti-Slavery Movement," Douglass said: "It would seem almost absurd to say it, considering the use that has been made of them, that we have allies in the Ethiopian songs; those songs that constitute our national music, and without which we have no national music. They are heart songs, and the finest feelings of human nature are expressed in them. 'Lucy Neal,' 'Old Kentucky Home,' and 'Uncle Ned,' can make the heart sad as well as merry, and can call forth a tear as well as a smile. They awaken the sympathies for the slave, in which antislavery principles take root, grow, and flourish."

### Chapter Three

#### Sympathy and Douglass's The North Star

The antislavery platform was built on two texts: the Declaration of Independence and the New Testament. The Golden Rule—"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them"—alone was "Christianity," was, indeed, "*abolitionism*" (Matthew 7:12; Clark; "A Colored Canadian" 5 May 1854). Americans needed only to "be TRUE" to it and they would feel and do right. Black and white activists alike agreed on the importance of "the self-application mode of reasoning" (*The Colored American*; Gerrit Smith): "The world is able to bear the *doctrine* of Christ; but nothing would convulse it so soon or so profoundly as this day to insist upon the utmost *practical* fulfilment of that doctrine" (Beecher *Discourse* 19). It required a willingness to figuratively and, if necessary, literally change places with another. You must first, one of them said, "be content to wear the chains of slavery yourself, ere you are at liberty to commend them to others" (Gerrit Smith). Then, "and then only," said another, "can he, without doing violence to his moral perceptions, take advantage of the law, and subject his horse and his brother to the same arbitrary rule, and hold both by the title of 'chattels personal, to all intents and purposes, whatsoever'" (Whittier). The demand to "treat colored men as you would have them to treat you, were your circumstances changed with theirs" was made in a radical conditional tense (*The Colored American*). The question, posed by a contributor to the first African American newspaper, "If you were a slave, what would you wish me to do for you?," therefore, did not mark the start of a theoretical exercise, but a political practice (*Freedom's Journal*).

Matthew 7:12 was "a law so substantially general" that one might think it "impossible to misapply" (*The North Star* 20 Mar. 1851). But the author of the following did just that: "All that

is taught by this counsel of Christ is, that the master should treat his slaves just as he would have them to treat him if circumstances were reversed, and he, a negro slave to one of them. Of course he would have his master to treat him the very best that could be under all the circumstances” (Bell 317). He interpreted the text to state that masters were only “morally bound to treat their slaves the very best that all the circumstances would allow, by giving them good wholesome food sufficient for their real wants, with comfortable clothing, and never to put on them more than they can bear without injury, and not to injure them in any way whatsoever. When he has done this, he has fulfilled this law so far as the law of master and slaves is concerned” (Bell 318). Slave law, in other words, is the higher law. The author rejected emancipation because blacks were as incapable to be free as whites were to be enslaved: “The relations of men are not to be changed to fulfill this divine precept” (Bell 318). And why not? To the author, “master” and “slave” are racialized terms. When he changes places with the “negro slave,” he also changes races. The race of his new “master” remains unstated, as if it were too terrible, or impossible, to imagine an African American in a position of power. The system of ‘care’ the author deems essential to the “real wants” of black people—the same system that antislavery activists were fighting to abolish—shows just how helpless he thought they were. Those active in the Underground Railroad, who would “steal a man from his legal owner, ... run[] him into a climate that is not congenial to his nature, and leave[] him there to starve and die,” were, in the author’s opinion, men-stealers, tyrants, and murderers (Bell 319). Among these he counted Harriet Tubman, who committed “a diabolical act of wickedness” toward her parents by freeing them (Bell 323). The author calls Tubman “wretched [and] hard-hearted” as well as “deluded” (Bell 325, 327). He is so convinced of the lack of agency of black people that he insists that she was not responsible for what she did.

Though it may be difficult to accept, the author of the above *does* sympathize with the slave. He did so while opening himself up to a common criticism of sympathy: He is, in a certain way, too self-centered, not enough other-oriented. As a writer for The North Star observed, the Golden Rule makes “no provision ... for color or degree of intellectual capacity” (2 Nov. 1849). His unwillingness to let go of white supremacist thinking, to leave his character behind with his person, leads a writer for Frederick Douglass’ Paper to conclude that “this divine and all comprehensive rule being no longer of any authority with them, because uncompromisingly oppose[d] to their prejudices, their pride, and unholy purposes, I regard them as incorrigible, and beyond the reach of argument” (24 June 1853). Abolitionists, then, became more willing to use force. But that did not mean that they abandoned persuasive tactics altogether. The author of the above refused to put his person in the slave’s place. The author of the following suggested that that might be the only way to win sympathy and converts for the cause: “I am fully persuaded that the only way that such men could be convinced of the enormities of slavery would be to apply the iron to their own limbs, and the lash to their own backs, until they could ‘remember those in bonds *as bound with them*’” (Parsons 312).<sup>42</sup>

While I share previous critics’ disapproval of how sympathy often worked, we have for too long ignored the potential it might have had to work for antislavery, antiracist purposes. Just as political abolitionists used the nation’s founding documents according to the texts’ own “righteous language” and against the “unrighteous intentions” of others, they also used the Golden Rule in such a way that demonstrated that sympathy was a dynamic process that could bring about radical change (“Declaration”).

---

<sup>42</sup> He was not the only one. Responding to “a lady who observed that the time had not yet come for agitating the subject” of slavery, Angelina Grimké “answered: ‘I apprehend if thou wert a *slave*, toiling in the fields of Carolina, thou wouldst think the time had *fully* come’” (qtd. in Child 17).

“Slavery,” as William Wells Brown once said, “has never been represented; Slavery never can be represented” (“Lecture” 108). Even the slave could not speak of it, Frederick Douglass said, because he or she could not speak: “There comes no *voice* from the enslaved. We are left to gather his feelings by imagining what ours would be, were our souls in his stead” (*My Bondage* 423). There came no voice because they had no access to the technologies of speech and print that could make them audible at a distance. Former slaves like Brown and Douglass did not need to be reminded to remember those still in bonds. Brown could not think of slavery without being “carried back” to the days his mother and siblings were “carried off” (“Lecture” 127). The act of remembering alone was enough to transport him back to those who were themselves transported. Douglass could not consider his current situation without having “the grim horrors of slavery rise in all their ghastly terror before me” (“To My Old Master”). Former slaves could speak to the experience of slavery because of the fellowship they felt, as Brown said, with the “three millions of my brethren and sisters, with some of whom I am identified by the dearest ties of nature, and with most of whom I am identified by the scars which I carry upon my back” (“Lecture” 107-8). Shared bonds and shared bondage allowed and required Brown and Douglass to sympathize with and agitate for the enslaved. But what they held in common could hold off others from identifying with them. For a free person, the experience of being enslaved was unimaginable. The problem was that one had no other option but to imagine it. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith recognized that sympathetic identification had its limits. Without “immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation” (Smith *Theory* 13). Through sympathy, “we enter as it were into [the other’s] body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his

sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. ... We change places in fancy,” though not in fact (Smith *Theory* 13-14). Because “the real condition of the Slave” could not be represented, those attempting to gain sympathy for the slave were forced to approximate (Brown “Lecture” 108). These approximations often took the form of a narrative with which the sympathizer was familiar, like the Bible. Or the slave’s situation would be made to appear more like the sympathizer’s own, as when abolitionists filled their texts with white slaves and appeals to ‘universal’ forms of experience.

Given how sympathy worked in practice, it should come as no surprise that a critical consensus has formed over the last twenty years around the idea that sympathy has a problematic relationship to difference. Abolitionism’s model of sympathetic identification, according to Elizabeth Barnes, is a “peculiarly egocentric” one “contingent upon familiarity” (97). Following Glenn Hendler, Marianne Noble observes that sympathy creates a “presumption that one’s own subject position is the universal norm” (*Masochistic* 223 n. 11). Privileging the self’s necessarily limited experience poses a problem to the other. Requiring the other to modify his or her experience into a form the sympathizer will recognize puts the other in an even more precarious position than he or she previously occupied. Smith describes, in Julia Stern’s words, the “reflexive workings of human fellow feeling,” but without a reciprocal move from the self, “the sympathizer extends agency over the sufferer, while the latter controls only himself or herself” (Stern 204; Castiglia 124). In necessitating familiar models for the sympathizer, Dana Nelson explains, “sympathy assumes *sameness* in a way that can prevent an understanding of the very real, material *differences* that structure human experience in a society based upon unequal distribution of power” (142; her emphasis). In fact, the process reproduces that unequal distribution of power. As Christopher Castiglia realizes, “sympathy affectively naturalizes social



hierarchy” (124). African Americans are thus made dependent on white Americans. This kind of interaction reflected a “paternalistic ethics” that “required the strong to care for the weak,” which was considered, as Gregg Crane points out, “the ethical basis of slavery” (65).

Most critiques of abolitionist uses of sympathy have been articulated in examinations of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Exchanges like that between Eliza Harris, Stowe’s light-skinned heroine, and her sympathizers have lead critics to charge acts of sympathy with being motivated by selfish feelings. Eliza flees North with her son, Harry, when she learns that he has been sold to a slave trader. In her passage through Ohio, she comes upon the home of a Senator Bird and his wife, moments after they were discussing the Fugitive Slave Law. Eliza wins Mrs. Bird over when, after noticing that she is “dressed in deep mourning,” guesses correctly that she has lost a child, and appeals to her as a fellow mother (72).<sup>43</sup> The bereaved mother bursts into tears and pledges her aid. The senator, who had been previously unmoved by publicized accounts of slave experience, “had never thought that a fugitive might be a hapless mother, a defenceless child,—like that one which was now wearing his lost boy’s little well-known cap” (77). Seeing her in this familiar (and familial) light, the senator goes against his previous position on helping fugitives.

Stowe’s narrator repeats Eliza’s appeal to her readership: “By the sick hour of your child; by those dying eyes, which you can never forget; by those last cries, that wrung your heart when you could neither help nor save; by the desolation of that empty cradle, that silent nursery,—I beseech you, pity those mothers that are constantly made childless by the American slave-trade!” (79) The latter appeal especially approaches what Saidiya Hartman calls a “narcissistic identification that obliterates the other,” in which the other’s suffering is forgotten, or only

---

<sup>43</sup> When Mrs. Bird answers that she has lost a child, Eliza replies, “Then you will feel for me.”

appreciated to the extent that it resembles one's own (4). Like the Birds, Stowe knew too well the pain of losing a child. In a letter to Eliza Cabot Follen, Stowe wrote that "[i]t was at [her son's] dying bed and at his grave that [she] learned what a poor slave mother may feel when her child is torn away from her" (qtd. in Hedrick 444).<sup>44</sup> But separation through sickness and slavery were not the same. Slavery may have resembled sickness in how it spread or how it struck, but its causes did not. The metaphor gives the impression that we are powerless to stop slavery's progress, though the novel's free and enslaved people of color, Quakers, and other right-feeling whites prove otherwise. The most troubling part of this episode is the suggestion that the free might only be able to access feeling for the enslaved through their own feelings, that anything resembling true sympathy could only occur between identical subjects with the same experiences, that, in other words, the only pity is self-pity (Bentley 284).

Smith anticipated the charge that sympathy is motivated by self-love rather than fellow feeling. He recognized that "it may be pretended, indeed, that my emotion is founded in self-love, because it arises from bringing your case home to myself, from putting myself in your situation, and thence conceiving what I should feel in the like circumstances." Still, Smith maintains that "sympathy is very properly said to arise from an imaginary change of situations with the person principally concerned, yet this imaginary change is not supposed to happen to me in my own person and character, but in that of the person with whom I sympathize" (373). Smith argues that our own limited experience of other forms of existence leads us to defer to the other.

When I condole with you for the loss of your only son, in order to enter into your grief I do not consider what I, a person of such a character and profession, should

---

<sup>44</sup> In Stowe's defense, she never claims equivalence of feeling ("*may* feel") and her sorrow led her to act for others: "I felt that I could never be consoled for it unless this crushing of my own heart might enable me to work out some great good to others" (444).

suffer, if I had a son, and if that son was unfortunately to die: but I consider what I should suffer if I was really you, and I not only change circumstances with you, but I change persons and characters. My grief, therefore, is entirely upon your account, and not in the least upon my own. (373)

It remains a possibility that the case may hit the spectator too close to home, especially when the two experiences, regardless of their real differences, resemble one another in some particular. Eliza appeals to Mrs. Bird because she too knows the reality of losing a child. Eliza appeals to Senator Bird because she's a wife and a mother. In both cases, Eliza frames her suffering, or her suffering is framed, in terms her sympathizers can relate to. And it works—the Birds help Eliza and Harry on their way.<sup>45</sup> But in the process, something of Eliza's experience is lost. The Birds do not grieve entirely upon Eliza's account, but upon their own as well. Appeals based on a 'universal' quality like parenthood or bereavement elide other equally determinate aspects of one's identity. It is conceivable that a person who needed sympathy but whose experience did not, or could not be adequately made to, resemble her sympathizers would have to do without it.

Recent scholars elaborate early African American critiques of sympathy's problematic relation to difference. In Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, for example, Harriet Jacobs emphatically resists facile identifications that privilege the sympathizer's experience. After describing her reunion with her son after many years of forced separation, Jacobs asks her female readership, "O reader, can you imagine my joy? No, you cannot, unless you have been a slave mother" (222). Jacobs consistently denies her readers identification on the basis of partially shared experience. Ideally, sympathy would always involve the kind of "vacillat[ion] between moments of identification and distantiation" that Jacobs exercised, though more often than not

---

<sup>45</sup> Noble may be the only critic that sees this as an act of expediency on Eliza's part.

this was not the case (Weinstein 192 n.5).<sup>46</sup> However much Jacobs resists placing her white readers at the center of the sympathetic situation, she still has to, at least temporarily. African American writers especially understood the necessity of this gesture. So they insisted on the difference of their experience while putting whites in a situation in which they could feeling something like it.

Douglass imagined such a confrontation in his only piece of fiction, “The Heroic Slave,” a fictionalized account of the life of Madison Washington, who started a slave revolt on the Creole in 1841. In the first three parts of the story, Washington is overheard and helped to escape by a white Northerner predisposed to the abolitionist cause. The uprising on ship is not recounted. Instead, in the fourth and final part of the story, the ship’s first mate, who is stridently antiabolitionist, narrates the revolt. Washington impresses the mate with his actions. Gore had called Douglass an “impudent rascal.” Tom Grant reports Washington’s speech upon taking over the Creole. Afterward, Grant inserts this comment: “I felt little disposition to reply to this impudent speech. By heaven, it disarmed me. The fellow loomed up before me. I forgot his

---

<sup>46</sup> Cindy Weinstein argues that abolitionist authors were more aware of the problems of sympathy than critics have given them credit for. I disagree with her argument as it applies to Stowe because, unlike Jacobs, her moments of identification and distantiation are far removed from each other. That being said, Stowe should perhaps be given more credit than she has. There are moments within the novel that she maintains the distance between the experiences of slavery and freedom. When Eva overhears Dinah and Aunt Ophelia speak of the death of Prue, a long-suffering slave, “her large, mystic eyes dilated with horror, and every drop of blood [was] driven from her lips and cheeks.” Dinah notices her reaction, and worries out loud that Eva will faint: “‘I shan’t faint, Dinah,’ said the child, firmly; ‘and why shouldn’t I hear it? It ain’t so much for me to hear it, as for poor Prue to suffer it’” (200). Eva, unlike so many of her elders, is able to maintain perspective. And, earlier in the novel, after Eliza first learns that her son is to be sold, the narrator asks: “If it were *your* Harry, mother, or your Willie, that were going to be torn from you by a brutal trader, tomorrow morning,—if you had seen the man, and heard that the papers were signed and delivered, and you had only from twelve o’clock till morning to make good your escape,—how fast could *you* walk?” (46)

blackness in the dignity of his manner, and the eloquence of his speech” (161). Washington’s words, and threat of violence, are enough to control Grant and the other white sailors. Gabrielle Foreman writes that Douglass is “more rhetorically invested in conversion than coercion” (153). Washington does both. Not every white man will be as predisposed to conversion as Listwell, who “had long desired to sound the mysterious depths of the thoughts and feelings of a slave” (134). Noble argues that Grant is open to transformation (“Sympathetic” 12). I argue that he is unwilling to change until he has no choice.<sup>47</sup>

Noble writes that Douglass’s work “reveal[s] the need for a dialogic rather than corporeal notion of sympathy” (“Sympathetic” 67-68). She admits that “honor” and “respect” are, to Douglass, “the necessary foundation of true sympathy” (“Sympathetic” 63). But how does a slave win the white man’s respect?<sup>48</sup> Noble continues: “Honorable actions draw the attention of an onlooker inward to character traits more true to that individual than those indicated by the physical body” (“Sympathetic” 63). So, with Grant, Noble claims that “Washington’s speech and actions momentarily inspire the mate to forget about color; they make him conscious of the interior of a man whose blackness becomes merely superficial” (“Sympathetic” 60). She quotes the part of Grant’s testimony in which he admits that he forgot Washington’s “blackness,” but

---

<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, as Sale has noted, “by simultaneously considering Washington superior and inferior, Grant reveals the illogic of his perspective. This undermining of the mate’s perspective enables readers to reach their own conclusions and challenges them to agree with Douglass” (242-43 n. 25).

<sup>48</sup> This is especially a problem in a culture that believed, as Chief Justice Roger Taney would enunciate in the majority opinion of *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857), that blacks were “beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations, and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.”

leaves out the detail that Washington “loomed up before” him (*ibid.*). Washington’s “manner” (i.e., his physicality) *and* his “speech” impress Grant.<sup>49</sup>

Noble contrasts Douglass’s valorization of “listening and speaking” over showing “visual signs of physical suffering,” a strategy that she associates with Stowe (“Sympathetic” 54). Douglass seeks, Noble argues, to move away from “the magic of the real presence of distress”—that is, the palpable distress of the slave—as a precondition for whites to sympathize with and act for slaves (Stowe *qtd.* in Noble “Sympathetic” 59). In “The Heroic Slave,” unwilling sympathizers are moved to respect the slave partly through being themselves put into a position of distress. Noble argues that “the development in whites of an antislavery position occurs slowly in this story, and in response to speech and action, not suffering” (“Sympathetic” 59). She means the slave’s suffering. I hold that suffering does come into play—the white man’s own.<sup>50</sup>

Jeannine DeLombard, like Foreman, Noble, Robyn Wiegman, and Herman Beavers, argues that Douglass’s goal is to shake off “the drag of the body.”<sup>51</sup> Only DeLombard and Wiegman recognize the futility of this enterprise.<sup>52</sup> But the body—of the slave and of the abolitionist, as well—has a place in Douglass’s plan. In the antebellum United States, a privileged embodiment was only accessible to people of a certain social standing. Ralph Waldo

---

<sup>49</sup> In the next chapter, I consider at more length the link between voice and gesture in vocal performance.

<sup>50</sup> As the latter half of this chapter will show, Washington forces Grant into the same position that Douglass did to Auld in his letter.

<sup>51</sup> DeLombard is quoting Sidonie Smith (17).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Wiegman: “The shift from voice to corporeal visibility in the early pages of the narrative—and the movement back to dis-corporation provided by Tom Grant’s testimonial to Washington’s heroism and eloquent speech—demonstrates the paradoxes of representational presence that accompany the black slave into literary identity” (75) and DeLombard: “Rather than portraying Douglass as a transparent eyeball, through which to witness vicariously the violence of Southern slavery, or an unencumbered voice, from which to hear testimony about the ‘peculiar institution,’ Douglass’s white contemporaries persistently train their own gazes on his body, focusing on its ‘physical proportion and stature’ and its ‘erect form’; in this context, Douglass’s ‘glistening eye’ and even his ‘deep-toned voice’ become recorporealized” (271).

Emerson, who wrote in Nature on the faculty of vision, imagines transcendence for these people as a form of spectatorship released from bodily concerns. Emerson is able to divide the universe into “Soul” and “Nature”—the “Me” and “NOT ME”—and, in effect, divide his mind from his body (and everything else) because his body is protected by the state. Emerson famously imagines himself in the woods, where, “[s]tanding on the bare ground,—my head bathed in the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God” (39). But rather than view him as a “[u]nique, unitary, unencumbered ... self [that] escapes all forms of embodiment,” as Sidonie Smith has characterized the universal subject (6), we must recognize that embodiment is only an encumbrance when the self is not white, male, and propertied. To argue that Emerson is “released from the constraints of physical embodiment [as well as] from ... the capitalist property and labor relations,” as DeLombard does (248), is to forget that Emerson’s position in race, gender, and class hierarchies allow him to transcend bodily concern. In fact, Emerson does not transcend these relations. He enjoys his already privileged position. Emerson is not “unimpeded” by corporeality, but to threats to his body (DeLombard 251). He recognizes as much. In those Northern woods, he “feel[s] that nothing can befall me in life,—*no disgrace, no calamity (leaving me my eyes), which nature cannot repair*” (39; emphasis added). In this moment, Emerson’s transcendence is made possible by his secure position. He can forget that he is part of the same field of force he sees because it operates in his favor without bothering to remind him of it.

Douglass, on the other hand, “can never be transparent in the sense of being released from materiality or corporeality” (DeLombard 251-52) because his life as a person of color does not release him from the vicissitudes of embodiment. Emerson’s virtual disembodiment is as

“organic and therefore radically contingent” as Douglass’s embodied subjectivity (DeLombard 256). The difference between them is that Emerson’s privileged embodiment creates the fantasy that, because it’s never made to feel its own vulnerability, it can partake of the power and authority of God. Douglass’s precarious embodiment incessantly reminds him that he is a body surrounded by others that may challenge, or care for, his own. Realizing that “the gaze is not the product of a stable position, a clearly defined and unchanging ‘place’ or subjectivity ... it is a process of struggle for power,” Douglass sets out in his writing to show that the spectator’s position is not unassailable (Straub 18). His goal is to disprove Emerson’s assertion that “whilst the world is spectacle, something in himself is stable” (65).

The burden of sympathy, then, rested on those who needed it most. Northern audiences could read about and listen to the experiences of Southern slaves and be unmoved from their privileged position. On the page or the platform, former or current slaves remained in their precarious one. Frederick Douglass endeavored to reverse these positions, to enact and expose the precarity of the spectator’s privilege. In “The Heroic Slave,” Douglass created a model of sympathy that focused on the experience of both spectator and spectacle. Before, sympathy resulted in a bodily experience for the sympathizer, but the sympathizer’s body was ignored in the process that led up to it. Now, the spectator’s bodily experience of the situation was what brought sympathy about. Douglass emphasizes the spectacle’s effect on the spectator’s body. If, according to Douglass, “to *understand*, some one has said a man must *stand under*,” then the spectator will understand the spectacle only once the former has stood under the latter’s influence (Bondage 161; his emphasis).



Douglass comments elsewhere that “[a] man, without force, is without the essential dignity of humanity. Human nature is so constituted, that it cannot *honor* a helpless man, although it can *pity* him; and even this it cannot do long, if the signs of power do not arise” (Bondage 140; his emphasis). In his own decisive struggle with the slave breaker Covey, Douglass recounted another moment in which a show of force detracted from an awareness of race: “The fighting madness had come upon me, and I found my strong fingers firmly attached to the throat of my cowardly tormentor; as heedless of consequences, at the moment, as though we stood as equals before the law. The very color of the man was forgotten” (283). In this situation, the color of both men—and both are men, as this is the scene in which Douglass narrates “how a slave was made a man”—is forgotten. Douglass forgets that the punishment for a black man who attacks a white man is higher than intraracial violence. In this moment, both are irrelevant. Douglass brought this willful irrelevance into his career as a newspaper editor, as well as in his fictional and autobiographical work. His strategy of forcing an unsympathizing white man into a sympathetic situation dates back to at least 1848.

On the tenth anniversary of his self-emancipation, Douglass published a letter to his former master, Thomas Auld, in The North Star, the newspaper he had founded the previous year with the promise that “we shall stand in our paper as we have ever stood on the platform ... Our views written shall accord with our views spoken” (3 Dec. 1847). The letter has received minimal critical attention, even though Douglass considered it important enough to include in the appendix to his second autobiography, My Bondage and My Freedom, alongside “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” and other speeches. In “To My Old Master,” Douglass employs the sympathetic appeal and the public letter itself to accomplish a change in positions between

himself and Auld. Douglass begins by switching places with his former master and ends by eliminating any difference in position at all. Douglass' reversal was interpreted as a leveling gesture that threatened to overturn the nation's racial and sexual orders.

A footnote to the letter in My Bondage and My Freedom claims that "[i]t is not often that chattels address their owners. The following letter is unique, and probably the only specimen of the kind extant" (*Autobiographies* 412). Whatever claim to truth this had in 1848, it was not the case in 1855. At least three other well-known fugitives wrote letters to their former masters and had them published in the interim. Like Douglass's, they were all originally composed far from the U.S. South. William Wells Brown's and Ellen Craft's letters were written in England, Henry Bibb's in Canada. But their awareness of the risk of recapture did nothing to soften the tone of their letters. Douglass's letter wasn't the only one in the antebellum period to compare the former slave's change of situation in relation to their former master.<sup>53</sup> Brown urges his master to imagine himself in the slave's position: "You are a husband:—I ask you then to treat the wives of your slaves as you would have your own companion dealt with. You are a father:—I ask you, therefore, to treat the children of your slaves as you would have your legitimate offspring treated." The Rev. J. W. Loguen challenges his mistress to consider herself in relation to others: "Have you got to learn that human rights are mutual and reciprocal, and if you take my liberty and life, you forfeit your own liberty and life?" (Douglass et al). Douglass shares with these letters a critique of religion, a demand for sympathy and action, and the discourse of equal rights. His letter differs in the degree to which he is willing to be aggressive. To speak publicly while still a fugitive was a bold move, one each of these authors was already accustomed to. Douglass also risked playing into the popular prejudice that black masculinity was violent and sexual.

---

<sup>53</sup> Douglass's wasn't even the only one to invoke the Golden Rule: Bibb chastises his master and his church for failing to abide by the doctrine.

Douglass begins by foregrounding “[t]he long and intimate, though by no means friendly, relation which unhappily subsisted between” himself and Auld. This former relation was exemplified by the last time their two names were “coupled” in newsprint, “in an advertisement, accurately describing my person and offering a large sum for my arrest.” Douglass acknowledges that he is taking “a great liberty” in addressing Auld: “In thus dragging you again before the public, I am aware that I shall subject myself to no inconsiderable amount of censure.” He knew that he will “probably be charged with an unwarrantable, if not a wanton and reckless disregard of the rights and proprieties of private life.” Those who would take offense to Douglass’s letter tended to “entertain a much higher respect for rights which are merely conventional, than they do for rights which are personal and essential.” Regardless of the misdirected anger of those who, “while they have no scruples against robbing the laborer of the hard earned results of his patient industry, will be shocked by the extremely indelicate manner of bringing your name before the public,” Douglass pledges to “frankly state the ground upon which I justify myself in this instance, as well as on former occasions when I have thought proper to mention your name in public.”<sup>54</sup> His immediate concern, then, is defending his right to write.

All will agree that a man guilty of theft, robbery, or murder, has forfeited the right to concealment and private life; that the community have a right to subject such persons to the most complete exposure. However much they may desire retirement, and aim to conceal themselves and their movements from the popular gaze, the public have a right to ferret them out, and bring their conduct before the proper tribunals of the country for investigation.

---

<sup>54</sup> In fact, Douglass had spoken of Auld in numerous speeches before and after the publication of his *Narrative* in 1845. See Blassingame.

Douglass ends this paragraph by telling Auld that he will “indulge in language which may seem to others indirect and ambiguous, and yet be quite well understood by yourself.” Douglass’s list of crimes is an example of Douglass speaking in a language that would be more readily understood by his abolitionist peers. Theft, robbery, and murder were common charges that abolitionists leveled at slaveowners. The idea of private life being attacked was also a common one to abolitionists. Slaves did not have a right to private life. Douglass begins by comparing slaves to their owners. It is the latter that deserve the treatment that the former are too often exposed to. But Douglass’s current treatment of Auld differs from Auld’s past treatment of him in that it’s defensible. Whereas the justification for Douglass’s treatment was unjust—Douglass was guilty of “the alleged crime of intending to escape from [Auld’s] possession”—Auld’s treatment is justified. Douglass defends “the morality of the act”—he means of running away, but the same holds in writing a public letter: “I am myself; you are yourself; we are two distinct persons, equal persons. What you are, I am. You are a man, and so am I. God created both, and made us separate beings.” The equality that Douglass posits is substantiated here on the level of syntax. The discursive violence of Douglass’s “dragging” someone before the public recalls Auld’s physical violence: “You well know that I wear stripes on my back, inflicted by your direction; and that you, while we were brothers in the same church, caused this right hand, with which I am now penning this letter, to be closely tied to my left, and my person dragged, at the pistol’s mouth, fifteen miles, from the Bay Side to Easton, to be sold like a beast in the market, for the alleged crime of intending to escape from your possession.” Douglass’s hand, the subject of Auld’s violence, now inflicts violence on Auld.

Douglass continues the change of place in a passage that most resembles the familiar abolitionist appeal.

How, let me ask, would you look upon me, were I, some dark night, in company with a band of hardened villains, to enter the precincts of your elegant dwelling, and seize the person of your own lovely daughter, Amanda, and carry her off from your family, friends, and all the loved ones of her youth—make her my slave—compel her to work, and I take her wages—place her name on my ledger as property—disregard her personal rights—fetter the powers of her immortal soul by denying her the right and privilege of learning to read and write—feed her coarsely—clothe her scantily, and whip her on the naked back occasionally; more, and still more horrible, leave her unprotected—a degraded victim to the brutal lust of fiendish overseers, who would pollute, blight, and blast her fair soul—rob her of all dignity—destroy her virtue, and annihilate in her person all the graces that adorn the character of virtuous womanhood? I ask, how would you regard me, if such were my conduct? Oh! the vocabulary of the damned would not afford a word sufficiently infernal to express your idea of my God-provoking wickedness. Yet, sir, your treatment of my beloved sisters is in all essential points precisely like the case I have now supposed. Damning as would be such a deed on my part, it would be no more so than that which you have committed against me and my sisters.

Generally these appeals are vague—the auditor’s identity is assumed, though no identifiable enslaved person is identified. The auditor is really only thinking what it would be like if he were enslaved, not if he were an enslaved black person living south of the Mason-Dixon line. Even the auditor usually remained anonymous—unnamed, ungendered, unclassed, unraced (even if the basis for the speaker’s appeal—what grants license to speak—is a shared identity, it’s not

nominated). So even though the images the speaker leads the auditor through are often detailed, the auditor's identity in them are not.<sup>55</sup> Douglass's revision of this tactic, then, is to more fully place his auditor in the imagined situation. He does not ask what *you* would feel if something happened to your family, but what *you, Thomas* would feel if *your daughter, Amanda* were to experience this. What's more, Douglass does not leave the agent of this change unnamed, nor does he give the impression that Auld is willing to imagine this change. He instead identifies himself as the agent both in creating this fantasy and acting as enslaver within it. Douglass's invitation to sympathize with the slave is an aggressive one. It is not an invitation at all.

Douglass invited certain charges in writing Auld in this way. Antiabolitionist writing was filled with fears about the violence ex-slaves would inflict on their masters, of the desire black men felt for white women that would be released were they to be freed. Part of the power, or at least the threat, of Douglass's letter derives from this. Yet Douglass tries to deflect much of the concern. Amanda is threatened by unmarked overseers, not Douglass himself. Though Douglass appears to make Amanda, and not Thomas, the center of the situation, Douglass is most concerned with making Auld feel the kind of helplessness that Douglass himself felt in regard to his family. Douglass makes sure to stress his sisters' and his own status as victims.

That Douglass's assault remains in the imaginative realm could lead some to question how radical it could be. The form of the public letter does the real work here. Douglass trains our gazes on Auld. Auld is made to perform the role of the sufferer. Douglass ends the letter on the

---

<sup>55</sup> Eliza Follen asked her readers: "You have a daughter; you are a proud, tender, virtuous mother. She is your heart's choicest treasure. You would bid the winds of Heaven to blow gently upon her; you guard her with the most sensitive care; she is as the flower of your existence. Imagine her exposed to ill usage, often cruelty, always to the lowest passions of humanity; her womanly feelings trampled upon,—if possible, obliterated; her pure affections laughed at and scorned; her person desecrated, and her whole nature brought down to the level of the vileness of a licentious man. I ask you whether, when you look upon your beloved daughter, you remember the poor slave-mother and her child?" (1).

new field of force: “You shall hear from me again unless you let me hear from you.” In fact, he does not send a letter, he sends a newspaper. Douglass includes a postscript: “I send a copy of the paper containing this letter, to save postage.”<sup>56</sup> This is another illustration that he’s *already* put his plan to use Auld as a tool, to expose him, into practice. Auld has no way to challenge it. It’s already done. Auld now has to respond on Douglass’s terms. The paper also implies a wider audience—as does his mention of audience in the letter, the jury that will judge Auld. Douglass has witnesses, both to Auld’s crimes and his own threats. Auld had been “dragged” into public before he had any knowledge of it.

A year later, Douglass published another letter. This was “a friendly epistle.” The tone of Douglass’s second letter, written on the eleventh anniversary of his self-emancipation, differs dramatically from the first. That it differs is made apparent in the salutation, “Dear sir.” Douglass believed that his exposure of Auld was successful. In the year between the two letters, Auld had emancipated all of his slaves and began to take care of Douglass’s grandmother.<sup>57</sup> Auld, that is, had “ceased to be a slaveholder” and has begun to act “in a manner becoming a man and a Christian.” Douglass links Auld’s act to the “public exposure and denunciation” he had undergone. The case of Auld was counterintuitive to Douglass’s critics, who believed that exposure would lead a slaveholder to “clutch more firmly what [was] attempted to be wrested from him.” Auld had “risen superior to these unhallowed influences” of slavery that affected master and slave alike. Douglass requests that Auld “make your conversion to anti-slavery known to the world, by precept as well as by example. A publication of the facts relating to the

---

<sup>56</sup> The postscript is not reproduced in recent reprints. See, for example, Foner and Andrews.

<sup>57</sup> Douglass was most likely misinformed. He does not reveal his source for this information. See McFeely.

emancipation of your slaves, with the reasons that have led you to this humane act, would doubtless prove highly beneficial to the cause of freedom.” He asks, in other words, that Auld write a slaveholder’s narrative, and thus finish the exposure of himself that Douglass had begun. Before, Douglass made him an example; now, Auld would “make [his] conversion to anti-slavery known to the world, by precept as well as by example.” If Douglass’s publication of Auld had had the effect of associating him with villainy, this new narrative would “place [Auld] in that high estimation of the public mind to which [his] generous conduct entitles [him].” Douglass points out that Auld’s case is special because “you have been publicly and peculiarly exposed before the world for being a slaveholder.” Douglass goes on: “It would be truly an interesting and glorious spectacle to see master and slave, hand in hand, laboring together for the overthrow of American slavery.” He continues the language of performance when he writes, “I shall not despair of yet having the pleasure of giving you the right hand of fellowship on the anti-slavery platform.” He concludes, after repeating his “sincere gratitude at the magnanimous deed with which your name is now associated,” that Auld should “publicly identify yourself with the holy cause of freedom,” further changing the association Auld would have formerly had with Douglass. Whereas Auld’s name was once associated with Douglass the fugitive, it was now associated with this “magnanimous deed.”

The first letter not only reflected a place change between slave and master, it removed any difference in position altogether. David Marshall argues that the goal of sympathy is to erase the conditions of spectatorship that it created. Douglass had done that. Douglass and Auld would now, the former hoped, “wor[k] side by side.” Though Douglass strongly urges Auld to “publicly identify [him]self with the holy cause of freedom,” he leaves it up to him to do so. He respects his choices, unlike their former modes of relation, which were coercive. Douglass ends the letter



“very respectfully yours.” Douglass had never recognized the right of one person to own another. Here, then, under very different circumstances, Douglass recognizes a more reciprocal relation.

Douglass’s first letter had another effect. As he expected, it caused a considerable amount of controversy. Over the next six months, a battle raged in the columns of The North Star and The Liberator. Douglass’s combatant was John Jacobus Flournoy, whom one abolitionist called “either a fool or a monomaniac” (The Liberator 23 Feb. 1849). Flournoy, a farmer in Georgia, called himself an expulsionist. He was avowedly antislavery and racist: he thought all African Americans, not merely free ones in the North, should be sent ‘back’ to Africa immediately. So he thought that the American Colonization Society did not go far enough, and he thought the American Anti-Slavery Society was too preoccupied with doing away with racial prejudice.

Two months after Douglass’s letter, Douglass published Flournoy’s response (with another rejoinder from one of Douglass’s allies) in The North Star. Flournoy admits that he is “lowering my dignity to write to a negro,” and yet does so anyway. “The people of the North,” he writes, “especially that portion which makes a tool of you, violate the constitution of their and our government, by not remanding you, black ninny, to Mr. Auld, and by turning that instrument, in a variety of ways, to their own convenience.” Douglass, not Auld, is the real tool here. Flournoy is shocked by the disregard that Douglass has for the consequences of his actions: “You abolitionists don’t care – you say, freedom anyhow, maugre consequences, and would have liberty given to the negroes, though utter ruin, or amalgamation, or even downright atheism, or continual wars, be the result.” Through a real or imagined change of place, Douglass sought to create a new political formation. Flournoy accuses him of attempting to create a new sexual

formation—an equality gained through interracial sex.<sup>58</sup> Flourney argues that equality cannot exist between black and white: The “greatest equality is founded on reciprocal obligations,” but “this reciprocity is according to the condition and capacities of the several races, as of individuals. One man is made the superior in bodily and mental faculties of another – one race or men better than another – each, therefore, should know, and by submitting to his sphere of duties, all work well for the good of all.” In writing Auld, in pulling him into the sympathetic situation, Douglass goes above his sphere.

Douglass’s greatest presumption, Flourney claims, is his comparison of his sisters to Auld’s daughter: “This is reasoning if they were equal, which is not the case.” Flourney does not see Douglass’s sister and Auld’s daughter as equals, so he interprets Douglass’s letters as acts of usurpation. Flourney takes it upon himself to correct Douglass, to put him back in his place. Flourney insists that he and Douglass are not equal—on a biological or a discursive level—and yet he continues to speak to him, and so he undercuts his earlier statement that Douglass was not fit to address him.<sup>59</sup> Regardless, Flourney insists, Douglass could only “equalize” through “the spoils of amalgamation” (10 Nov. 1848).

A rejoinder, published in the same issue of The North Star, observes that Flourney’s “letter is wonderfully far from containing any argument” (J.D.). Flourney mistakes the insult as an admission of incompetence. He later asks how his black correspondent knew his first letter “was not full of arguments? Could your obtuse faculties and dim perceptions never grasp hold of

---

<sup>58</sup> Amalgamation is Flourney’s recurring theme. In his last letter to Douglass, Flourney implies that “among your reasons for wishing to stay forever in the centre of white communities here, is none more extraordinary and all-absorbing than the secret or open hope or wish to get white wives!” (9 Mar. 1849).

<sup>59</sup> In his second letter, Flourney admits that he should have clarified, that he does not mind sometimes writing to “a well-behaved and humble negro, slave or free,” but that he “has no disposition to lower my dignity by writing to a rebellious, turbulent, reckless negro” (5 Jan. 1849).

what is obvious to all white men of mind, that you (even if attempting the work) could not controvert my points? Ah, Frederick, you have not yet been put where powerful arguments were unyieldingly in contention; you have not had yet, in any master mind, an opponent who would contest with you every inch of ground, and leave you finally subdued” (5 Jan. 1849). Although this fight is less familiar to us than Douglass’ clash with the slavebreaker Covey, this one is no less significant.

Douglass tries to end the conversation in his response: “We tell him once for all, that we do not desire him to ‘misdignify’ himself by sending us any more letters – the game is not worth the candle. Negroes though we are, we cannot admit the moral or mental superiority of this Mr. Flounoy over us, if his present letter be a fair sample of his quality” (Frederick Douglass’ Paper 5 Jan. 1849). The critique of Flounoy’s writing and, therefore, his supremacy continued in The Liberator:

As for thy assumed superiority over Frederick Douglass, or the people of his color so far as I have had opportunity to observe, were any competent scholar to make a comparison between the beautiful and expressive language of his speeches, his dignified and gentlemanly manners, and the classical correctness of his writings, on the one side; and the ungrammatical, mutilated composition (be it English or American) of thy letter to him on the other; that scholar would have no difficulty in awarding that Frederick Douglass is infinitely thy superior in intelligence and polite literature. (23 Feb. 1849)

Garrison appends a note saying that if this author “had known how unworthy of the least notice is the individual to whom he addresses himself, .... he would have spared his powder and shot. ... he is not a disputant worth contending with.”

William Lloyd Garrison contended that his only “infidelity” was that he “believe[d] in the teaching of Jesus,” and so he “demand[ed] that my fellow-men be released from a bondage, at the thought of which, for myself, my very soul shudders” (qtd. in The Liberator 23 Sept. 1853). Jane Swisshelm, who ran an antislavery newspaper of her own, felt that even more personal interests inspired Garrison and others: “Disinterested benevolence ... has nothing at all to do with abolitionism,” she wrote. “I doubt very much if there is such a thing as disinterested benevolence” (230). “It is,” instead, “selfishness ... that has thus far carried on the war with slavery and wrong in all times; and selfishness must break the chains of the American slave” (230). She discusses Garrison in particular:

Where would William Lloyd Garrison have been to-day, if any combination of circumstances could have shut in his soul’s deep hatred of oppression, and prevented its finding utterance in burning words? He would have been dead and rotten. It is necessary to his own existence that he should work,—work for the slave; and in his work he gratifies all the strongest instincts of his nature, more completely than even the grossest sensualist can gratify *his*, by unlimited indulgence. (230-31; her emphasis)

It may come as no surprise that white abolitionists were more concerned with themselves than they were with the enslaved, or that black abolitionists, through familiarity or flesh, were not. What is more remarkable, then, is the African American awareness, and exploitation, of the fact that in agitating against slavery, some abolitionists, maybe, were “just seeking a soft pillow that they may ‘sleep o’ nights’” (Swisshelm 233).

## **Chapter Four**

### **The Realization of African American Performance in Stowe's The Christian Slave**

“Look!! Look!! at This!!!!”

- David Walker

“I am in earnest – I will not equivocate – I will not excuse – I will not retreat a single inch – AND I WILL BE HEARD.”

- William Lloyd Garrison

The primary texts of radical abolitionism demand a reader that has an eye for sound. David Walker and William Lloyd Garrison believed that before they could secure a fair hearing, they needed to be heard. And so they wrote with capital letters and exclamation points in order to capture the nation's ear.<sup>60</sup> But not without difficulty: A large part of the country wanted “the noise of abolition silenced!” (Liberator 8/16/1844). Abolitionists described decades of obstructed efforts in the same aural terms: Frederick Douglass lamented that people around the United States still “turned a deaf ear, and refused to listen to the friends of freedom. They turned a deaf ear to the groans of the oppressed slave” (Liberator 5/29/1846). Those who sought to “choke free words before they're spoken” not only sought to silence dissent, but to assault the bodies of the dissenters (Liberator 9/28/1860). Legislative gag orders, suppressed mailing campaigns, and antiabolitionist rioting were not merely violations of the right to free speech. The circulation of David Walker's Appeal and The Liberator depended on the mobility of black and white bodies: Walker sewed his text into the jackets of southbound sailors; Garrison employed subscription agents throughout the Northeast. If these people could not travel, these visual texts would not be

---

<sup>60</sup> See Dinius. My epigraphs are from Walker (63) and Garrison (72).

heard. More than sound was being abridged, though it was *as* sound that abolitionists figured these restrictions.

When we read an abolitionist text we perceive a material process in which a sound is realized as an image that has the force of a statement.<sup>61</sup> The texts that I examine in this chapter record the performances of Elizabeth Greenfield and Mary Webb, two African American women who toured the northern United States, Canada, and England during the 1850s. Like those of Walker and Garrison, the textual performances of Greenfield and Webb were interdependently visible and audible. Each of these performers exhibits what I call a *resonant body*.<sup>62</sup> This term emphasizes the influence a performer's voice had over the way a reviewer saw her body. It also suggests the way that her voice resounds in descriptions of her body. For these women, to become textualized was not to become abstracted. Their embodiment was realized in print. The voices of these performers call attention to their corporeality. These calls are answered by representations of their bodies that show the traces of their vocalization. The sight and sound of the body in performance, in other words, is remediated as text.

There is an audio/visual split within studies of race and slavery. This split is based on the common practice of work on race to privilege the visual. This practice, according to Josh Kun, originates in a "sensory hierarchy that keeps the eye above the ear and thus limits knowledge formation to visual vocabularies of interpretation and meaning and marginalizes sound and music in the study of race" (117). The result is studies that focus on either the aural or the visual

---

<sup>61</sup> I use the term "realization" in a slightly different sense than Martin Meisel's, of "giving concrete perceptual form to a literary text," its "re-creation and translation into a ... more vivid, visual, physically present medium" (32; 30).

<sup>62</sup> Ronald Radano defines resonance as "a formulation of sound into text and back again as a social articulation or utterance" (23).

and, as a consequence, neglect the multisensory quality of performance.<sup>63</sup> What is needed instead is an understanding of performance that recognizes what Fred Moten calls “the irreducible sound of necessarily visual performance” (1). Moten refers to the scene in Frederick Douglass’s Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass in which Douglass recounts his Aunt Hester’s beating by her master. Douglass remembers how her “warm, red blood (amid heart-rending shrieks from her, and horrid oaths from him) came dripping to the floor” (19). “Amid” combines her blood with the shrieks and the oaths—already bound together on the page by parentheses—into a visible mass. The shrieks and oaths are realized as much as Hester’s blood is. The sounds that I investigate in this chapter, like Hester’s scream, insist on their materiality through the visual medium of printed description.

This chapter contributes to the study of early African American performance by exploring the way that performance archives itself and by investigating the work that that archive performs. It appreciates that “African American expressive culture and artistic production” form a tradition in which “sound and vision, the aural and the scriptural, have always been interlinked” (Kun 117). It acknowledges that African American texts are not static, but operate within what Ronald Radano describes as “a dynamic process in which orality moves through textuality and back around” (45). We can see this process at work in the press coverage of Greenfield’s and Webb’s performances. These reviews offer more than critiques. They are also effects of those performances. In them, sound is rendered visually as verbal description or pictorial illustration. Sound, however, is not reduced. It is reproduced. Jon Cruz prompts us to think of black music “as a stage upon which other nonmusic—social, political, and cultural—

---

<sup>63</sup> Recent work on (anti)slavery’s visual culture includes Wood and Chaney. Recent work on its aural culture includes Cruz and White and White. Scholars working within the discipline of performance studies have perhaps done the best job of negotiating the split. Notable among this work are Lott, Brooks, and Nathans.

struggles could be enacted” (11). These reproductions enact a struggle over how these women were to be represented.

Women were central to, even if they often worked on the margins of, the antislavery movement. But to be a woman in the public sphere in the antebellum period meant to be exposed to criticism, or worse. When Angelina Grimké urged women to agitate for the abolitionist cause, Catharine Beecher took it upon herself to warn her, or any woman considering taking a position on the issue, what she could expect: “If the female advocate chooses to come upon a stage, and expose her person, dress, and elocution to public criticism, it is right to express disgust at whatever is offensive and indecorous, as it is to criticize the book of an author, or the dancing of an actress, or any thing else that is presented to public observation” (121). As Faye Dudden has established, “the continuing problem of a woman in public, on the street and in the workplace, is the same as the problem of a woman on the stage: she must be there in the body. To be present in the body carries with it the inherent risk of being taken as a sexual object against one’s will” (3).

Some in the United States at the time viewed a woman’s speech act as a sex act. One clergyman compared Grimké to a Quaker woman who had walked “through the streets of Salem, *naked as she was born*.” Deborah Garfield notes how a “charged or sexually explicit lecture, no matter how scrupulously reasoned, was too frequently refigured by detractors into the visual metaphor of striptease, as if the female voice, confounding sound and flesh, were the exposed body itself” (102; emphasis in the original). In 1838, antiabolitionist rioters in Philadelphia broke up a meeting Grimké had addressed. One newspaper sympathetic to the rioters included in its coverage an illustration of white women acting ‘inappropriately’ with black men outside the meeting. Women speaking to promiscuous assemblies would inevitably lead, it was feared, to



promiscuous sexual behavior with the men for whose rights they advocated (Lemire 88). Given the way outspoken women were treated, it's no wonder that Harriet Beecher Stowe defended her authorship by invoking the need to "speak for the oppressed—who cannot speak for themselves." She "'preach[ed] on paper' rather than 'viva voce'" (qtd. in Hedrick 378-38).<sup>64</sup>

Women of color were, as Hazel Carby has documented, "persistent[ly] associat[ed] with illicit sexuality" (32). The sound of Sojourner Truth's voice made her audience think about sex, though they weren't sure which one. Once in 1858, a male audience member "'demanded that Sojourner submit her breast to the inspection of some of the ladies present' so that the question of 'her sex' might be 'removed by their testimony.'" When Truth asked him "why they suspected her to be a man," he answered, "Your voice is not the voice of a woman, it is the voice of a man, and we believe you are a man" (qtd. in Brooks Bodies 159-59). Even in 1870, Frances Harper wrote a friend that "you would laugh if you were to hear some of the remarks which my lectures call forth: 'She is a man,' again 'She is not colored, she is painted.'" "In this comment," Carla Peterson explains, "the black woman speaker is predictably masculinized, and she is also racialized as 'painted.' Yet the term 'painted' also resexualizes her, and dangerously so, as an actress, and perhaps even a prostitute" (qtd. in Peterson "Doers" 21-22).

Despite, or perhaps because, of antebellum America's overdetermined perception of the 'grotesque' black female body, there was an inconsistency in the way the culture represented it. All black bodies, according to Peterson, possess an "empowering oddness" ("Foreword" xi-xii). Truth chooses to "flaunt the eccentric black female body before [her] audiences and readers and celebrate its beauty." Truth's body "represents a determination to define the black female body" on its own terms (Peterson "Foreword" xii-xiiv). That's why Truth narrated her body's history as

---

<sup>64</sup> During her tour of the United Kingdom, though she appeared in public, Stowe never spoke.

she displayed it. As Brooks remarks, Truth “revalues her exploited flesh and instills it with an alternate textual meaning” (Bodies 159).

Harper, Peterson argues, attempts “to render the body invisible or present the black subject as a disembodied voice” by “emphasizing the quietness of her body, the chastity of her language, and the purity of her voice.” If this were true, Harper must have been unsuccessful, as no audience “could forget that language emanates from the body and that the black body is inescapably present” in its performances (“Foreword” xiii; Doers 122; “Foreword” xiii.). If these women attempted, instead, to “normalize” their bodies by “following the conventions of the dominant literary culture,” they would then be limited to a location “within an idealized middle-class domestic household” (Peterson “Foreword” xiii). By “imbuing [their bodies] with moral value,” Peterson continues, these women made their bodies “object[s] worthy of the reader’s compassion.” This assumes that these women were seeking compassionate readers in private and not, as I argue, captivated audiences in public. In place of the notion of an impossibly disembodied performance, Gay Gibson Cima claims that though these women appeared in person, they “did not always call attention to their race or gender” (202). These performers did not need to call attention to their race or gender. Their audiences did it for them. Their bodies were “never divorced from perception and interpretation” (Peterson “Foreword” ix).

Peterson’s argument, as Brooks has summarized it, establishes a “dichotomy between being visible and abject and being ‘pure’ and disembodied” (“Deeds” 48). Peterson’s is something of an audio/visual account of the performing body. Like that opposition, this proves to be a false one. Sight and sound have always been interrelated in oratory. When Caleb Bingham, author of The Columbian Orator (made famous by Douglass’s Narrative), refers to “the whole art of pronunciation,” he means the orator’s “voice *and* gestures.” Although Bingham cannot say

“whether voice or gesture has the greatest influence upon us,” he does recognize that “the sight is the quickest of our senses.” Even though “persons commonly form some opinion of a speaker from their first view of him, which prejudices them either in his favour or otherwise, as to what he says afterwards,” he maintains that as “the voice should be suited to the impressions it receives from the mind, so the several motions of the body ought to be accustomed to the various tones and inflections of the voice” (9; emphasis added; 15; 19; 15). People are prejudiced toward what a speaker says by how she looks, though the speaker should concern herself first with her voice, and with her appearance second.

A performer’s visible actions could make a statement. These women signified their respectability, partly, through the visual. One’s style of dress and control of one’s person substantiated claims to respectability as much as one’s voice or words did. Oratory, after all, introduced its students to “a decent and graceful management of their bodies” (Bingham 9). The performance of respectability relied upon the visibility—and availability—of these bodily signs. Respectability meant having the right look, not no look at all. Ellen Craft’s protest at the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London relied on her appearance for its effect. In response to the exhibition’s sanitized version of slavery presented in Hiram Powers’ statue, “The Greek Slave,” The London Punch printed a more provocative version in “The Virginia Slave.” William Wells Brown placed a copy of the latter next to the former for all to compare. But neither proffered an acceptable image of the African American woman, so Craft supplied her own—herself. Craft walked through the Crystal Palace without saying a word, performing, as Tavia Nyong’o comments, “black femininity as ladyhood” (113). Her physical presence at the fair drove the protest, which was, after all, a silent one. The performance styles of Truth, Harper, and Craft differed, but they were alike in that they resulted in more attention being placed on the body.

Each managed, not one denied, the materiality of her body. And by positioning their resonant bodies and voices in such a way, they influenced the way their audiences perceived, and thus represented, them.

There was no uniform way that Americans in this period perceived African American performers. As Cruz remarks, how people heard black music was changing at the time Elizabeth Greenfield and Mary Webb were performing: “Prior to the mid-nineteenth century black music appears to have been heard by captors and overseers as *noise*—that is, as strange, unfathomable, and incomprehensible. However, with the rise of the abolitionist movement, black song making became considered increasingly as a font of black *meanings*” (43; emphasis in the original). Cruz is discussing the reception of *black* musical forms—namely, the spiritual. Though Greenfield and Webb performed *white* forms—opera and blackface minstrelsy—the identity and position of the auditor still determined how the auditor heard them.<sup>65</sup> An abolitionist heard a political message in Greenfield’s and Webb’s songs; an antiabolitionist heard noise. *How* one heard, then, had more to do with *who* heard it and *where* and *when* one did than with *what* one heard.

Music, as Dale Cockrell asserts, is “a metaphor for the official social code” and noise is “a challenge to law’s authority” (80). During the nineteenth century, both were becoming codified. Nick Yablon writes that during the time Greenfield and Webb were performing, what constituted music or noise was being redefined in spatial terms: “If certain sounds were to be characterized as ‘music’ insofar as they could be contained within the enclosed spaces of the auditorium, concert hall, or parlor, then others that could not be confined in space and which

---

<sup>65</sup> It is important to note the interracial origins of black and white musical traditions. What Radano states about the spiritual is true for the minstrel song as well: “[T]he qualities that define black music grow out of a cultural ground that is more common than many may realize, and this commonality is all the more so in musical circumstances, where practices literally exist in the air and are thus accessed more easily than other forms of cultural expression” (xiii).

instead circulated freely across the city were coming to be understood as noise. In the same way that ‘dirt’ would be conceived by Mary Douglas as ‘matter out of place,’ noise was beginning to be conceived as sound ‘out of place.’” (360). I would add that we cannot think of spaces without thinking of the people who are and are not welcome in them. Certain performers, regardless of what they performed, would not find a place in certain spaces, or would only do so as an exception. Certain kinds of performance by anyone would not be welcome at all.

Some but not all of the people recording their responses to Greenfield and Webb were music critics. One of these critics reflected on the generic violence of music criticism: “In music, especially, criticism is very personal and precise. It mentions names broadly, and examines each note, down to the minutest shadows of sound. Literally, it throttles its victim. It takes him by the throat, and dissects his organs of speech; applies a stethoscope [*sic*] to his lungs, and a Procrustean measurement to the general conduct of the person”(qtd. in La Brew 82). The critic destroys, as it deconstructs, the voice. The body is measured and maimed. The voice is by no means immaterial. It is part of a vulnerable body whose parts can be taken apart. Professional critics move immediately from an awareness of sound to an awareness of the body that produced it. Nonprofessionals have this realization as well.

Elizabeth Greenfield was probably born in the 1820s in Mississippi, reputedly to an African father and an Native American mother. When her owner joined the Society of Friends, emancipated her slaves and moved to Philadelphia, Elizabeth went with her. The self-taught “Black Swan” showed musical talent an early age, and sang in church and in the homes of family friends. She made her debut as a concert singer in Buffalo, New York in 1851. Greenfield was favorably compared to some of the most celebrated singers of the antebellum period, including

Abby Hutchinson of the Hutchinson Family Singers and Jenny Lind, the “Swedish Nightingale.” Greenfield typically sang operatic works by such composers as Donizetti, Bellini, and Verdi, though she was also known to sing popular songs like “Home, Sweet Home” and “Old Folks at Home.” She would go on to tour the northern United States, Canada, and England. With Stowe’s help, she gained access to the British aristocracy, eventually giving a command performance for Queen Victoria in 1854.

Reviewers were fascinated with her voice, which by some estimates covered a four-octave range. The only way they were able to describe it was by guessing that she had more than natural endowments. One critic remarked, “she possesses a most remarkable organ,” and so was impressed by her range that he said she must have, “in fact, *two voices*” (Spirit of the Times 3/26/1853; emphasis in the original). Samuel Ringgold Ward was present at one of her London concerts, and spoke of another audience member’s reaction to her range: “Sir David Brewster said to me, ‘she has two throats’—alluding to the perfect ease with which she passed from the highest to the lowest notes” (304).<sup>66</sup> These auditors were not alone in seeing Greenfield’s peculiar talent as somehow more, or less, than natural. Another found her range “more wonderful than truly natural,” though he concluded that she “is deficient in every requisite for a good vocalist” (London Musical World 7/16/1853). Most reviewers tempered their praise by noting her lack of training. Still, reviewers did not agree on her voice’s development. One reported that she was “even far less cultivated than we expected to find her; she having yet to learn to deliver her voice, and her scale passages being given without the slightest articulation of successive notes, but with a continuous sound, such as is produced by running the finger up a violin string” (New York Mirror 4/1/1853). Stowe reported how “between the parts Sir George [Smart] took

---

<sup>66</sup> Queen Victoria, for one, thought “[t]he voices do not blend, which is a great disadvantage” (qtd. in La Brew 121).

her to the piano, and tried her voice by skips, striking notes here and there at random, without connection, from D in alt [*sic*] to A first space in bass clef: she followed with unerring precision, striking the sound nearly at the same instant his finger touched the key. This brought out a burst of applause.” Stowe swore that “had she culture equal to her voice and ear, *no* singer of any country could have surpassed her,” but few were as complimentary (Sunny 2:104; 2:109; emphasis in the original).

Peterson observes that “reviews in the white press often had difficulty reconciling” Greenfield’s voice with her blackness and so paid closer attention to the former rather than the latter. One would then expect for her body to get little attention, but the opposite was the case. Most did comment on her body. Upon hearing her exert the lower registers of her range, one reviewer was put in mind of a tangible corporeal oddity: “The idea of a woman’s voice is a feminine tone; anything below that is disgusting: it is as bad as a bride with a beard on her chin and an oath in her mouth. . . . We hear a great deal about Woman’s sphere. That sphere exists in Music, and it is the soprano region of the voice” (New York Tribune 4/2/1853). The reviewer for Frederick Douglass’ Paper had anticipated this kind of criticism and derided it: “This singular performance must have shocked (if there were any such present) those nervous and exceedingly timid old gentlemen, who, about these times of woman’s conventions, are quite alarmed lest woman should usurp dominion over man” (12/18/1851).

Most were able to couch their negative perceptions of Greenfield’s voice in seemingly neutral ways, though the repeated observation that she lacked cultivation could have been a euphemistic way to put down her race. Hardly any, however, had a problem discussing what they saw as the grotesqueness of her body. One reviewer compared her to “a sort of biped hippopotamus” (New York Herald 4/1/1853). Rosalyn Story finds that a “Cincinnati Enquirer

journalist called her the ‘African Crow.’ Another writer estimated her weight at between 275 and 300 pounds, noting ‘her voice is more refined than her person.’ ... Another reporter went to inordinate lengths to describe her physiognomy” (23).

Others were sympathetic in comparison. Stowe’s faint praise that Greenfield was “not handsome, but looked very well” on one occasion was not uncommon (Sunny 2:103). Story documents “one woman [who] took the liberty of advising the singer on the proper dress for a stage artist”: “I have a few suggestions to make, respecting your dress. You were dressed with great modesty and with much simplicity; still there are some things it would be well for you to lay aside.” The woman told Greenfield to only wear flowers in her hair, to dress in black silk with “muslin under sleeves and white kid gloves—always.” The woman concluded, “I know how important it is that, in the midst of all the prejudice against those of your colour, that your appearance should be *strikingly* genteel” (25; emphasis added).<sup>67</sup> Greenfield’s understated appearance should be very much noticeable. Stowe observed similarly conspicuous gentility when she wrote that “Miss Greenfield bears her success with *much quietness* and good sense” (Sunny 1:320; emphasis added). This comment implies, of course, that there was something powerful being contained behind her appearance.

Regardless of the effort at respectability, certain reviewers still found reason to ridicule Greenfield. One of these waited till the end of the review to play the joke: Greenfield “was becomingly attired in black silk, relieved by a little white lace work, and her dark, bare arms tapered down to very fair sized white kidded hands, which were as conspicuous as snowballs upon a coal bed, and they might well appal [*sic*] any of her pugnaciously disposed white ‘bredren’” (Newark Daily Advertiser 1/18/1855). Greenfield and Webb had to deal with such

---

<sup>67</sup> Greenfield’s correspondent was the daughter of Gerrit Smith.



racist and sexist depictions, a legacy of minstrel show characterization. Inserted within one reviewer's description of her appearance is an allusion to a minstrel song: "Her woolly hair was done in the Jenny Lind style; her only ornament was a bunch of white flowers, which graced the 'place where the wool ought to grow'" (New York Mirror 4/1/1853). Vera Brodsky Lawrence identifies the song as "Old Uncle Ned," a Foster original about a now deceased black man who, before he went "whar de good Niggas go," lost his teeth and the use of his eyes (2:410 n.108). The allusion is not, then, only meant to indicate the placement of an accessory, but to compare a live African American person to a dead one. Such casually racist reviews of Greenfield were common, though more brutal than banal.

If her time in England did not keep some from criticizing her appearance, it at least helped Greenfield get more positive feedback on her singing. Though Arthur La Brew notes that "comment about her voice was pointed" after she returned, it was much more likely to be favorable (116). James Trotter records that a paper which had given her especially harsh criticism before her time abroad had come around: "'The Swan' sings now in true artistic style, and the wonderful powers of her voice have been developed by good training" (87). That same paper reprinted another reviewer's judgment that her "very extensive voice ... has been much improved by the instruction of Sir George Smart" (New York Herald 10/16/1854). Others gave credit to her training: Her voice "is full and melodious, and at the same time evinces a thorough musical education" (Daily Pennsylvanian 1/10/1855). Another critic at the same concert admired her performance as much as he did his own ability to appreciate it: "Sweet in its tone, and delicious in cadence, she charms the ear of the most refined musical critic" (Pennsylvania Daily News 1/10/1855).

Greenfield's most controversial performance took place at New York City's Metropolitan Hall in 1853. No African Americans were allowed to attend the concert. Greenfield was the only person of color present.<sup>68</sup> Fearful of prohibited black patrons and angry white supremacists, the manager requested that police be present. Reviews of the concert numbered over one hundred officers in uniform or plainclothes. "A huge American flag, probably intended to subdue potential troublemakers, dominated the stage; and, perhaps for the same reason, 'the footlights were not lit, and duskiness prevailed the platform'" (qtd. in Lawrence 2: 409).<sup>69</sup> How different, then, was the New York City concert that James McCune Smith attended two years later, after Greenfield had returned from England. The Broadway Tabernacle was filled with "upwards of two thousand persons ... of whom at least six hundred were colored!" "Never was the Tabernacle so thoroughly speckled with mixed complexions," Smith told his readers. This proved to be a sympathetic audience. These heard meaning in Greenfield's music. One audience member was so overwhelmed with admiration that he "snatched an opera glass from the lady next to him, raised it to his lips and shouted, 'Hurra!'" (Frederick Douglass' Paper 3/9/1855). Perhaps indicating that he liked what he saw as much as what as he heard, the man expressed his vocal support with the aid of a visual instrument.

Smith's review suggests what about the newly cultivated Greenfield resisted refinement. He saw the political stakes in her performance: When Greenfield "appears on the platform, before an American audience, and her pure and perfect notes gush forth 'Sweet as seraph's song,' there trails beneath their ravishing melody the irresistible 'AM I NOT A WOMAN AND

---

<sup>68</sup> The African American press protested Greenfield's decision to go on with the show. A number of well-known figures, including William Cooper Nell and Martin Delany, spoke on the issue. Frederick Douglass' Paper, March 18, 1852; Frederick Douglass' Paper, April 8, 1853; Frederick Douglass' Paper, April 22, 1853.

<sup>69</sup> Despite the tense atmosphere, Lawrence notes that "the audience was determined to treat the occasion as a kind of super minstrel show" (2: 413 n.113).

A SISTER?”” When Smith heard Greenfield sing, that is, he saw the famous antislavery icon of the kneeling female slave. Perhaps this is what Smith imagined when he “urge[d] our colored friends to go and hear the Black Swan: apart from the rich musical treat they will have an opportunity of looking into their own hearts” (Frederick Douglass’ Paper 3/9/1855).

Smith closed his review by making a very different comparison: One “must grow up to the comprehension of Miss Greenfield and then he may criticize,” Smith realized. “Even Wendell Phillips, after seventeen years’ service in the ranks of Garrisonism, could only ‘bless the pistol’ which took effect at Christiana: the great soul who fired it off was beyond the reach of his intellection” (Frederick Douglass’ Paper 3/9/1855). Smith’s reference is to the Christiana Riot of 1850, “in which the Maryland slave owner Edward Gorsuch led a posse of men to Christiana, Pennsylvania, to reclaim his fugitives. The fugitives resisted capture, and in the battle that ensued, Gorsuch and three blacks were killed and Gorsuch’s son was seriously wounded” (138 n.162). It might seem odd to compare a concert singer to an armed revolt against an unjust law (the Fugitive Slave Act), but the comparison is apt. Smith felt that both acts were political gestures, even if they were not immediately understood to be so.<sup>70</sup>

In London, Greenfield sang a new song written for her by Stephen Glover. It was a duet in which Greenfield took turns singing in the ‘male’ and ‘female’ registers. Though the song’s lyrics do not survive, its title, “I Am Free,” is telling. Greenfield’s “I” is male and female, a black singer of white music. It’s the song of one who had met “Prejudice face to face and crush[ed] it” (Frederick Douglass’ Paper 3/9/1855).

---

<sup>70</sup> Philip Alexander Bell also understood Elizabeth Greenfield in such militant terms. He concludes his review of her performance by stating that “art knows no distinction of color, science recognizes no prejudice, education and wealth are the ladders by which we must rise, the weapons with which we can assail and conquer the demons, slavery and prejudice” (Frederick Douglass’ Paper, 3/16/1855).

Mary Webb, the daughter of a self-emancipated woman of color and a Spanish gentleman, was born in Massachusetts. Trained in elocution, she came to Stowe's attention after she delivered a reading of drama and poetry in Philadelphia in the spring of 1855. Stowe adapted Uncle Tom's Cabin to be read by Webb in the winter of that year.<sup>71</sup> After touring Northern cities giving her readings of The Christian Slave, Webb traveled to Great Britain in 1856. Like Greenfield, Webb profited from her relationship with Stowe. Webb earned enough money to support herself and her husband, Frank, as he wrote his only novel, The Garies and Their Friends. Jayna Brown writes that an African American man did not play the part of Uncle Tom until around 1878 and that an African American woman did not play the part of Topsy until around 1914 (64). "The Black Siddons," named after her British counterpart, Sarah, performed both roles 20 and 60 years before that, respectively.

During her performances, Webb stood at a podium and read out the play to the audience. She stood still and used no props, so she gained most of her effects from her voice's "great powers of modulation"—though this did not stop reviewers from commenting on her appearance (New York Times 12/18/1855). Webb performed at abolitionist meeting places and homes. This more manageable scale made a more visual style of performance unnecessary, as well as undesirable. One reviewer found that Webb "possessed considerable and rather peculiar dramatic power," even though her performance consisted in little else than "very little gesticulation, ... [and] judicious modulations of the voice, combined with earnest and effective delivery" (Illustrated London News 8/2/1856). Webb's reliance on her voice, rather than on gesture, for

---

<sup>71</sup> Eric Gardner has published a modern edition of the play. Harriet Beecher Stowe, "The Christian Slave," in Major Voices: The Drama of Slavery ed. Eric Gardner (New Milford: Toby, 2005).

her performances placed her in an aural tradition of acting that had already begun to be supplanted by a greater stress on visuality (Dudden 5-6). Without the distraction of histrionic acting, panorama, tableau, and other visual effects, Webb's performance became a spectacle of the body.<sup>72</sup>

In a biographical sketch that prefaced the published play, Frank details Mary's early life, her education, and her initial successes as a dramatic reader. Speaking of the effect Webb had on one of her first audiences, Frank reported that "in their enthusiasm and delight the audience lost the mulatto in the artiste; genius had become the conqueror of prejudice."<sup>73</sup> Rather than describe how her first audiences actually reacted, Frank is trying to model for her current and future audiences how they should respond. Indeed, as Eric Gardner attests, "all of the print promotion and review material notes Webb's race; often, her color is emphasized significantly" (105). The attention that reviewers paid to Webb's skin color fell within the comments they made about her bodily and vocal comportment more generally.

A number of reviewers complained about the muted quality of Webb's performance. One reviewer, though generally praiseworthy of Webb, indicated that "the only portion [of the reading] to which we could take exception was the rendering of the language of *Cassy*, which we thought would have been deepened in its tragic power, if given in a more energetic and impassioned manner" (*Liberator* 12/14/1855). After watching the first half of the play, which encompassed Tom's time on the Shelby and St. Clare plantations, another reviewer concluded that "all that could be said was that Mrs. Webb had a remarkably sweet and flexible voice,

---

<sup>72</sup> Sarah Meer writes that *The Christian Slave* is a spectacle of race, but I would also add that it is a spectacle of gender and class as well (188).

<sup>73</sup> Frank Webb, "Biographical Sketch," in *The Christian Slave*, 3rd ed. (London: Phillips, Samson, and Low, 1856), ii-iii. One reviewer of Greenfield agreed that "the individual was lost sight of in the *prima donna*" (*Frederick Douglass' Paper*, April 27, 1855; emphasis in the original).

apparently without much power; that she displayed considerable feeling in the rendering of particular passages; and that she was careful on the side of restraint rather than exuberance” (Illustrated London News 8/2/1856). Rather than rendering her invisible, Webb’s control of her body called attention to itself. One can speculate that Webb’s occasional restraint was more a matter of policy than a lack of ability: One reviewer had complained that this “delicate” woman’s performance “would have been a very fine reading for a drawing room, but was too tame for a public audience” (Provincial Freeman 5/12/1855). More likely than not, the drawing room—a domestic space—was exactly the setting that Stowe intended for her drama.

Webb was capable of acting with force. In the final act, which details Tom’s time at the Legree plantation, one reviewer noted that, “combined with earnest and effective delivery, she gave great effect to the last dark, powerful scenes of the drama.” The reviewer praises Webb’s portraits of Cassy and Tom in particular, writing that her greatest success was with the latter: “The hoarse negro voice, the solemn tones ... were very striking” (Illustrated London News 8/2/1856). Indeed, many reviewers commented on the skill with which Webb imitated the voices of the different characters. One reviewer commended how she “delineat[ed] with *graphic* truthfulness all the varied intonations of the many characters introduced” (New York Times 12/18/1855; emphasis added). The reviewer registers the effect of her voice in visual terms. Another reviewer admitted that she “has dramatic talent. She has a good musical ear, and intonates through the range of extensive and sympathetic voice according to the characters evolved in the text, and has evidently taken much pains to qualify herself for her task. ... Her imitation of Topsey [*sic*] was particularly good.” Another pronounced the reading “capital, the different tones of the different characters so well sustained throughout, that with the eyes closed

one would have been sure that different readers were engaged upon the parts” (National Anti-Slavery Standard 12/22/1855).

In the course of The Christian Slave, Webb sings a song in Latin (as St. Clare) and another in Spanish (as Cassy), but reviewers were most impressed by “the singing of the hymns” (as Tom), which “was remarkably effective. The peculiar negro intonation, the struggle after correctness of melody, the solemn meaning which the singer threw into the words, gave great prominence to this portion of the readings. It was a mixture of solemnity and pathos quite indescribable.” The same reviewer that had claimed that “there was nothing [in the first half of the play] to excite the sympathies of the hearer very violently; and, had the readings terminated [t]here, the reader would have made a pleasant impression and no more” found that “it was evident that Mrs. Webb had, in the latter part of the entertainment, regained a portion of that confidence which she had lost at the commencement” (Illustrated London News 8/2/1856).

Other reviewers commented on Webb’s singing. A review reprinted in The Provincial Freeman, a black newspaper published in Canada, claimed that her “‘Negro Eccentricities’ ... were so near perfection that our mind was carried back to our native State, where we had heard and seen the genuine ‘darkies’ of the South act naturally, that which Mrs. Webb had acquired by practice and study.” This aural illusion was so well done that this reviewer “could fairly see the characters represented by her” (Provincial Freeman 5/12/1855). Commenting on this review, Nyong’o observes how, “in a reversal of expectations, a black newspaper considered Webb’s performances of black dialect and black particularity a practiced skill rather than the testimony of her authentic self” (91). The reviewer’s ironic message, of course, is that, on their own, the *acts* of the “darkie” are as natural as Webb’s reproduction of them—that is, they are both decidedly *unnatural*.

Webb's performance does more than expose black particularity. One reviewer marveled at the "complete mastery" she had over her voice, "which enables her to individualise [*sic*] the characters which she reads." (The reviewer adds that her Tom and Ophelia were "marked instances of this.") In a comment that recalls Greenfield's doubled vocal apparatus, this reviewer thought Webb's embodiment of the disparate roles so complete that "the characters speak indeed through [her] mouth" (London Morning Chronicle 7/29/1856). This praise for Webb's remarkable skill at impersonating different characters resembles another that appeared earlier in the Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer: Webb's "rendering of the parts of 'Uncle Tom,' 'Little Eva,' 'Aunt Chloe,' 'Miss Ophelia,' 'Marie,' and above all 'Topsy' were as nearly natural as it is possible for an imitator to give them" (qtd. in Clark 346).

This reviewer realizes that Webb is acting the parts of characters of different races, genders, and classes. Though this reviewer does not admit that the types themselves are inauthentic, nevertheless, his comments say something about the performativity of each type. Nyong'o argues that Webb reveals black particularity to be "a practiced skill." I would extend his insight further and argue that she proves *white* particularity to be the same. Elocution tries to give the impression that it is unmarked speech. Dwight Conquergood defines elocution as "the performativity of whiteness naturalized," a form of linguistic enclosure that whites of a certain class use to differentiate themselves from the masses ("Rethinking" 326). If the voice of 'white' eloquence is learned, so too is the voice of 'black' dialect. Nyong'o writes that Craft's "respectable performances drew upon their minstrel antitype"—"The Virginia Slave"—for its effect. Webb, in that case, performed type and antitype (113).<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> We can think of Greenfield and Webb as performing a version of what Joseph Roach calls "whiteface minstrelsy," which ridiculed the idea held by white people that race or gender could ever be categorized.



In 1853, one New York City paper had planned to print a story about Elizabeth Greenfield's Metropolitan Hall concert. A portrait of Greenfield was set to run alongside the text. The story and the illustration were never published. A librarian at the New York Historical Society presumes that “the negative public reaction caused The Illustrated News to cut both the illustration and description.”<sup>75</sup>



Figure 3. “The Black Swan.” The Illustrated News. April 12, 1853.

In 1855, Smith’s review of the Broadway Tabernacle concert may have been one of the few: “none of these events seems to have elicited a review in the New York press” (Lawrence 2:653).

<sup>75</sup> Edward O’Reilly, “Black History Month – 19<sup>th</sup> Century,” New York Historical Society Library Collections Blog, <https://www.nyhistory.org/library/blog/?p=744>.

In fact, “the 1855 tour was the last that Elizabeth was to give in New York. She would later appear in a benefit recital but did not include New York City as necessary during her other tours” (La Brew 148). Smith noted in his review that mainstream critics were “dumb in relation to the Black Swan.” The difference between 1853 and 1855 is the difference between critical “silence,” as Smith describes it, and silenced criticism (Frederick Douglass’ Paper 3/9/1855). In canceling their coverage, The Illustrated News suppressed an image of the woman whose voice they would have called, had they printed the story, one “that must be *regarded* by the musical world as a phenomenon” (Illustrated News 4/2/1853; emphasis added). Greenfield’s voice was phenomenal because it *could* be seen.

There was no such controversy at Greenfield’s performance later in 1853 at the Stafford House, the London home of the Duchess of Sutherland, a friend to the antislavery cause.



Figure 4. “The Stafford House.” The Illustrated London News. July 30, 1853.

Columns, statues, vases, and over one hundred people crowd the room. There is a chandelier, which is reflected in a mirror behind it. Another tall mirror hangs on the left wall, opposite a large window on the right. Facing the crowd on a platform are five people sitting—the couple on the left may be Stowe and her husband, Calvin. Of all these people the only recognizable one is Greenfield, who stands next to her accompanist to the right of center. Greenfield is conspicuous, but in an unassuming way, as her correspondent advised and Stowe noted.

This is supposed to look like a regular concert. It is standing room only—a man in the right foreground offers his seat to a woman. The performance, perhaps, is about to begin: two people in the front of Greenfield and slightly to the viewer's right are finding their seats; a man and a woman in the left foreground chat. The rest are turned in expectation toward Greenfield. The audience dominates the review and would appear to do the same in the image. The text lists over forty attendees. The image documents many more. We are directly behind the audience. And yet Greenfield takes over the field of vision. She stands a little above the audience. Her darker color stands in slight contrast to the rest of the image. Most of audience members look toward Greenfield, and so our attention is drawn along with theirs.

Three years later, Mary Webb performed at the Stafford House, though it would be difficult to tell from the image printed in the same newspaper that had reviewed Greenfield's concert.



Figure 5. "The Black Siddons." The Illustrated London News. August 2, 1856.

Apart from Webb, we see three audience members, a lectern, a railing of some kind. Behind her is a tropical plant as well as some flowers: "Even as she capitalized ... on her status as an exotic other," Gardner tells us, Webb "consistently and simultaneously positioned herself within the definitions of a 'lady'" (108). Webb gazes out over the attentive audience. Her dress is dark with light accents. Her hair is up in the back with curls falling from her temples. Subtle, but still noticeable, are the contrasting colors of her black face and white hands, which, hidden from the audience by the lectern, touch the black ink and white paper of the script. One reviewer opined that "the name *black* Siddons is a misnomer" (Provincial Freeman 5/12/1855; emphasis in the

original). Another swore that it was “absurd” to call her black on the basis of her light complexion (Liberator 5/4/1855). The caption informs us that Webb is “a coloured native of Philadelphia.” Like the white audience, this detail is supposed to assure us of her racial status, but it only adds to the confusion. The woman in the audience’s hands are as white as Webb’s.

How do you represent in black and white a woman who is neither? I refer more to the results of Webb’s performance of ‘black’ and ‘white’ speech than to her mixed racial heritage. If Webb is wearing gloves—as Greenfield was told always to do—it’s impossible to tell. But that’s the point. It’s an imperceptible performance. Either way, the contrast with her face should make us wonder what our eyes are hearing. Susan Clark claims that Webb “performed without the minstrel signifiers of burnt cork, wild hair, and tattered clothing,” but she leaves one signifier out: dialect (346). In fact, “blackface was really the secondary signifier. . . . The *noise*—the *ear*—that which always accompanies ritual representations of blackness, is a much richer indicator of the presence of inversion rituals than mere blackface” (Cockrell 141). Webb’s skin tone has been colored by her tone of voice. *Blackvoice* has made her *look* black. Webb’s ‘black’ speech is realized here as black skin. Bingham argued that it was not “in the power of any one to alter the natural make of his countenance” (16). Performance grants one such a power. Webb’s face may be a fake but, as Bingham knew, something that is “wholly counterfeit” can have “the same effect as if it were founded in truth” (7).

I began the chapter with Walker’s and Garrison’s abolitionist texts. I have treated the reviews of Greenfield and Webb as allied documents, even though abolitionists, for the most part, did not author the reviews.<sup>76</sup> Through their performances, Greenfield and Webb appropriated the reviews for antiracist ends. Through its realizations, the resonant body resisted

---

<sup>76</sup> The next chapter will turn to another allied document that was not written by an abolitionist: Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation.

the antebellum public's ideas about black femininity. The performing bodies of Greenfield and Webb challenged the culture's strategies for representing them. Greenfield and Webb demonstrated that one could be "transgressive" while giving the impression that one was "conventional."<sup>77</sup> Their performances proved that a quiet body is not necessarily quietist.

---

<sup>77</sup> Brooks uses both terms to describe Greenfield (Bodies 312-13).

## Chapter Five

### Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in Print and Performance

On January 1, 1863, the United States Government Printing Office published a two-page, 7 ¼ inch by 4 ¾ inch broadsheet with the superscription:

*Emancipation Proclamation.*

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

A PROCLAMATION.

The printer added the two-word title by which we know the act today. The official copy, like all of the other fifty proclamations Abraham Lincoln made during his presidency, was superscribed: “BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. A PROCLAMATION.”<sup>78</sup>

But this, the most important of the sixteen he would make that year, or any other year of his presidency, got special treatment. The only new word the printer introduced, a word that does not appear anywhere in the text, is the first: *Emancipation*.<sup>79</sup> The word summarizes the force of the act. The title attests to the fame the only one hundred day old act already had. (Notices in newspapers and military reports would call it the President's Proclamation.) The name was new, but readers would have immediately recognized it. The indefinite “A PROCLAMATION” would have seemed redundant following “*Emancipation Proclamation*,” but that was the point.

“Emancipation Proclamation” omits the definite article, but this, Lincoln's sixteenth, was *the* proclamation as far as anyone was concerned. The document announces *which* it is before it

---

<sup>78</sup> In its placement and in its size, “BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA” is given secondary importance. A colon connects it to “A PROCLAMATION,” instead of the customary period, which had the effect of giving each phrase independent weight.

<sup>79</sup> In an undated note on the draft of the proclamation, Lincoln calls it the “Emancipation Proclamation” (V: 337). All of Lincoln's writings in this chapter derive from *The Collected Writings of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953). Subsequent citations, in reference to volume and page number, will be made parenthetically.

announces *what* it is. The definite and the indefinite articles, the repetition of “proclamation,” make it seem as if it preceded, indeed, makes it precede, itself.

Abraham Lincoln called the Emancipation Proclamation “the central act of [his] Administration” (qtd. in Holzer 2006 ix). This chapter treats the Proclamation not as a single act, but as a series of performances that occurred at different times and places in Civil War America. Part Two of the dissertation ends with an example of textual and performance production that recalls that with which the dissertation began: David Walker’s Appeal. The performances of the Proclamation included such diverse acts as Lincoln’s reading of the preliminary draft to his Cabinet in Washington, the recitation of the published text in celebrations across the United States, and its announcement by Union soldiers to slaves in the Confederacy. In addition to considering the context in which the Proclamation was composed, this chapter proposes that we consider the context in which it circulated. By doing this, we can broaden our understanding of a cultural event in which many Americans participated. In looking at its cultural impact, we can gain a better appreciation of the Proclamation’s significance and see, as Frederick Douglass saw, “in its spirit a life and power far beyond its letter” (Autobiographies 792).

Of all of Lincoln’s writings, the Emancipation Proclamation has received the least amount of critical attention. Scholars of American history and literature both concentrate on the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural Address—those that inscribe the walls of the Lincoln Memorial. Each of them has been the subject of book-length study.<sup>80</sup> Even more general studies of Lincoln’s writing fail to discuss the Proclamation at any length.<sup>81</sup> Though there have been studies of the Proclamation, they are generally limited to reviewing the political and

---

<sup>80</sup> Wills and White 2002.

<sup>81</sup> White 2005, Wilson, Kaplan.



military issues that led to its adoption or to discussing the limited role it played in actually freeing the slaves.<sup>82</sup>

The criticism of the Proclamation is well known. It lacks the high rhetoric of the Memorial speeches. The most moving passage is not his own.<sup>83</sup> Samuel P. Chase, Lincoln's Secretary of the Treasury, contributed the final line: "And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God" (VI: 28-30). This sentiment is qualified by the assertion that the act is "warranted by the Constitution" and done "upon military necessity." The sentence's syntax, which places these phrases into dependent clauses, conceals the fact that they were the basis for, if not the motivation behind, the Proclamation. It was an act of policy—with all the negative connotations of that word—before it was an act of justice.<sup>84</sup>

The Proclamation is a separate genre of presidential writing than the Address. Its name aside, it doesn't exactly count as a speech at all. The Address is delivered at a particular time and place, like November 19, 1863 in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The better comparison would be to the Annual Message to Congress. Article II, Section 3 of the U.S. Constitution states that the President "shall from time to time give to Congress information of the State of the Union and recommend to their consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient." The Constitution does not specify when or how the message is to be communicated. In December 1862, Lincoln called what he wrote "a paper addressed to the Congress of the nation by the Chief

---

<sup>82</sup> Franklin and Guelzo.

<sup>83</sup> Though this hasn't hurt the First Inaugural Address, whose best passage was suggested by William H. Seward.

<sup>84</sup> And it didn't even work. Douglass, like many others, criticized the limitations of the act: "It only abolished slavery where it did not exist, and left it intact where it did exist" (*Autobiographies* 792).

Magistrate of the nation” (V:536).<sup>85</sup> The Emancipation Proclamation’s subscription certifies that it was “done at the City of Washington, this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty three, and of the Independence of the United States of America the eighty-seventh,” but this seems more formal than factual. The Gettysburg Address begins by affirming its time and place: “Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation” (VII:23). The whole speech is taken up with setting. It seems so short because most of it reads like a prologue. Lincoln says “here” eight times. The fourth- and second-to-last exemplify the force of the repetition: “It is for us the living rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us.” If the repetition of “here” threatened to take away from its power, its inversion with “dedicated,” and the resulting split infinitive, push it back into the forefront of our minds. Similarly, Lincoln says “that” thirteen times, of which five are adjectives and eight are conjunctions. The fifth and sixth bring both together: “We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live.” The awkward juxtaposition serves to lend to the instrumentality of the conjunction the significance of the adjective, so that all of the thats reinforce the address’ deictic charge.

The deliveries of the Addresses have been documented. There are photographs of Lincoln at Gettysburg and at Washington, barely visible amidst the crowds that surrounded him. The photographs suggest how grand the occasion was and how insignificant the actors. Though Francis Bicknell Carpenter would portray Lincoln’s first reading of the Proclamation to the Cabinet two years after the fact, its strict composition makes it seem lifeless.

---

<sup>85</sup> The State of the Union as it is now delivered emerged over the course of the twentieth century. No President from Jefferson to Taft delivered it in person.



Figure 6. Francis Bicknell Carpenter. First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation of President Lincoln. 1864.

Carpenter based his portraits of each man on photographs of them. To get the clearest images, the men had to sit still. The vibrancy of the photographs is lacking. The apparently realistic painting is actually unreal. The men are ordered according to their positions on emancipation. The “accessories” are significant.<sup>86</sup> Everything means something. Nothing is out of place. The newspaper on the ground, the New York Tribune, criticized Lincoln for his inertia. The books that support the empty chair, Joseph Story’s Commentaries on the Constitution and William Whiting’s War The War Powers of the President, provided justifications for Lincoln’s action—as did, arguably, the Constitution, a parchment copy of which is on the table next to Lincoln. So too did the legislation collected in the two volumes of the Congressional Globe that support the

---

<sup>86</sup> This is the term Frederic Beecher Perkins, Stowe’s nephew, uses to describe the items in The Picture and the Men, the volume he compiled about the painting.

table. The two maps, of Slavery in the South and the War in Virginia, give context for the cause of the act and indicate where it would have an effect.<sup>87</sup> The key to the painting in The Picture and the Men guides our interpretation of the act it's meant to represent. Its necessity—the maps may be identifiable, but the books are not—demonstrates the propaganda value that the commemoration offered.<sup>88</sup> Lincoln did similar work in composing the Proclamation, but he attempted to render it invisible.

The Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation was not without precedent. Over the first year and a half of the war, officers in the field and legislators in the capital acted on the issue of emancipation, often without the authorization of the President. From General Benjamin F. Butler to Senator Lyman Trumbull, military and government officials advocated prosecuting the war as a war of liberation. In doing this, they were responding to the reality on the ground: Fugitives from slavery and soldiers for the Union were constantly coming into contact with each other, and at each meeting the same questions arose: Should the enslaved be returned to their masters? If not, could the government hold them as property? Butler knew that the fate of the three men who had fled to Fort Monroe was “but an individual instance in a course of policy which may be required to be pursued with regard to this species of property,” so he requested direction from Winfield Scott, the Commanding General of the United States Army (1:2 752). Butler defended his refusal to hand over the men in two ways: He argued that the Fugitive Slave Act “did not

---

<sup>87</sup> The former was made before the war, the latter during it. See Schulten.

<sup>88</sup> Alexander Hay Ritchie's engraving, which made all of the details clearer, continued this work on a much wider scale.

affect a foreign country which Virginia claimed to be.” He could have stopped there. Instead, he stated his intention to “hold these Negroes as contraband of war” (qtd. in Goodheart 313-14).<sup>89</sup>

The contraband argument dominated military and government action on emancipation. General John C. Frémont invoked martial law in Missouri in August 1861 to justify the confiscation of slaves. He was actually executing his own interpretation of the First Confiscation Act, which Congress had passed weeks before (Chaffin 464). General David Hunter also invoked martial law in Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina in May 1862. That, without the addition of confiscation, was enough for him to declare the enslaved people of those states “forever free.”<sup>90</sup> The argument would receive its fullest expression in the Second Confiscation Act, which Lincoln would sign in the days leading up to his writing the draft of the Emancipation Proclamation. The official title of that act was “An Act to Suppress Insurrection, to Punish Treason and Rebellion, to Seize and Confiscate Property of Rebels, and for Other Purposes.” It’s about the confiscation of property, not the emancipation of slaves, though that would certainly qualify as another purpose. Lincoln relied on precedent to authorize the unprecedented work he was trying to accomplish. He employed language that would let him effect emancipation while asserting that it was not only “fit and necessary,” but that it was also just.

---

<sup>89</sup> Sean Wilentz has it as “contrabands.” The difference is significant. As Davis recognizes, enslaved people were usually discussed as a group, lacking individuality (86). Some of Lincoln’s language—used elsewhere to talk about individual states and their relation to one another—undoes this work. Wilentz observes that “by treating the confiscated slaves not as chattel property but as persons ‘held to labor,’ the [Second Confiscation Act] implicitly endorsed the argument, long advanced by Republican political leaders, that there could be no legitimate property in human beings.” What he doesn’t observe is the use of the language of labor and service in the Fugitive Slave Acts of the Constitution and the Compromise of 1850. Senator Trumbull’s reference to “the persons they hold in slavery,” which Wilentz quotes, agrees with his argument. “Labor” and “service” were used as euphemisms for slavery in those earlier documents. Trumbull refused to equivocate.

<sup>90</sup> “Slavery and martial law in a free country,” he reasoned, were “altogether incompatible (qtd. in Miller 99).

In the preliminary proclamation, Lincoln declares that “the executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons” (V:433-36). In the final proclamation, he declares that “the Executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons” (VI:28-30). The “such persons” of the preliminary proclamation were now the “said persons” of the final proclamation. The final proclamation makes a concerted effort to build on the previous versions of the proclamation (and the congressional acts that preceded them). This shift in adjectives typifies Lincoln’s way of building up his authority. He does this in material ways, like in cutting and pasting in parts of the document that immediately preceded the version he was working on, and in linguistic ways, from “such” to “said.” Lincoln makes a point in the preliminary proclamation that he’s talking about “people held as slaves” and not “all slaves,” as the Second Confiscation Act does. “Said persons,” referring to “such persons,” is doing standard legalese work, while also affirming the personhood of the enslaved.

Section 6 of the Second Confiscation Act stated that the act would take effect “within sixty days after public warning and proclamation [was] duly given and made by the President of the United States” (qtd. in Holzer et al. 139). The draft proclamation that Lincoln read to this cabinet in July 1862 was to execute the act. He wrote that he was acting “in pursuance” of that section. He adopted, without attribution, the language of the act itself: He addressed those “participating in, aiding, countenancing, or abetting the existing rebellion” (V:336-37).<sup>91</sup> Quotation with or without attribution was an important part of Lincoln’s textual practice.<sup>92</sup> He

---

<sup>91</sup> The Act addresses those who “aid, countenance, and abet.”

<sup>92</sup> Quotation may not even be the best way to think about it. It would be difficult to determine, for example, who coined the phrase “forever free.” Hunter used it in this proclamation of May of

did both in the Emancipation Proclamation. In the manuscript of the final proclamation, he wrote quotation marks around the part of the preliminary proclamation that he had cut and pasted in.<sup>93</sup>

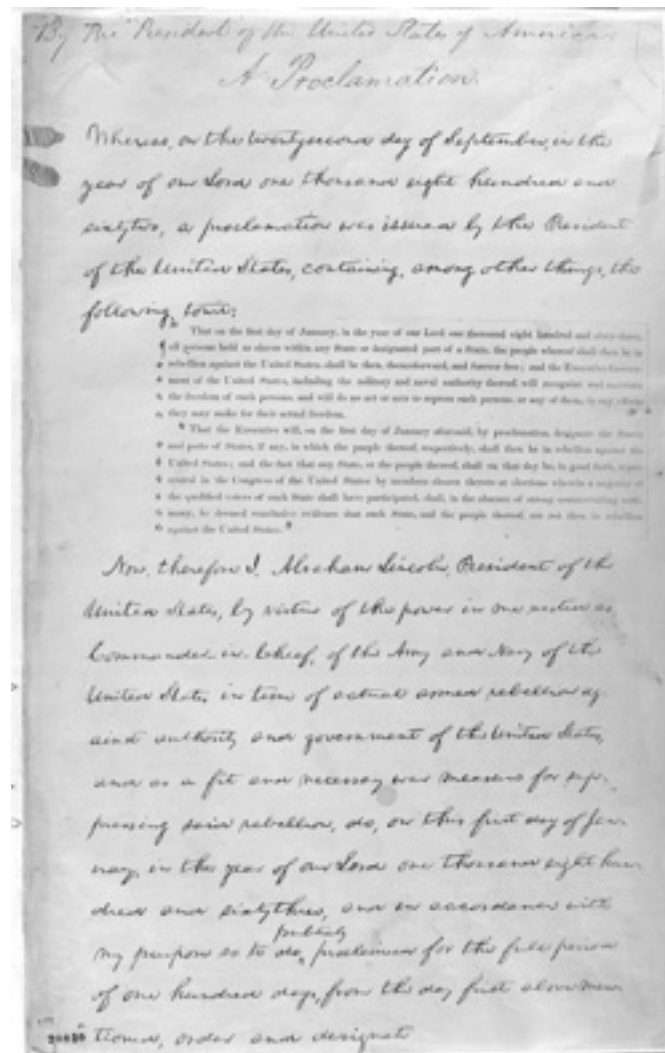


Figure 7. Abraham Lincoln. Manuscript of the Final Emancipation Proclamation. 1862.

that year. It also appeared in the Second Confiscation Act, passed three days before Lincoln wrote the draft. But the bill (S.B. 78), introduced the previous December, contained the language “the persons from whom it is said to be due, commonly called slaves, shall, *ipso facto*, on the commission of the act of forfeiture by the party having claim to the service or labor as aforesaid, be discharged therefrom, and become forever thereafter free persons.”

<sup>93</sup> The circulation of the proclamations involved the opposite: Others would use Lincoln’s language as if it was their own.

The rest of the draft is mostly spent revisiting old policy. He “again” proposes compensation for the “gradual abolishment of slavery.” He repeated that the object of the war, “as it has been, will be” reunion. His new policy comes at the end. On January 1, 1863, “all persons held as slaves” by disloyal Americans in territory unoccupied by union troops “shall then, thenceforward, and forever, be free.” Lincoln based the Proclamation on his own authority as Commander-in-Chief and on the Congress’s power to make war (Carnahan 108). But he, like Frémont, went farther than Congress had done (Pinsker 81).

The structure of the preliminary proclamation differs considerably from that of the draft. Lincoln comes first and he makes no mention of the sixth section of the Second Confiscation Act. Though, as before, Lincoln adopts the language of others—including, now, himself, we don’t see him working through his thoughts, as we did with the draft. Though he doesn’t say so explicitly, he continues to cite precedent to defend his actions. Over half of the preliminary proclamation is taken up with calling our attention to legislation. As in the draft, Lincoln uses the language of a congressional act. The difference is that he eventually cites those acts in the latter half of the proclamation, after he’s announced his policies. But he only adopts the language that supports his views. He does not work through the issues of legal personhood and legal language like Congress had. Though those in Congress who were for the Confiscation Acts were against the constitutional protections of slavery, they were obliged to comply with its terms. Lincoln skipped this step.

The two sections of the Second Confiscation Act that Lincoln cited codified the opposition to slavery that Butler, Frémont, and Hunter had acted on in the field.<sup>94</sup> Section 9

---

<sup>94</sup> Anastaplo argues that Lincoln’s omission of the Second Confiscation Act’s twelve other sections was a repudiation of them. He had, after all, quoted the entire “Act to make an Additional Article of War” (213). Lincoln’s use of the other sections in the Proclamation and in



allowed the confiscation of property, including slaves. Section 10 disobliged soldiers *and* civilians from returning fugitive slaves to their masters. Each used the language of preexisting statutes. Section 9 referred to the people in terms of property—“slaves” appear three times. Section 10 referred to them in terms of service and labor—“fugitive” appears two times. Both sections model for Lincoln the movement away from the constitutional language that had sanctioned slavery. Section 9 ends by declaring that confiscated slaves “shall be deemed captives of war, and shall be forever free of their servitude and not again held as slaves.” Treating slaves as “captives of war” originated in the Second Seminole War, when slaves that had joined Indian bands were considered “prisoners of war” (Carnahan 112). Even though it justified seizing slaves as property, it treated them as captives.<sup>95</sup> The equation of captivity with freedom is troubling. But “captive” refers to a person, at least, which “contraband” does not. A similar, if subtle, shift takes place in the promise that all those slaves “shall be ... not held again as slaves.” “As” makes slavery a condition, not an identity.

Section 10 ends by ordering that “no person engaged in the military or naval service of the United States shall, under any pretence whatever, assume to decide on the validity of the claim of any person to the service or labor of any other person.” The title of slaves and masters are dismissed. Both are transformed into people in relation to each other. The language of these sections of the Second Confiscation Act enacts the liberation they describe. Once the slaves “escap[e],” or are “captured,” “deserted,” or “found,” they are free. Once the fugitive has escaped, he is just like “any other person.” The other sections that refer to the freed people,

---

other policies shows that this wasn’t the case. If anything, Lincoln’s leaving out compensation and colonization in the final proclamation was a repudiation of himself.

<sup>95</sup> The legislative branch determined what kinds of property could be forfeited, though the judicial branch could interfere on constitutional grounds. It was up to the military to decide who could be taken prisoner (Carnahan 112).

sections 10 and 11, that authorize enlistment and colonization refer to them as “persons of African descent” and “persons of the African race.”<sup>96</sup> The word “slave” does not appear again.

Lincoln begins the preliminary proclamation with old policy again. He repeats his intention to propose compensated emancipation and colonization.<sup>97</sup> Then comes the new one:

On the first day of January in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State, or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.

Lincoln does not call them slaves; he uses the language that Congress had worked out. “All persons held as slaves” recalls, though it comes before it in the Proclamation, section 9 of the Second Confiscation Act. Immediately following the proposal, Lincoln calls attention to past legislation.<sup>98</sup> The effect of reading Lincoln’s unattributed quotations *before* reading their source gives the impression of a perpetual consensus that can be best represented in the historical present of “forever free.” The embossed, signed document, as well as the printed versions of it, registers on a material level the detemporalization that the language generates. Different people composed the manuscript of the preliminary proclamation at different times. Lincoln copied out the text in his own hand, cutting and pasting in the congressional acts as he went. He explained

---

<sup>96</sup> The D.C. Emancipation Act of April 1862 referred to “all persons held to service or labor ... by reason of African descent.”

<sup>97</sup> Both policies were part of emancipation in the District of Columbia. Lincoln would continue to advocate both of them months after the preliminary proclamation, in December’s Message to Congress. The D.C. plan provided for immediate emancipation. The preliminary proclamation allowed for either one.

<sup>98</sup> Anastaplo observes that the preliminary proclamation succeeds because it “shift[s] attention to the expected measure (on January 1) from the extraordinary measure (of September 22)” (211). While it does look forward, it’s also constantly looking back.

in a letter to the woman in charge of the auction he donated it to that he did so to “save writing” (VI: 539). It also saved him time.<sup>99</sup>

Lincoln originally wrote that the government would “recognize the freedom” of the freed people. Seward suggested changing it to “recognize and maintain” (Guelzo 155). Lincoln later said that he “had already fully considered the import of that expression in this connection, but I had not introduced it, because it was not my way to promise what I was not entirely sure I could perform, and I was not prepared to say that I thought we were exactly able to ‘maintain’ this” (qtd. in Wilson 132). What counted as the maintenance of freedom was unclear. Some thought it meant that Union troops would support a slave insurrection. Lincoln would introduce language in the final proclamation to counteract this fear—he “appeal[ed] to the people so declared to be free, to abstain from all disorder, tumult, and violence, unless in necessary self defense.” Still, it wasn’t enough for some. Secretaries Bates, Seward, Blair, and Chase “all urged him to strike it out completely” (Guelzo 178). Jefferson Davis thought self-defense still permitted insurrection. The slaves, he said, “are encouraged to a general assassination of their masters by the insidious recommendation” (qtd. in Franklin 125). European leaders feared the same (Carnahan 127). Lincoln’s reticence to promise more than he could guarantee is most evident in the line that Seward and Chase recommended be struck from the preliminary proclamation. He had written that freedom would be recognized “during the continuance in office of the present incumbent” (qtd. in Wilson 132). Lincoln didn’t only fear the Supreme Court, but his political opponents as well (Guelzo 180-81). Lincoln’s eventual challenger, General George B. McClellan, had opposed publicizing the proclamation to the Army of the Potomac. Only after being pressed by his friends did he do so (McClellan 471-72). In his addendum to the Proclamation, he intimated

---

<sup>99</sup> The text of the embossed, signed proclamation was copied out, Lincoln writes, “by whom I know not,” which suggests the anonymous way it will circulate.

that those who disagreed with the policy should bring it up at the ballot box (McClellan 493-94). And the Republicans did lose seats in both houses of Congress in 1862's midterm elections.

Many have commented on Lincoln's removal of "forever" from the final proclamation, but as significant are the other shifts in that sentence. The preliminary proclamation declared that the enslaved "shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free." It spoke of emancipation in the future tense (Guelzo 179). The final proclamation proclaims that they "are, and henceforward shall be free." The loss of one of the only poetic phrases in the proclamation—the alliterative, iambic "forever free"—is made up for by the steady rhythm of "shall be free." And "forever free" isn't gone either. It's still in the part of the preliminary proclamation that Lincoln quotes.

The preliminary proclamation is obsessed with time, just as the final proclamation would be obsessed with space. Lincoln waited to release the Proclamation until the timing would be right. Seward told him that if he released it in July, it "may be viewed as the last measure of an exhausted government, a cry for help" (qtd. in Guelzo 123). And so Lincoln waited two months. The Proclamation envisioned emancipation happening all at once or over time, in stages.<sup>100</sup> It would depend on the success of individual fugitives and the outcome of battles. The process of emancipation would be prey to the same contingencies as the proclamation of it.<sup>101</sup> The Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation is full of dates (March 13, 1862, July 17, 1862, September 22, 1862). It measures time in centuries ("the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and sixty two) and decades ("and of the Independence of the United States, the eighty seventh"). The day the Proclamation was to take effect was listed as "the first day of January, in

---

<sup>100</sup> The compensated emancipation plan he put forth in December would have allowed the states thirty-seven years, until 1900, to abolish the institution.

<sup>101</sup> In this respect, the Second Confiscation Act's emphasis on occupied territory, instead of the Proclamation's emphasis on unoccupied territory, seems more realistic. It would have emancipated those who took "refuge within the lines of the army" or came "under the control of the government of the United States."

the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three,” like the birth of Christ. This wasn’t done to trump Congress or celebrate himself, but to sanctify the act.<sup>102</sup>

If the Government Printing Office had emphasized the Proclamation, the final proclamation serves to emphasize the President. Its superscription was identical to Lincoln’s previous sixteen proclamations: “BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. / A PROCLAMATION.” The proclamation itself begins: “Whereas, on the twentysecond day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty two, a proclamation was issued by the President of the United States.” After citing the two relevant passages from the preliminary proclamation, he continues, “Now, therefore, I, Abraham Lincoln.” Though this isn’t the only time that Lincoln refers to himself in the third person in a proclamation, those others references were usually in reference to congressional acts that called on him to act as President. Here he’s speaking about his own actions. It, along with Lincoln’s citation of himself, adds to the sense that he is not acting on his own (Anastalplo 217).<sup>103</sup>

Lincoln assembled the final proclamation in the same way that he did the preliminary one. He wrote it out, pasting in clippings from the preliminary proclamation as he went along. He included the Cabinet’s suggested revisions, including the passage by Chase.<sup>104</sup> He waited to complete the list of occupied counties so it could be as accurate as possible (Guelzo 178). The document was then sent to be embossed at the State Department. When he was about to sign it, Lincoln noticed that the copyist had written the wrong subscription: “In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my name and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.” This phrase was meant for proclamations of treaties ratified by Congress. Lincoln ordered that a new copy be

---

<sup>102</sup> Anastalplo disagrees (216).

<sup>103</sup> It also anticipates the blending of voices that will happen in the circulation.

<sup>104</sup> Guelzo writes that this passage “makes the Proclamation virtually a second Declaration” (180-81).

made with the correct subscription: “In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed” (Guelzo 181). The phraseology for each act was predetermined, but it’s significant that the proper one refers not only to the signature, but to the hand that signs it.<sup>105</sup> “Witness” suggested a presence that “testimony” lacked. Lincoln had intended to sign the Proclamation before the annual New Year’s Day reception had begun. Then he noticed the mistake, so it would have to wait until after. This not only delayed the announcement of the Proclamation—which caused considerable anxiety in those waiting to celebrate it, especially as it wasn’t certain that Lincoln would go through with it—but it affected how it was signed (and not just when). Lincoln’s hand was weak after shaking hands for so many hours. He hesitated before signing, because he was concerned that the weakness of his hand, which might be visible in his signature, may be taken as a sign of the weakness of his resolve. He was noted to have said, “Now, this signature will be closely examined, and if they find my hand to have trembled, they will say ‘he had some compunctions.’ But, any way, it is going to be done!” (qtd. in David 407). The significance lies in what “it” was. If “it” meant the Proclamation, then it was done. If “it” meant emancipation, then it was going to be. The success of the Emancipation Proclamation would ultimately depend on the strength of federal forces and slave resistance, not one man’s hand.

The Emancipation Proclamation was a war measure and, as such, was publicized by the military. Most writing on the circulation focuses on its reception in the North. Scholars write about its appearance in newspapers, its transmission along the telegraph, the celebrations and protests that met it. They speak of the reaction in Europe and of the response of the Confederate

---

<sup>105</sup> Even though the hand that wrote the subscription was not Lincoln’s own. It was the copyist’s.

Government. But the reception of the Proclamation among the enslaved is not as well known. The most common way it circulated were the “networks of communication able to stretch into remote areas of the rural South,” often called at the time the “slave telegraph” (Hahn 2009 103).<sup>106</sup> A black song sung to the tune of “John Brown’s Body” that was recorded after the war naturalized this process:

We heard the Proclamation, master hush it as he will.

The bird he sing it to us, hoppin’ on the cotton hill.

And the possum up the gum tree, he couldn’t keep it still,

As he went climbing on. (qtd. in Marszalak 114)

Still, it was the military’s responsibility to circulate it as widely and as quickly as possible (Franklin 127). And though the effort benefitted as much from the industrial might of the North as any other part of the war, it remained dependent on the kind of word-of-mouth, face-to-face interactions that we associate with the slave telegraph, rather than the electric telegraph.

The Proclamation, in composition and in circulation, relied on a series of substitutions.<sup>107</sup> Lincoln, as President, gave the Emancipation Proclamation his authority. But the task of carrying it out—and, literally, carrying it—would be performed by others. The drafts of each proclamation were written out by copyists, each of whom wrote “I, Abraham Lincoln ... have hereunto set my hand” and were telling the truth. Lincoln described his actions as being done “by

---

<sup>106</sup> Medford has more on how the slaves came to know about the proclamation (50-51).

<sup>107</sup> Joseph Roach’s “surrogation” deals with “memory, performance, and substitution” (2). It refers to a process through which “culture reproduces and re-creates itself,” a process often centered on the substitution of someone, or something, that has died, or been lost. Though Roach’s “surrogation,” like Richard Schechner’s “restored behavior,” informs my general understanding of performance, it does not apply here. The performances of the Emancipation Proclamation I examine do not count as “twice-behaved behavior” because the Proclamation was never once-behaved (37-37). Though these performances circulate, they do not hearken back to any one performance. Though they all perform the same text, they have no original to repeat or replace. Even Carpenter’s painting is a reenactment without a referent.

the President of the United States.” His words were his own—and those of secretaries, generals, and senators. The Proclamation did not announce how its policies would be put into effect. Later in 1863, Lincoln would release his Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction, which did contain instructions on how it was to be executed. Rebels would receive a full pardon on the condition that they “take and subscribe an oath, and thenceforward keep and maintain said oath inviolate; and which oath shall be registered for permanent preservation” (VII: 54). The oath would be spoken and written. There were no restrictions on where or when it could be carried out. It, or something of the same “tenor and effect,” would suffice. The Emancipation Proclamation worked in the same way. Writing after the release of the preliminary proclamation, Emerson feared that it would end up being no more than a “paper proclamation” (132). An advertisement for a print of an imagined scene of reading of the Proclamation told that it represented “the only way in which the glorious news could reach the downtrodden and oppressed slaves, viz: through the faithful soldier, without whom the Proclamation would ever have remained a dead letter.”





Figure 8. Henry W. Herrick. Reading the Emancipation Proclamation. 1863.

The booklet that accompanied the engraving enacted a substitution of its own. As well as offering a “description of the engraving,” it supplied the text of the Proclamation as well. The viewer of the engraving is, like the soldier, the reader of the text. The publisher assured the purchaser that “the sight of this engraving will always produce happy reflections in the minds of every Christian and philanthropist” (Kellogg 400).<sup>108</sup> A disembodied Lincoln supports the scene. The torch that the son holds illuminates the paper—though it appears as if the paper itself radiated light—and casts shadows on the face of the soldier. The rest of the family acts out

<sup>108</sup> Holzer writes that the engraving’s “creators expected the principal audience to be not newly liberated slaves but philanthropic white abolitionists” (110-11). They would be happy because it reminded them of the work they had done for emancipation. They are part of what the print called the “party.”

different responses to the news: joy, gratitude, fear. The identity of the soldier is not given. He may be white or black.<sup>109</sup> The Proclamation was for both.

The War Department issued both the preliminary proclamation (General Orders, No. 139) and the final proclamation (General Orders, No. 1). Of the latter, approximately 15,000 copies were printed (Eberstadt 21). The heads of each military department were also responsible for publishing it. But by far, the largest enterprise to circulate the proclamation was by John Murray Forbes, a Boston businessman and a Republican.<sup>110</sup> In her edition of her father's letters, Murray's daughter writes that,

with the view of placing the Proclamation of Emancipation in the hands of the Negroes themselves, my father had 1,000,000 copies printed on small slips, one and a half inches square, put into packages of fifty each, and distributed among the Northern soldiers at the front, who scattered them among the blacks, while on the march. (348)

Forbes had received the support of Governor John A. Andrew to distribute the 3 3/8 inch by 2 1/4 inch proclamation amongst Massachusetts regiments, who, in 1863, were serving in the Departments of Virginia, North Carolina, the Cumberland, and the Gulf (Eberstadt 22; Higginson Massachusetts).<sup>111</sup> Murray's proclamation is significant not only for its possible reach, but for what it can tell us about the way it circulated.

---

<sup>109</sup> Vorenberg thinks he is an African American (126).

<sup>110</sup> For more on Forbes, see Lawson and Smith.

<sup>111</sup> Murray had run the idea by Senator Charles Sumner as well. Sumner "like[d] much the idea of distributing the Proclamation through the army" (349). Sumner thought Murray should go further: "Why not send to all the hospitals, camps, posts? The more the better."

Murray's intentions can be guessed at from the size of his title.

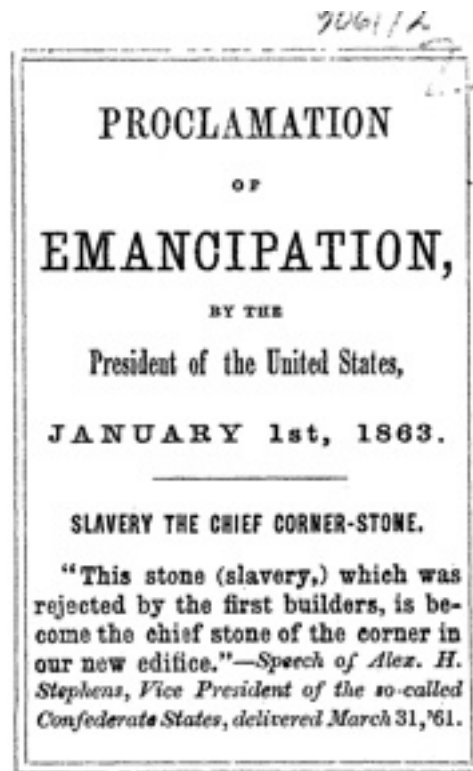


Figure 9. Abraham Lincoln. Proclamation of Emancipation, by the President of the United States, January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1863. 1863.

Emancipation is emphasized over proclamation, which is emphasized over the President. Under the heading of “SLAVERY THE CHIEF CORNER-STONE,” there is a quotation from a speech by Alexander H. Stephens, “Vice President of the so-called Confederate States, delivered March 31, ’61.”<sup>112</sup> The excerpt reads: “This stone (slavery,) which was rejected by the first builders, is become the chief stone of the corner in our new edifice.” This speech is perhaps the most famous

---

<sup>112</sup> Murray had consulted with Sumner about including this quote. Sumner saw “no objection” to doing so (349).

defense of the Confederate States of America and its Constitution.<sup>113</sup> Stephens declares that that United States Constitution guaranteed “perfect equality” for all. The whole speech walks through the new Constitution, detailing what of the old was kept, changed, or left out. He spends more time on race and slavery than on any other issue. He judges the United States Constitution’s plan for the end of the foreign slave trade to be a sign that the Framers thought slavery was wrong and, moreover, temporary: “This idea, though not incorporated in the constitution, was the prevailing idea at that time.” Their ideas were “fundamentally wrong” because they “rested upon the assumption of the equality of the races.” The Confederate States of America would not make the same mistake:

Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea; its foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition. This, our new government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth. (717-29)

The Confederacy would not be based on the idea of state sovereignty, but of white supremacy.

The Stephens quote is important because it proved that the Civil War was about slavery and should be for liberation. Lincoln’s idea was not new at all. Stephens took the position before he did. If the Confederate States of America were to be taken down, it made sense to strike at their base. Remove slavery, Murray reasoned, and the structure would fall. Emancipation gained popular support over the course of the war, but it was still controversial.<sup>114</sup> The inclusion of the

---

<sup>113</sup> Jaffa writes about the speech at length.

<sup>114</sup> Brasher argues that General McClellan’s failed 1862 Peninsula Campaign led the way to the North’s acceptance of emancipation.

Stephens quote makes the proclamation Union propaganda.<sup>115</sup> If the broadside of the Proclamation that Murray published, which also included the Stephens quote, was meant for skeptical civilians, the pamphlet was meant for skeptical soldiers. Lincoln feared that McClellan's troops would side with their commander. There is evidence that some soldiers did not approve.<sup>116</sup> Though there were initially threats of desertion, support for the measure grew.<sup>117</sup> Even if a soldier were already supportive of the measure, the pamphlet would give him the tools to convince others of its justness.

A more telling clue to the pamphlet's intended use is on its back cover. There are two paragraphs from "General Andrew Jackson's Proclamation of September 21, 1814" to "the Free Colored Inhabitants of Louisiana." Jackson had appealed to the *gens de couleur libres* to defend New Orleans against the British in the War of 1812:

Through a mistaken policy, you have heretofore been deprived of a participation in the glorious struggle for national rights in which our country is engaged. This no longer shall exist.

As sons of freedom, you are now called upon to defend our most inestimable blessing. As Americans, your country looks with confidence to her adopted children for a valorous support, as a faithful return for the advantages enjoyed under her mild and equitable enjoyment. As fathers, husbands, and brothers, you are summoned to rally around the standard of the Eagle, to defend all which is dear in existence. (58-59)

---

<sup>115</sup> 1863 was also the year that Murray, along with other influential Bostonians, began the New England Loyal Publication Society, which wrote, reprinted, and recirculated pro-Republican newspaper editorials throughout the North and West.

<sup>116</sup> See McPherson 1997, Gallagher, and Manning.

<sup>117</sup> The great majority of the Army of the Potomac voted for Lincoln in 1864.

This address, meant to recruit free people of color in 1814, is now meant to recruit enslaved people of color in 1863. But its placement in the pamphlet, after the Proclamation, is the first recognition of their status as freed people. Read linearly, the pamphlet convinced the white soldier, who then freed and recruited the black slave. But it collapses time too, as did the Emancipation Proclamation. It also combines the tasks of liberation and recruitment. The latter would be taken on through a separate office. In a poster from one of those campaigns, the white recruiter is shown as the hero, even if its audience were black. They are now being called upon to defend the nation they were moments before kept out of.

The “mistaken policy” in both cases are not named. Then, it was the decision to not arm free blacks. Now, it was the decision to not work for their freedom.<sup>118</sup> Nor are the “national rights” identified. Then, it was the rights of national sovereignty. Now, it was the rights of national existence. The “inestimable blessing” was always freedom, though in a truer sense in 1863 than in 1814. The “advantages enjoyed” by the freed people were nonexistent. The spirit of the message was to recall a time when African Americans acted heroically. And, in the Civil War, as in the War of 1812, black men would fight for the United States, as well as for themselves. The irony that freedmen would be faithful children, thankful for advantages they had not enjoyed, comes out in the text and history of the rest of Jackson’s address. Jackson promised fair treatment and equal pay, “namely, one hundred and twenty-four dollars in money and one hundred and sixty acres in land,” much more than General William Tecumseh Sherman would offer the freedmen of South Carolina and Georgia in 1865. The men fought well, well enough for Jackson to make a second proclamation praising his “fellow-citizens” and their love for their “native country” (119).

---

<sup>118</sup> Is it a “mistake” like, to Stephens, the Framers’ ideas on race were an “error”? Error is harsher. Mistake tries to deflect blame.

Recall the scene of Lincoln's reading the Emancipation Proclamation as Carpenter sketched it. There are ten men represented: Lincoln and his seven cabinet members, in person, and Simon Cameron and Andrew Jackson, in portrait. Cameron had been Lincoln's Secretary of War until he was replaced by Stanton in 1862. *President* Jackson held the country together during the Nullification Crisis of the 1830s. He was celebrated for asserting that "the Union must and shall be preserved." But *General* Jackson had betrayed the free and enslaved men that had fought in the Battle of New Orleans. James Roberts, a veteran of the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, published his narrative in 1858 when he was, by his estimate, 104 years old.<sup>119</sup> He was, while serving under Generals Washington and Jackson, a slave. Jackson had promised to free Roberts and his fellows if they won the battle. The battle won, he sent them home to their masters. Roberts recounts the way he challenged Jackson. He pulled his gun on the Jackson, only to discover that it had been unloaded on the General's orders (17). Jackson told his white soldiers, "Never arm another set of colored people. We have fooled them now, but never trust them again. They will not be fooled again with this example before them" (18). In the conclusion to his narrative, published a year after the Dred Scot decision denied black men citizenship and a year before John Brown led his unsuccessful raid on Harpers Ferry, Roberts wrote that he regretted his service. If black men had not rallied to America's side, the British would have won, and they would be free: "Therefore, my earnest and departing request is, that should this country ever again engage in war with any nation, have nothing whatever to do with the war, although the fairest promises should be made to you. Do not forget the promise Jackson made us" (31-32). Neither Jackson's nor Roberts' warnings would be heeded.

---

<sup>119</sup> He dictated it to an unnamed, black amanuensis. Martin Delany also wrote about a man he knew in Pittsburgh, a free man of color that fought for Jackson and also felt betrayed by his broken promises.

There were 4,000,000 people enslaved in the United States in 1860. Seward estimated that the Proclamation had freed 200,000 slaves (Guelzo 214). It did not apply to 800,000 (Medford 59). By April 1865, about 500,000 people had been freed. The institution of slavery would not be abolished until December of that year, with the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. 400,000 black men, most of them freedmen, would fight for the North in the Civil War. One out of every five would die.<sup>120</sup>

David Brion Davis once described what he called the “emancipation moment” (69). Though he gave examples of many such moments that occurred throughout the U.S. South, he retained the singular construction. Anthony Kaye has since argued that “emancipation was not a single instant at all but a process” (206). Both are correct. The composition and circulation of the Emancipation Proclamation were enacted in multiple places and at multiple times. The furthest from Washington, and the latest after January 1, 1863, was in Galveston, Texas on June 19, 1865. The proclamation that General Gordon Granger read out (General Orders, No. 3) was a paraphrase of Lincoln’s Proclamation. It began: “The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free” (Wiggins 62). The war that had brought about the act had been over for two months. The man that had signed it had been buried for one.

Diana Taylor argues that the archive and the repertoire are two separate, incommensurable forms, and that the latter is a more effective mode for enacting dissent. Taylor’s argument has contributed to a habit in performance studies to not consider the role that material forms—specifically, textual ones—played in the performance repertoires of African

---

<sup>120</sup> See Cornish and McPherson 1982 for more on the U.S. Colored Troops.



American resisters. This dissertation has demonstrated that the material and the embodied were not distinct, that each, in fact, effected the other. This chapter has examined the production history of the Emancipation Proclamation: namely, what free and enslaved blacks in the Confederate States of America did to compose and circulate it. I argue that the Proclamation was produced by the fugitive movements of contraband slaves and soldiers. These movements were reflected in the text, which promoted more acts of resistance. These slaves, and these soldiers, forced Washington to act on the emancipation and the enlistment of black men. Once enlisted, these men became indispensable to the military's efforts to liberate other enslaved people. The Proclamation, in summary, was the record and the instrument of their self-emancipation.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Bluford. E Pluribus Barnum: The Great Showman & The Making of U.S. Popular Culture. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. Print.
- Aiken, George L. "Uncle Tom's Cabin." 1858. Early American Drama. Ed. Jeffrey H. Richards. New York: Penguin, 1997. 368-443. Print.
- Anastaplo, George. Abraham Lincoln: A Constitutional Biography. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999. Print.
- Andrews, William L., ed. The Oxford Frederick Douglass Reader. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. Print.
- Bank, Rosemarie K. Theatre Culture in America, 1825-1860. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Print.
- Barnes, Elizabeth. Love's Whipping Boy: Violence & Sentimentality in the American Imagination. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011. Print.
- . States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. Print.
- Beavers, Herman. "The Blind Leading the Blind: The Racial Gaze as Plot Dilemma in 'Benito Cereno' and 'The Heroic Slave.'" Criticism and the Color Line: Desegregating American Literary Studies. Ed. Henry B. Wonham. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996. 205-29. Print.
- Beecher, Catharine. Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism. Freeport: Books for Libraries, 1970. Print.
- Beecher, Henry Ward. A Discourse Delivered at the Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, N.Y. upon Thanksgiving Day, November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1847. New York: Cady & Burgess, 1848. Print.
- Bentley, Eric. The Life of the Drama. New York: Atheneum, 1964. Print.
- Berlant, Lauren. "Poor Eliza." American Literature 70:3 (1998): 635-668. Print.
- Bernstein, Robin. Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights. New York: New York University Press, 2011. Print.
- Bingham, Caleb. The Columbian Orator. Ed. David W. Blight. New York: New York University Press, 1998. Print.

- The Bible: Authorized King James Version. Ed. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Print.
- Birdoff, Harry. The World's Greatest Hit: Uncle Tom's Cabin. New York: Vanni, 1947. Print.
- Brasher, Glenn David. The Peninsula Campaign & the Necessity of Emancipation: African Americans & the Fight for Freedom. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012. Print.
- Brooks, Daphne A. Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. Print.
- . "'The Deeds Done in My Body': Black Feminist Theory, Performance, and the Truth about Adah Isaacs Menken" in Recovering the Black Female Body: Self-Representations by African American Women. Eds. Michael Bennett and Vanessa D. Dickerson. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001. Print.
- Brooks, Peter. "Melodrama, Body, Revolution." Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen. Eds. Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook, and Christine Gledhill. London: British Film Institute, 1994. Print.
- . The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. Print.
- Brown, Jayna. Babylon Girls: Black Women Performers and the Shaping of the Modern. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008. Print.
- Brown, William Wells. "A Lecture Delivered Before the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Salem." William Wells Brown: A Reader. Ed. Ezra Greenspan. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008. Print.
- Carby, Hazel V. Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987. Print.
- Carlson, Marvin A. Performance: A Critical Introduction. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- Carnahan, Burrus M. Act of Justice: Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and the Law of War. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007. Print.
- Castiglia, Christopher. Interior States: Institutional Consciousness and the Inner Life of Democracy in the Antebellum United States. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008. Print.
- Chaffin, Tom. Pathfinder: John Charles Frémont and the Course of American Empire. New York: Hill and Wang, 2002. Print.

- Chaney, Michael A. Fugitive Vision: Slave Image and Black Identity in Antebellum Narrative. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2008. Print.
- Child, Lydia Maria. Correspondence between Lydia Maria Child and Gov. Wise and Mrs. Mason, of Virginia. Boston: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1860. Print.
- Cima, Gay Gibson. Early American Women Critics: Performance, Religion, Race. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Print.
- Clark, O. The National Era 7 June 1855. Print.
- Clark, Susan F. "Solo Black Performance before the Civil War: Mrs. Stowe, Mrs. Webb, and 'The Christian Slave.'" New Theatre Quarterly 13:52 (1997). Print.
- Cleveland, Henry. Alexander H. Stephens in Public and Private: With Letters and Speeches Before, During, and Since the War. Philadelphia: National Publishing Company, 1866. Print.
- Cockrell, Dale. Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Print.
- The Colored American 27 Jan. 1838. Print.
- "A Colored Canadian." Frederick Douglass' Paper 24 June 1853. Print.
- . Frederick Douglass' Paper 5 May 1854. Print.
- Conquergood, Dwight. "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research." The Drama Review 46:2 (2002). Print.
- . "Rethinking Elocution: The Trope of the Talking Book and Other Figures of Speech." Text and Performance Quarterly 20:4 (2000). Print.
- Conway, H.J. Dred; A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp. New York: Amerman, 1856. Print.
- Cornish, Dudley Taylor. The Sable Arm; Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865. New York: Longmans, Green, 1956. Print.
- Crane, Gregg D. Race, Citizenship, and Law in American Literature. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Print.
- Cruz, Jon. Culture on the Margins: The Black Spiritual and the Rise of American Cultural Interpretation. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999. Print.
- Daily Pennsylvanian 10 Jan. 1855. Print.

- “Declaration of the Convention of Radical Political Abolitionists.” New York: American Abolition Society, 1855. Print.
- Delany, Martin Robison. Blake or The Huts of America. Boston: Beacon, 1970. Print.
- . The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States. Politically Considered. Philadelphia, 1852. Print.
- DeLombard, Jeannine. “‘Eye-Witness to the Cruelty’: Southern Violence and Northern Testimony in Frederick Douglass’s 1845 Narrative.” American Literature 73 (2001): 245-75. Print.
- Dinius, Marcy J. “‘Look!! Look!! at This!!!!’: The Radical Typography of David Walker’s Appeal.” PMLA 126: 1 (2011): 55-72. Print.
- Donald, David Herbert. Lincoln. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995. Print.
- Douglass, Frederick. Autobiographies. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Library of America, 1994. Print.
- . The Frederick Douglass Papers. Ed. John W. Blassingame. Vols. 1-2. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979-82. Print. Series 1: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews.
- . “The Heroic Slave.” 1853. The Oxford Frederick Douglass Reader. Ed. William L. Andrews. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. 131-63. Print.
- . “To Captain Thomas Auld, Formerly My Master.” The North Star 7 Sept. 1849. Print.
- . “To My Old Master.” The North Star 8 Sept. 1848. Print.
- . The North Star 5 Jan. 1849. Print.
- Douglass, Frederick et al. “Letters to Antislavery Workers and Agencies.” The Journal of Negro History 10.3 Jul. 1925: 394-418. Print.
- Dudden, Faye E. Women in the American Theatre: Actresses & Audiences, 1790-1870. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994. Print.
- Eberstadt, Charles. Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation. New York: Dushnes Crawford, 1950. Print.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. Emerson’s Antislavery Writings. Eds. Lee Gougeon and Joel Myerson. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. Print.
- Fanuzzi, Robert. Abolition’s Public Sphere. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003. Print.

Fishkin, Shelley Fisher and Carla Peterson. “‘We Hold These Truths to Be Self-Evident’: The Rhetoric of Frederick Douglass’s Journalism.” Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays. Ed. Eric J. Sundquist. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990. 189-204. Print.

Flournoy, J. J. The North Star 10 Nov. 1848. Print.

---. The North Star 5 Jan. 1849. Print.

---. The North Star 9 Mar. 1849. Print.

Follen, E. L. To Mothers in the Free States. New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1855. Print.

Foner, Philip S, ed.. Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999. Print.

Forbes, John Murray. Letters and Recollections of John Murray Forbes. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899. Print.

Foreman, Gabrielle P. “Sentimental Abolition in Douglass’s Decade: Revision, Erotic Conversion, and the Politics of Witnessing in ‘The Heroic Slave’ and My Bondage and My Freedom.” Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture. Eds. Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999. 149-62. Print.

Franklin, John Hope. The Emancipation Proclamation. Garden City: Doubleday, 1963. Print.

Frederick Douglass’ Paper 18 Dec. 1851. Print.

--- 9 Mar. 1855. Print.

--- 16 Mar. 1855. Print.

--- 27 Apr. 1855. Print.

Freedom’s Journal 14 Mar. 1828. Print.

Gallagher, Gary W. The Union War. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011. Print.

Gardner, Eric. “‘A Nobler End’: Mary Webb and the Victorian Platform.” Nineteenth-Century Prose 29:1 (2002). Print.

- Garfield, Deborah M. "Earwitness: Female Abolitionism, Sexuality, and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl" in Harriet Jacobs and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: New Critical Essays. Eds. Deborah M. Garfield and Rafia Zafar. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Print.
- Garrison, William Lloyd. The Liberator 23 Feb. 1849. Print.
- . "To the Public," in William Lloyd Garrison and the Fight Against Slavery: Selections from The Liberator. Ed. William E. Cain. Boston: Bedford, 1995. Print.
- Gerould, Daniel G., ed. American Melodrama. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1983. Print.
- Gledhill, Christine. "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation." Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and Woman's Film. Ed. Christine Gledhill. London: British Film Institute, 1987. 5-39. Print.
- Gossett, Thomas F. Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture. Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985. Print.
- Grimsted, David. "Uncle Tom from Page to Stage: Limitations of Nineteenth Century Drama." Quarterly Journal of Speech 56 (1970): 235-44. Print.
- Guelzo, Allen C. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004. Print.
- Hartman, Saidiya V. Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Print.
- Hendler, Glenn. Public Sentiments: Structures of Feeling in Nineteenth-Century American Literature. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2001. Print.
- Hedrick, Joan D. Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. Print.
- Higginson, Thomas Wentworth. Massachusetts in the Army and Navy During the War of 1861-1865. Boston: Wright & Potter Print. Co, 1895.
- Hinks, Peter P. To Awaken My Afflicted Brethern: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997. Print.
- Holzer, Harold. Emancipating Lincoln: The Proclamation in Text, Context, and Memory. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012. Print.

Holzer, Harold, Edna Greene Medford, and Frank J Williams. The Emancipation Proclamation: Three Views (Social, Political, Iconographic). Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006. Print.

Illustrated London News 2 Aug. 1856. Print.

Illustrated News 2 Apr. 1853. Print.

Jackson, Andrew. Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. New York: Kraus Reprint Co, 1969. Print.

Jacobs, Harriet. Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written By Herself. Expanded ed. Ed. Jean Fagan Yellin. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009. Print.

Jaffa, Harry V. A New Birth of Freedom: Abraham Lincoln and the Coming of the Civil War. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000. Print.

James, Henry. A Small Boy and Others. New York: Scribner's, 1913. Print.

J. D. The North Star 10 Nov. 1848. Print.

---. The North Star 1 June 1849. Print.

Kaplan, Fred. Lincoln: The Biography of a Writer. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008. Print.

Kaye, Anthony E. Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007. Print.

Kellogg, Robert H. Life and Death in Rebel Prisons. Hartford: L. Stebbins, 1865. Print.

Kun, Josh. Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. Print.

La Brew, Arthur R. The Black Swan: Elizabeth T. Greenfield, Songstress. Detroit, 1984. Print.

Lampe, Gregory P. Frederick Douglass: Freedom's Voice, 1818-1845. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1998. Print.

Lawson, Melinda. Patriot Fires: Forging a New American Nationalism in the Civil War North. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002. Print.

Lemire, Elise Virginia. "Miscegenation": Making Race in America. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002. Print.



Levine, Robert S. Dislocating Race and Nation: Episodes in Nineteenth-Century American Literary Nationalism. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008. Print.

The Liberator 16 Aug. 1844. Print.

--- 29 May 1846. Print.

--- 23 Sept. 1853. Print.

--- 4 May 1855. Print.

--- 14 Dec. 1855. Print.

--- 28 Sept. 1860. Print.

Lincoln, Abraham. The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln. Ed. Roy P Basler. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953. Print.

London Morning Chronicle 29 Jul. 1856. Print.

London Musical World 16 Jul. 1853. Print.

Lott, Eric. Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. Print.

Manning, Chandra. What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007. Print.

Marshall, David. The Figure of Theater: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith, and George Eliot. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986. Print.

Mason, Jeffrey D. Melodrama and the Myth of America. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993. Print.

Mayer, Henry. All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery. New York: St. Martin's P, 1998. Print.

McClellan, George Brinton. The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan: Selected Correspondence, 1860-1865. Ed. Stephen W Sears. New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989. Print.

McFeely, William S. Frederick Douglass. New York: Norton, 1991. Print.

McGill, Meredith L. "Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and the Circuits of Abolitionist Poetry" in Early African American Print Culture. Eds. Lara Langer Cohen and Jordan Alexander Stein. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012. Print.

- McPherson, James M. For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Print.
- . The Negro's Civil War: How American Negroes Felt and Acted During the War for the Union. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982. Print.
- Meer, Sarah. Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelsy, and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850s. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005. Print.
- Meisel, Martin. Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983. Print.
- Merish, Lori. "Melodrama and American Fiction." A Companion to American Fiction, 1780-1865. Ed. Shirley Samuels. Malden: Blackwell, 2004. Print.
- Miller, Edward A. Lincoln's Abolitionist General: The Biography of David Hunter. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997. Print.
- Miller, William Lee. Arguing About Slavery: John Quincy Adams and the Great Battle in the United States Congress. New York: Vintage, 1998. Print.
- Moody, Richard, ed. Dramas from the American Theatre, 1762-1909. Cleveland: World, 1966. Print.
- Moten, Fred. In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003. Print.
- Nathans, Heather S. Slavery and Sentiment on the American Stage, 1787-1861: Lifting the Veil of Black. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Print.
- National Anti-Slavery Standard 22 Dec. 1855. Print.
- Nelson, Dana D. The Word in Black and White: Reading "Race" in American Literature, 1638-1867. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. Print.
- Newman, Judie. "Staging Black Insurrection: Dred on Stage." The Cambridge Companion to Harriet Beecher Stowe. Ed. Cindy Weinstein. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 113-30. Print.
- Newman, Richard S. The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002. Print.
- Newark Daily Advertiser 18 Jan. 1855. Print.
- New York Herald 1 Apr. 1853. Print.

New York Herald 16 Oct. 1854. Print.

New York Mirror 1 Apr. 1853. Print.

New York Times 18 Dec. 1855. Print.

New York Tribune 2 Apr. 1853. Print.

Noble, Marianne. "Sympathetic Listening in Frederick Douglass's 'The Heroic Slave' and My Bondage and My Freedom." 34 (2006): 53-68. Print.

---. The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000. Print.

Nord, David Paul. Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of the Mass Media in America. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. Print.

The North Star 2 Nov. 1849.

--- 20 Mar. 1851. Print.

Nyong'o, Tavia. The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009. Print.

Parsons, C. G. Inside View of Slavery: Or a Tour Among the Planters. Boston: John P. Jewett and Co., 1855. Print.

Pennsylvania Daily News 10 Jan. 1855. Print.

Perkins, Frederic B. The Picture and the Men. New York, Cleveland: A.J. Johnson, 1867. Print.

Peterson, Carla L. "Doers of the Word": African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880). New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. Print.

---. "Foreword" in Recovering the Black Female Body: Self-Representations by African American Women. Eds. Michael Bennett and Vanessa D. Dickerson. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001. Print.

Phelan, Peggy. Unmarked: The Politics of Performance. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.

Provincial Freeman 12 May 1855. Print.

Radano, Ronald. Lying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003. Print.

- Richards, Leonard L. Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970. Print.
- Roach, Joseph R. Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. Print.
- Roberts, James. The Narrative of James Roberts, a Soldier under Gen. Washington in the Revolutionary War, and under Gen. Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans, in the War of 1812. Chicago, 1858. Print.
- Robinson, John Bell. Pictures of Slavery and Anti-Slavery: Advantages of Negro Slavery and the Benefits of Negro Freedom Morally, Socially, and Politically Considered. Philadelphia: 1863. Print.
- Robinson, Marc. The American Play: 1787-2000. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. Print.
- Sale, Maggie Montesinos. The Slumbering Volcano: American Slave Ship Revolts and the Production of Rebellious Masculinity. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997. Print.
- Schechner, Richard. Between Theater & Anthropology. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985.
- Schulten, Susan. Mapping the Nation: History and Cartography in Nineteenth-Century America. University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- Singer, Ben. Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001. Print.
- Smith, Adam. The Theory of Moral Sentiments. Ed. Ryan Patrick Hanley. New York: Penguin, 2009. Print.
- Smith, Adam I. P. No Party Now: Politics in the Civil War North. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. Print.
- Smith, James McCune. The Works of James McCune: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist. Ed. John Stauffer. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. Print.
- Smith, Gerrit. Frederick Douglass' Paper 4 Dec. 1851. Print.
- Spirit of the Times 26 Mar. 1853. Print.
- Stern, Julia A. The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997. Print.

- Story, Rosalyn M. And So I Sing: African-American Divas of Opera and Concert. New York: Warner Books, 1990. Print.
- Stowe, Harriet Beecher. Stowe, Harriet Beecher. Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands. Boston: Phillips, Sampson, and Company, 1854. Print.
- . Uncle Tom's Cabin: Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism. 2nd ed. Ed. Elizabeth Ammons. New York: Norton, 2010. Print.
- Strong, George Templeton. Strong on Music: The New York Music Scene in the Days of George Templeton Strong, 1836-1875. Ed. Vera Brodsky Lawrence. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. Print.
- Swisshelm, Jane G. "A Letter that Speaks for Itself." Autographs for Freedom. Ed. Julia Griffiths. Rochester, NY: Wanzer, Beardsley, & Co., 1854. 230-34. Print.
- Taylor, Diana. The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. Print.
- Trotter, James M. Music and Some Highly Musical People. Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1880. Print.
- Walker, David. David Walker's Appeal. Ed. Sean Wilentz. New York: Hill and Wang, 1995. Print.
- The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies. Washington: Government. Printing Office, 1880. Print.
- Ward, Samuel Ringgold. Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro. New York: Arno, 1968. Print.
- Walker, David. David Walker's Appeal. Ed. Sean Wilentz. New York: Hill and Wang, 1995. Print.
- Warhol, Robyn R. "Toward a Theory of the Engaging Narrator: Earnest Intervention in Gaskell, Stowe, and Eliot." PMLA 101:5 (1986): 811-18. Print.
- Watkins, Frances Ellen. "Eliza Harris." 1853. "Words for the Hour": A New Anthology of American Civil War Poetry. Eds. Faith Barrett and Cristanne Miller. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005. Print.
- . "Eliza Harris." The Liberator 16 Dec. 1853. Print.
- . "Eliza Harris." Frederick Douglass' Paper 23 Dec. 1853. Print.
- . "Eliza Harris." Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects. Boston: J.B. Yerrinton & Son, 1854. Print.

- Weinstein, Cindy. Family, Kinship, and Sympathy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Print.
- Weston, C. L. The Liberator 20 Dec. 1850. Print.
- White, Ronald C. A. Lincoln: A Biography. New York: Random House, 2009. Print.
- . The Eloquent President: A Portrait of Lincoln Through His Words. New York: Random House, 2005. Print.
- White, Shane and Graham White. The Sounds of Slavery: Discovering African American History Through Songs, Sermons, and Speech. Boston: Beacon, 2005. Print.
- Whittier, John Greenleaf. The National Era 8 July 1847. Print.
- Wiegman, Robyn. American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995. Print.
- Wiggins, William H, and Douglas DeNatale, eds. Jubilation!: African American Celebrations in the Southeast. Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1993. Print.
- Wilentz, Sean. "Congress Confiscates Confederates' Slaves." Opinionator. Web. 16 Jul. 2012.
- Williams, Linda. Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. Print.
- Wills, Garry. Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992. Print.
- Wilson, Douglas L. Lincoln's Sword: The Presidency and the Power of Words. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006. Print.
- Wood, Marcus. Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780-1865. New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.
- Yablon, Nick. "Echoes of the City: Spacing Sound, Sounding Space, 1888-1908." American Literary History 19:3 (2007). Print.