

SPECTACULARLY CONCEIVED:
SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND BURDENED MOTHERHOOD
IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH LITERATURE

Doreen Thierauf

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Approved by:

Beverly Taylor

Ruth Salvaggio

Kimberly J. Stern

Danielle Coriale

Robyn Wiegman

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ABSTRACT

Doreen Thierauf: Spectacularly Conceived: Sexual Violence and Burdened Motherhood
in Nineteenth-Century British Literature
(Under the direction of Beverly Taylor and Ruth Salvaggio)

This dissertation responds to the traditional scholarly assumption that near universal censorship prevented discussion of sexual assault and pregnancy in nineteenth-century British literature. I argue that these issues are not only at the heart of Mary Prince's slave narrative *The History of Mary Prince* (1831), Elizabeth Barrett Browning's verse novel *Aurora Leigh* (1856) and her slave poems, as well as George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871) and *Daniel Deronda* (1876), but that women's reproduction is represented in remarkably similar ways in each of these texts. Elite women writers staged abused, suffering, or pregnant bodies in spectacular and often exploitative ways, utilizing a mode of representation that derived from sentimental genres of the late eighteenth century. Reading these women-authored texts in the context of abolitionist, medical, and legal literature, I show that the creation of female writers' authority in the Victorian literary marketplace was intimately tied to the rise of professional discourses, and that both processes depended on the prurient display of non-elite women's bodies in distress. I conclude that female Victorian novelists and poets, echoing male professionals, accepted the notion that the public display of women's sexuality threatened the institutional stability of marriage, procreative norms, and cultural reproduction. Spectacular displays of women's sexuality were strongly associated with working-class femininity, and writers' depiction of women's reproductive troubles supported a fundamentally conservative political message. My argument thus complicates previous scholars' understanding of nominally progressive nineteenth-century

writings. I demonstrate that rhetorical strategies marked by sentimental appeal, professional detachment, and half-concealed eroticism allowed elite women writers to position themselves as major spokespersons for cultural reform. These strategies ultimately helped cement the economically dependent status quo of female working-class and colonial subjects in Victorian Britain.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AL* *Aurora Leigh*. By Elizabeth Barrett Browning. New York: W. W. Norton, 1996.
- BC* *The Brownings' Correspondence*. By Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Robert Browning, et al. Ed. Philip Kelley and Ronald Hudson. 24 vols. Winfield, KS: Wedgestone Press, 1984-2016.
- DD* *Daniel Deronda*. By George Eliot. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- EBB* Elizabeth Barrett Browning
- GEL* *The George Eliot Letters*. Ed. G. S. Haight. 9 vols. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1954-78.
- LEBB* *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*. Ed. Frederic G. Kenyon. 2 vols. London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1897.
- MM* *Middlemarch*. By George Eliot. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- MP* *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave. Related by Herself*. Ed. Moira Ferguson. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.
- RB* Robert Browning

INTRODUCTION

Sentimental Beginnings and “Rouzing” Sexual Spectacles

The project’s title, “Spectacularly Conceived,” conveys my overall concern with nineteenth-century authors’ tendency to invite readers to witness someone else’s pain, particularly pain experienced by socially inferior women, in order to educate audiences in sympathy and politico-moral citizenship. Throughout this work, my use of the word “spectacle” refers broadly to the literary staging or exhibition of a person or object to generate pleasure in the reader, or to entertain, fascinate, and satisfy curiosity (see Mallipeddi 27). Throughout the nineteenth century, the dramatic literary staging of a woman’s anguished affect and the shameful exposure of her body (or of individual body parts) communicated her sexual availability. A raped woman’s lament of her loss of purity or, say, a narrator’s multi-page study of a transgressive heroine’s facial features served as sexual “vignettes, staged and managed for the consumption of a viewer” (Jarvis ix), and could be expected to evoke titillation among Victorian readers. As I will show, much of British abolitionism’s political force rested on the spectacular staging of female slaves’ involuntary participation in sexually suggestive scenes because anti-slavery writers realized that non-visceral descriptions failed to convince readers of slavery’s immorality. Later, Elizabeth Barrett Browning exploited that same representational logic to cement her unusually powerful presence within the transatlantic literary marketplace and to direct readers’ emotions into reformist channels. Even a famously “cerebral” writer like George Eliot,

publishing in the 1870s, was not immune to putting her coquettes up for public consumption to make a point about the decline of middle-class culture—a decline occasioned by girls’ moral miseducation and resulting in their mercenary summons of the public’s prurient gaze.

Nineteenth-century authors, with their penchant for showcasing female bodies on display, were indebted to David Hume’s paradox of tragic pleasure. At the beginning of his essay “Of Tragedy” (1757), Hume ponders the

unaccountable pleasure, which the spectators of a well-written tragedy receive from sorrow, terror, anxiety, and other passions, that are in themselves disagreeable and uneasy. The more they are touched and affected, the more are they delighted with the spectacle; and as soon as the uneasy passions cease to operate, the piece is at an end. . . . The whole art of the poet is employed, in rousing and supporting the compassion and indignation, the anxiety and resentment of his audience. They are pleased in proportion as they are afflicted, and never are so happy as when they employ tears, sobs, and cries to give vent to their sorrow, and relieve their heart, swoln with the tenderest sympathy and compassion. (185-6)

The problem of the “unaccountable pleasure” readers derived from uneasy spectacles constitutes one of this dissertation’s central themes. Most obviously, the derivation of pleasure from observing someone else’s pain poses an ethical dilemma.¹ Borrowing from Aristotle, Hume theorized that audiences’ store of negative emotion would be purged in moments of tragic catharsis. After releasing pent-up anger or melancholy, spectators’ spirits would soar. Others would derive satisfaction from having their emotions aroused towards morally worthy and interesting new objects, or from observing their own heightened sensitivity and responsiveness to someone else’s pain. Edmund Burke, writing in the same year as Hume, proposed that sympathetic observation of distress would create a certain pre-cognitive, emotional, and instinctive “delight,” especially when art represented anguish effectively. Burke reasoned that spectators would feel immense relief upon the realization that they were not the ones subjected to

¹ See Oliver, for recent investigations into ethical recognition.

pain. To counteract the selfishly voyeuristic dimension his analysis affords, Burke further posited—without reference to specific scripture—that God had created humans to “be united by the bond of sympathy.”² The delight of the spectacular experience would be infused with a productive sort of pain prompting the observer to relieve suffering. Where pleasure “hinders us from shunning scenes of misery,” Burke mused, “the pain we feel prompts us to relieve ourselves in relieving those who suffer” (43). Humanity’s bonds, therefore, were thought to be forged from the mutually exclusive impulses of selfishness and altruism, and relied on human beings’ universal (and universally identical) ability to experience and witness pain. Aesthetic form would aid spectators’ apprehension by converting the consumption of a public body into pleasurable aesthetic experience. The degree of the audience’s distress or passion would depend on the work’s artistic excellence because positive aesthetic appreciation could enhance the force of negative feelings. Finally, equality of affectability suggested equality of status, an idea further developed by philosophers, political orators, and, later, novelists, radicals, and socialists over the course of the nineteenth century.³

Neither Hume, Burke, nor the authors following them ever sampled the range of readers’ affective responses to tragic scenes, although, as I argue, writers attempted to harness tragedy’s pleasures to produce political affects with particular political effects. For example, readers of abolitionist materials clearly showed themselves to be drawn to the forbidden exhilarations of the violent spectacle, and British anti-slavery agitators explicitly exploited the spectacle’s attractions

² Burke 42; see Carey 29-30.

³ Dadlez 215-23; see Carey 30, 38; Sánchez-Eppler 100. Hume writes that this “very eloquence, with which the melancholy scene is represented ... diffuse[s] the highest satisfaction on the audience” (190-1; see Dadlez 217). Hume further: “The impulse or vehemence, arising from sorrow, compassion, indignation, receives a new direction from the sentiments of beauty. ... And the soul, being, at the same time, roused by passion, and charmed by eloquence, feels on the whole a strong movement, which is altogether delightful” (191-2).

in the service of emancipation. This project not only suspects⁴ that some audiences enjoyed opening themselves up to the titillating spectacle rather than honing their capacity for compassion or purging negative emotion (processes that in themselves problematically instrumentalize someone else's exposure to the public gaze), but also that authors consciously attempted to regulate, even institutionalize, flows of sympathetic and prurient affects. At stake is the consideration that Hume's "swoln" spectators—wittingly or not—reinforced and perpetuated the violence that the literary representation brought to their supposedly sympathetic attention.

My analysis begins with an examination of *The History of Mary Prince*, a mostly non-fictional account of a slave woman's life in the British colonies of Bermuda and Antigua. Ultra-personal testimonies like Prince's, consisting of a sequence of scenes in which the slave, "an aggrieved, melancholy, and sentimental witness" (Mallipeddi 2), first observes and then experiences extreme victimization, formed the bedrock of the British abolitionist publishing circuit and showcased reformers' belief in the power of narrated personal experience to effect policy changes. To justify my choice to begin with the *History*, I take my cue from Tricia Lootens who has argued that Victorian literary criticism, despite the powerful presence of postcolonial and Empire studies, still "echoe[s] and elaborate[s] most late Victorians' own ambivalent, haunted evasions of the heritage of transatlantic slavery."⁵ One can easily forget that Mary Prince's *History* (1831) and Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876) appeared within a time span of

⁴ Although this mode of suspicious reading might have become somewhat unfashionable, I would wager that the quasi-pornographic representation of sexual violence in Victorian literature constitutes a test case for the ethical limits of 'mere' surface reading. Rather than taking a "triumphalist cast" in excavating half-buried emplotments (Felski 230), my study's overall ethos is one of mourning in light of the army of ghosts still awaiting scholarly reckoning. See Burton 66, on "continuous suspicion and radical doubt" with which feminists should confront the historical objects of empire, and Armstrong 1995, 417, on paranoia as "an essential phase in the reading process" because "only a closeness to a text's terrors keeps one sane."

⁵ Lootens 2006, 494; see Lootens 2017, 16, 34.

forty-five years because the cultural and political worlds they invoke seem completely detached from one another. The chapter sequence of this dissertation intends to linger on some of slavery's "haunted evasions" as they reach into the second half of the century, particularly in their relation to the spectacular (non)representation of reproductive anguish and sexual violence. As Angela Davis states, "slavery, like [black women's] sexuality, lies continually at the periphery of our consciousness; eluding representation, it hovers over us [and] disrupts our lives with unpredictable eruptions" (104). Slavery not only stole black women's sexuality and reproductive functions "for white pleasure and profit" (A. Davis 104), its legacy continued—and continues—to burden descendants of enslaved people socially and economically. One of the mechanisms regulating that continued burdening is the pornographic gaze, the historical Western visual and literary convention that, as some critics have argued, first arose to "explain" black women's sexuality to Europeans and that, in the twentieth century, contributed to the rise of the porn industry. At the core of the pornographic gaze—wielded by men and women alike—is the unbroken history of "racial and sexual fetishism obsessed with the fascinations and horrors of black women's difference."⁶ Its purpose is the elision of women's status as political subjects.

The Victorian age incompletely processed slavery, culturally speaking, because the sentimental literary tradition that emerged alongside abolitionism in the second half of the eighteenth century was so successful in producing politically explosive affect that it was never obliged to query the inherent ethical contradictions of its form, particularly its purposefully imperfect concealment of slavery's atrocities. The abolitionist movement in Great Britain had expanded rapidly in the 1780s, mass-producing fiction and non-fiction that contributed to the

⁶ Miller-Young 28. The pornographic structure of representation on which I will elaborate below is unaffected by the implied gender of the narrative's voice or point of view. The explicitly female 'subjectivity' of Mary Prince's narrator as well as Barrett Browning's poetic speaker both deploy the pornographic gaze (see Kappeler 90).

consolidation of a Christian, often specifically Evangelical Christian, culture at home (Gould 11). Abolitionist literature appealed to female readers of the middle and upper classes, as activist publishers and authors expected that women would inculcate anti-slavery convictions in their (male) children who would grow up to become abolitionist lawmakers. Because women, the cultural guardians of morality, were seen to be less susceptible to temptations of economic gain and political power, abolitionist texts invoked women's 'innate' compassion and posited an imagined, and highly fraught, alliance between anti-slavery's goals and the emerging cultural regime of metropolitan domesticity. Consequently, public approval of black women's slave narratives (reflected in high sales numbers), was most easily won if stories successfully conveyed the fantasy that formerly enslaved women's virtue would survive slavery more or less intact and that they were ready to serve the ends of white English domesticity.⁷ Harnessing domestic ideology to rectify the evils of slavery not only educated white readers in the moral and emotional standards at home, but perpetuated structures of authority that themselves were at the heart of slavery.

Abolition mobilized elaborate conventions of sentimental discourse designed to politicize readers and, through popular consent, effect the end of British slavery. Crucially, the sentimental mode, with its appeals to readers' tears, was constitutionally "leaky." It portrayed slavery's

⁷ See Sánchez-Eppler 109. White metropolitan morality on both sides of the Atlantic deemed rape an essentially nonpublic crime—yet one with catastrophic public ramifications—and did not easily sanction written accounts that openly suggested it to be a public and virtually omnipresent practice under slavery. The metropolitan understanding of female virtue equated chastity with silence. Consequently, "it [was] impossible for an unchaste woman to be raped" (Hartman 105). Since rape was seen to erase the victim's already scant claims to liberal subjectivity, a black woman narrating her own rape was doubly dubious to a white audience already skeptical about black people's suitedness for 'civilization' (Santamarina 232; see Altink 67; Woodard 133). Despite abolitionist texts' focus on individual physical torture and subjection under slavery, they registered women's sexual trauma as highly codified circumlocution—easy to be recognized if one knew what to look for. In what follows I suggest that the knowing allusion to a socially inferior woman's rape is, in fact, the necessary ingredient for post-abolition liberal British subjectivity.

atrocities as romantic family tragedy and sensationally divulged the open secret of systematic miscegenation between white men and black or mixed-race women in the colonies. Confronted with accusations of sexual exploitation on a massive scale, proslavery authors, in turn, asserted that women of color were by nature precocious and promiscuous.⁸ In aggregate, these discursive battles, with their standardized exposure of black bodies in pain, perpetuated rather than confronted slavery's commodifications, equally subjecting colonial bodies to their respective labor disciplines and market regimes (see Mallipeddi 3-4). I suggest that the convention of not-quite-unspeakable horrors—those ghostly hoverings and hauntings⁹ towards which Lootens and Davis point when they address slavery's unfinished legacies—continued to shape the British cultural imaginary, and the novel tradition in particular, after Emancipation in 1834. The result was a long-standing tradition of a public language that failed to document sexual crimes, denied poor women the ability to articulate sexual identities, and maintained pornographic registers wielded by cultural elites to stabilize pre-Emancipation social and labor hierarchies.

One of the most prominent long-term consequences of 'leaky' sentimental story-telling this project considers is the form of "enforced narratives of the self" (Steedman 55, 48). These are moments in which women (half-)confess to having been raped¹⁰ or abused, or in which their

⁸ See Miller-Young 33. British and colonial law usually disregarded rape or attempted rape of slaves at the hands of white men. Since colonial law did not (fully) recognize slaves' subjectivity, sexual exploitation was automated as the legitimate use of forever willing property. Henrice Altink shows that some colonies imposed laws to reduce the occurrence of interracial sex. In 1826, Jamaica established the death sentence for white planters who had raped a slave, a singularly strict prohibition which did not occasion any convictions as it required slave women to procure complex evidence documenting the crime. Altink interprets the law as a strategy to assuage abolitionist voices in the British government (76). Nevertheless, some lingering doubt about black women's humanity and interiority was regularly rephrased as the myth of black women's seduction of white masters, expunging and romanticizing colonial sexual violence (Hartman 80-7; see Beckles 133).

⁹ For contending with Victorian ghosts, see Roach 2-3 and *passim*, and Freedgood 45-7.

¹⁰ While it might seem obvious to define rape as sexual intercourse between two (or more) partners without the consent of (at least) one of the partners, the concept remains notoriously difficult to define. Requiring ever-changing evidence for successful prosecution, rape's legal status is contingent on historically shifting assumptions about ownership of women's bodies and its impact on social relationships. For the purposes of this project, rape will be

transgressive actions are divulged for public consumption. Regardless of their fictional content, such narratives usually take the shape of autobiography, complete with birth place, names of parents and lovers, and rueful conversion to bourgeois domesticity. Moreover, they are mediated by middle-class or elite amanuenses. This socially superior interlocutory agent assumes the rights of a “magistrate,” in Jacques Derrida’s terms, a narrator whose authority sometimes overlaps or competes with the author’s. The magistrate occasions the confessional narrative, controls its plot, possesses the social power to demand a statement, institutes the victim-expert dyad, interprets what is said, measures the testimony against existing moral law, finds the speaker sufficiently virtuous, and vouches that the story is safe for public perusal. In the finished narrative, the magistrate’s leading questions are edited out, consolidating the genre as self-evident and natural. The magistrate’s domicile—whether Thomas Pringle’s house in Claremont Square, Barrett Browning’s Florentine refuge¹¹, or George Eliot’s vast medical library—becomes the birthplace of sexuality’s “official documents,” silencing alternative cultural possibilities of

broadly defined in accordance to an Elizabethan statute that guided nineteenth-century British law, according to which rape is “the carnal knowledge of a woman forcibly and against her will” (qtd. in Conley 520). Contemporary Western law tends to privilege concerns about the deliberate violent and devastating intrusion into the victim’s most intimate bodily and psychological space, and measures the severity of the crime against the human-rights ideal that a person’s dignity and physical integrity are indefeasible (Horvath and Brown 3). Unlike earlier legal systems that prosecuted rape as a property crime that entitled fathers, husbands, or employers to restitution, nineteenth-century British law acknowledged the existence of women’s independent will. Yet, the courts based their adjudication on inferences about the accuser’s moral character, and most of the investigation hinged on assessing the degree of the accuser’s physical resistance. Carelessness, flirtatious behavior, or less than violent struggle damaged the accuser’s credibility and led to a verdict that blamed her for the loss of her reputation. Throughout the nineteenth century (and until today) judges were less likely to rule in favor of the accuser if she was of low social status. Judges considered male sexual aggression a laudable and inevitable feature of virile masculinity, although, as I will show in the first and third parts of this dissertation, high-status men were expected to shield violent impulses from public scrutiny. Sexual assaults were rhetorically minimized—and often forgiven—as unfortunate temporary transgressions, while rape accusations publically announced a woman’s loss of virtue and invited ridicule or incredulity (Conley 524-32). Under slavery, the systematic rape of enslaved women was a technology of domination, repression, and terror, employed to disable resistance, humiliate women and men, and thus disintegrate slave cultures (A. Davis 116).

¹¹ In accordance with scholarly convention, I will henceforth abbreviate the poet’s name as “EBB.”

speaking about sex.¹² I argue that women writers specifically assumed the guise of the magistrate (usually imagined as sentimental or benevolent sisterhood) to claim authority and authorship within a literary market hostile towards female authors, winning status as regulators and institutionalizers of other women's bodies. This guise suspended historical or fictional subjects in a state of "*domiciliation*"—put them under "house arrest" (Derrida 1995, 10, 12)—to ensure that women writers' own lineage, literary or biological, would survive into the future. Black and poor women's sexual labor was thus harnessed by literary representations to help define the terms of citizenship, liberal selfhood, and cultural belonging (see Miller-Young 35).

Although there has been a recent uptick in interest in sentimentality, many critics approach it dismissively.¹³ Particularly scholars of nineteenth-century literature appear to find sentimentalism's grab for readers' viscera distastefully self-indulgent. Lootens has remarked that scholars seem more at ease with the rhetorical violences of Victorian political satire than with sentimental literature's ability to "jerk" one's "corporeal chain."¹⁴ Resisting the lure of today's hostility towards "tear-jerking," I would like to respond to Lootens's and Marjorie Stone's repeated calls for further explorations of the relationship between representations of anguish, ethics, and literary aesthetics.¹⁵ Sentimentality, along with its related and parallel tradition,

¹² Derrida 1995, 9; see Steedman 67.

¹³ See Mallipeddi 4; Sánchez-Eppler 100.

¹⁴ Lootens 2006, 495; see Lootens 2017, 2, 16.

¹⁵ The current critical aversion towards sentimentalism has to do with its starkly feminized, universally appealing 'gushing.' It is a rhetorical mode addressing everyone in possession of a body and a 'heart,' regardless of age, political affinity, or intellectual preparation. Its historical association with maternalist philanthropy and with literary genres such as romance and melodrama renders the "tear-jerker" akin to the call of an imagined universal mother—a call that academics, navigating traditionally masculinist professional hierarchies, are loathe to heed. Sentimental literature written by and for women, however, "exercise[ed] unprecedented (and, perhaps, since unequalled) pragmatic public power" in the first half of the nineteenth century and therefore warrant renewed interest (Lootens 2017, 39, see 16; Stone 2002, 150).

gothic melodrama, is defined by its preoccupation with feelings and changing emotional states, and consists of distinct and portable rhetorical strategies that emphasize representations of human emotional and physical anguish. By default, its spectacular scenes stage suffering as world-historically exceptional to win the reader's sympathy and mobilize stereotype to support readers' quick apprehension of the sufferer's moral worth.¹⁶ As I will show in the first half of this project, antislavery authors invented an unstable black female body immediately recognizable as both rebelliously heroic and loyally servile. Translating political scandals into sexual ones, abolitionism's sentimental spectacles imagined non-elite bodies (and souls) as deformed by circumstance, thereby soliciting and authorizing the well-meaning intervention of institutional establishments.¹⁷ The early Victorian liberal state, emerging after Emancipation in 1834, rests on a historical legacy of intense political feeling and complexly imbricated spectatorship, and its coherence benefited from the cultural superimposition of sexual language over that of the centuries-long struggle for participatory democracy (see Levy 29-30).

The spectacle as an event designed to foment political affect arose during a period of relative political stability and economic prosperity in late eighteenth-century Britain. For the first time, increasingly literate and wealthy readers were at sufficient leisure to take an interest in the suffering of others, less likely to encounter suffering in their daily lives than their ancestors, and able to provide private financial redress.¹⁸ Nineteenth-century philanthropic and social movements, erected on depictions of pain, can be considered cultural reactions to the vanishing

¹⁶ See Jarvis 14 and *passim*, for "scenic-ness" as underlying and subverting the novel's realism; see Lootens 2017, 17, for the "click of the cliché" on which sentimental writing thrives.

¹⁷ See Levy 36; Sánchez-Eppler 101.

¹⁸ Carey 18-9; Sánchez-Eppler 100.

of overt physical violence from everyday life and indicate that, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, a significant portion of the population found the infliction and experience of violence intolerable (Carey 19-20). The ability to sympathize with anguished virtue and innocence (as opposed to guilty or unruly people) indicated one's self-conscious participation in benevolent, non-violent civilization. With its focus on the human body's capacity to feel pain, the spectacle invited the European reader to identify with people of vastly different backgrounds, cementing the spectator's own distinctive identity in the process. It also reframed the imperial conquests of the past as literary, philanthropic, and commercial activity in the present. The spectacle confronted British readers with the historical outcomes of exploitative practices abroad and at home (be it rapacious masculinity, economic marginalization, or the slave trade), and conveyed arguments for political change by representing suffering as an occasion for pity and generous giving—all the while allowing the sentimental, politically responsible bourgeois self to stabilize itself into the future.¹⁹

The spectacle of pain linked the concerns of abolitionists with that of mid-century feminists, the latter's self-image propped up by the mythologized memory of the successful anti-slavery campaigns.²⁰ The later parts of the dissertation take liberal feminists' problematic equation of marriage with slavery and prostitution, stock motifs in Victorian writing, as one of their central themes. Under the legal fiction of coverture, Victorian wives effectively 'enjoyed' the status of physical and economic property to their husbands. Cultural campaigns against mercenary marriage and for companionate unions employed rhetoric reminding philanthropic

¹⁹ Mallipeddi 7; see Levy 24.

²⁰ See Sánchez-Eppler 100; Lootens 2017, 31. Lootens further suggests that late-Victorian writers struggled to maintain faith in the moral promise established by Emancipation as the liberatory project of Empire appeared to be collapsing (2017, 34).

women, many of them previously involved in the abolition of slavery, that they themselves were sexual slaves. As part of such rhetorical maneuvers, white Victorian women writers tended to appropriate and erase colonial subjects' difference to align slaves' narratives more closely with their own. Women writers recognized that their non-conformity with the norm of white maleness blocked them from attaining liberal personhood and political inclusion. Since reproduction and marriage were understood to stymie and replace women's political speech, the British legacy of slavery helped women articulate the conditions of their own disenfranchisement by rhetorically equating bourgeois women and slaves in search of liberal subjectivity and self-ownership, absorbing the latter within the domestic narrative of the former.²¹

Methodological Considerations

This project is interested in registers of representation and traces the conscious inability of nineteenth-century British literature to articulate that to which it eagerly and powerfully alludes.²² At the heart of that inability is a fundamental "conflict between a structural or material and an emotional or moral conception of social reality" (Sánchez-Eppler 112). Reformist women

²¹ See Brown 1995, 124-6; Lootens 2017, 40-1; Sánchez-Eppler 93-4.

²² Jean-François Lyotard's concept of the *differend* has been used to describe Marian's inability to narrate her own rape in Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (Lawson and Shakinovsky 116-7), and holds true for all examples of sexual violence in this project. Lyotard defines the *differend* as a linguistic situation between two opposing parties, in which "the 'regulation' of the conflict that opposes them is done in the idiom of one of the parties while the wrong suffered by the other is not signified in that idiom" (Lyotard 9). This deprives the accusing party of the means to prove that they have been wronged and the moment of speaking yields silence, maintaining the status quo (10):

The differend is the unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be able to be put into phrases cannot yet be. ... This is when the human beings who thought they could use language as an instrument of communication learn through the feeling of pain which accompanies silence ... that they are summoned by language, ... to recognize that what remains to be phrased exceeds what they can presently phrase, and that they must be allowed to institute idioms which do not yet exist" (Lyotard 13).

Sexual violence and women's reproductive self-reflection is not yet part of official discourse, but each of the texts I investigate works towards developing the public language without which this dissertation could not have been written.

writers' lack of exposure to material realities of slavery, working-class poverty, or (in many cases) sexual violence made it impossible for them to separate the ideals of bourgeois domesticity from the interconnected systems of capitalist patriarchal authority that occasioned the oppressions against which they agitated. Their mode of appeal compensated for the absence of material realism via 'real' stimulation of readers' affective and bodily apparatus with the help of spectacular scenes of suffering, spiritual appeals, and recourse to authorized professional registers. The political efficacy and economic success of their works relied on writers' ability to "rearrang[e] the real," replacing documentary evidence from inaccessible places in the colonies or the slums with that of readers' immediate feeling (Sánchez-Eppler 100). Bodily indicators of sympathy (or at least fascination) are thus the preferred vehicle of communication, while, throughout the texts I study, professional epistemologies delimit what can be known and articulated about the subject at hand.²³

Additionally, my project faces the strange fact that many Victorians feared words more than actions. In what follows, I ponder certain phrases and expressions at length because Victorians placed "an awful stress on the power ... of individual words"—they considered each public utterance a potential "moral act[]" (Marsh 224, 223). By the mid-nineteenth century, obscenity had become established as a secular crime (rather than spiritual sin), and language, particularly that of polite literature, was seen as an immensely culturally influential moral mechanism that could produce fatal debasement or vital elevation in the reader. Victorians' trust "in the quasi-magical correspondence between words and the things they represent," in the

²³ This does not mean that strategies of documentary realism would solve the problem of the voyeuristic representation of anguish. Realism and conventions of documentation and interpretation (especially forensic ones) are historically tied to cultural and political institutions that benefit from and encourage women's exploitation. Realism in itself is neither hegemonic nor liberating (see Hesford 195-7).

“divine autonomy” of words, gave rise to a culture of euphemism, indirection, and narratological anxiety, particularly with regards to sexual matters (Marsh 258, 227). The fear that language enacted moral change in the reader also influenced nineteenth-century negotiations of the boundary between private and public information. Once knowledge became common or commonly shared (like the prostitute’s body), it turned vulgar. For example, melodrama, that most universally appealing form, came to be seen as a “promiscuous genre” catering to a “debased imagination” unfit for ladies (Marsh 208).

Language, as an institution of moral policing, counteracted the radical individualism that had emerged in service of the unregulated capitalist marketplace and worked towards the consolidation of a national culture. Yet, sexual censorship also supported capitalism’s beneficiary class because unregulated sexuality, rhetorical and material, risked neutralizing property and inheritance laws (Marsh 208). Owing to these contradictory cultural pressures, the Victorian literary market instituted silence on sexual matters “as the ultimate penitential euphemism,” while nurturing a culture of “shared knowingness” that refused public acknowledgment of independent and private sexual thoughts (Marsh 230, 220). As I show in chapter 9, when Eliot’s narrator resorts to medicalized gothic fantasy to articulate the trauma of marital rape, she is writing against, yet assiduously within, the legal limits of literary representation. Although both *Middlemarch*’s and *Daniel Deronda*’s plots revolve around the question of sex within marriage, Eliot was obliged to uphold the novel form’s respectable status by alluding to reproductive problems via euphemistic metaphor, gothic registers, and medical concepts.²⁴ The 1880s, the decade after Eliot’s death, saw the height of Victorian taboo-driven

²⁴ Scientific terminology had begun infiltrating Victorian literature after 1850 and was seen to open new and more precise ways for describing the material world.

legislation of publically circulated sexual utterances, a trend that had begun more than three decades earlier and culminated in the *fin de siècle*'s full-blown crises of morality and representation. Both crises were prefigured in Eliot's novels.

Due to these historical conventions of indirection, most of the sources cited in this project do not actually concern women's bodies, sexual violence, or motherhood. The primary texts I engage—novels, verse, newspaper articles, abolitionist pamphlets, medical tracts, legal works, advice literature, surviving correspondence—were created at a time when written accounts of women's intimate physical experiences were not systematically collected. Even educated and wealthy women's private intimate recollections are absent from nineteenth-century archives, deemed unworthy of preservation. Jacques Derrida, in "Archive Fever," famously calls this historical structure of selection the "topology of privilege" (1995, 10). In the meantime, however, archives' historical mandate has changed. Where they formed the backbone of a national social history, served institutional and state power, and deprived some groups of legal and documentary visibility, over the past five decades, archives have become "collective, memory-based structure[s]" (Ridener 111). Twenty-first century archives—stored on servers or in cardboard boxes all over the world—are dispersed in institutional and informal locations, and are seen to create a place of memory for the present. Yet even the contents of our rapidly expanding digital archives depend on historical selection strategies that failed to anticipate the critical desires of twenty-first century scholars. While theorists now view the archive as a symbolic and utopian space from which to address "human knowledge, memory, power, and justice," decisions made a few centuries ago still determine what can (and cannot) be found there.²⁵

²⁵ Ridener 127; see Derrida 1995, 17; Velody 7. Although one should not "be shocked at its exclusions, its emptinesses, at what is *not* catalogued, ... nor that it tells of the gentry and not of the poor stockinger," the archive is

Rape, two hundred years ago as much as today, functions as a “material and discursive site of struggle for cultural power” (Hesford 197). Because historical archives keep disappointing and because rape continues to be an essential point of inquiry for feminist critics, my project pulls together generically disunited statements and fragmented evidence about women’s sexual lives—some of them traumatically painful lives—for its evidentiary basis. Piecing together sources, understanding their complex mediation, and acknowledging their indisputable partiality allows me to work “against the grain of the overbearing power relations” that occasioned their production (D’Cruze 1992, 378). This approach is informed by Derrida’s insight that the priorities of historical documentation conceal certain forms of knowledge in order to authorize others. Archives, despite their past service to national institutionalization, tend to rear up against their official meanings. They divulge information that one was not supposed to see and that, after all this time, still pretends it is not there; they contain telling references, unexpected symbolisms, lexical echoes, sly allusions, hastily patched-over elisions, panicked redactions, surreptitious emplotments, self-defeating identifications, embarrassed silences, details buried in subordinate clauses, out-of-rhythm intervals, and weighty spaces that disrupt their institutional designations.²⁶ Often reading strategically (be it with or against the ideological grain), this project collects discontinuous “stories caught half way through” from which to construct previously submerged histories and which may (or may not) indicate the presence of nineteenth-century sexual knowledge and related fictionalized socio-biological processes.²⁷

a frustrating place. It is the “neatest demonstration of how state power has operated, through ledgers and lists and indictments, and through what is missing from them” (Steedman 68).

²⁶ See Derrida 1974, 158; Steedman 40.

²⁷ Steedman 10, 83; see Foucault 1969, 8. This is also true for my engagement with subsequent scholarship.

By studying the “material effects of the rhetoricization of the body” (Hesford 197), by taking seriously cultural materialism’s interest in social power and political incentives, I also articulate how feminist scholars of nineteenth-century British literature, writing in an age of mass digitization, can try to remember the past.²⁸ As such, this dissertation, a literary history of burdened reproduction, functions as a politically invested “technology of memory” that recognizes the process of writing literary history as an endeavor responding to urgent alignments in the present and hoping to “propel[] a new future.”²⁹ It is important to keep in mind that the present moment of writing does not constitute the linear and inevitable endpoint of the formally progressive literary texts under discussion. Rather, most elite nineteenth-century writers expected that the future would gradually yield legal improvements, while fundamental hierarchies—those between the sexes, between rich and poor, between masters and servants—were thought to be universal, God-given, and indefinitely persistent. As such, it is important not only to study what these authors say and which knowledges they mobilize, but also to trace their political “modes of address” and the cultural milieu, social networks, material positions, and horizons of intelligibility from which their articulations occur—as well as that which remains unsaid (and possibly unthought).³⁰ By considering these historical texts with a non-progressive, non-teleological, non-liberationist lens, I hope to assemble archives of the past that help virtualize possible ways of making sense of social hierarchy for the future.

Relatedly, I avoid ahistorical projection of the somewhat exhausted rubrics ‘sexual

²⁸ See Foucault 1969, 8, 147; Armstrong 1995, 402.

²⁹ Grosz 16; see Steedman 66-7.

³⁰ Grosz 13. Unarticulated possibilities include alternative ways of sociality, profoundly competing with bourgeois liberal selfhood, such as unrefined comportment, communal instead of individual priorities in ordering society, gregariousness instead of seriousness (see Barret-Ducrocq 19; Levy 25).

agency,’ ‘voice,’ and ‘autonomy’ onto mostly fictional nineteenth-century texts. Not only do such readings apply traditional Western feminist values to a historical period in which these concepts did not enjoy much currency, but they invite a form of revisionism that measures historical crimes with the yardstick of human rights activism.³¹ Although I ultimately participate in such discourses, I also want to emphasize that nineteenth-century Anglophone texts hardly grant non-elite women even the most rudimentary narrative forms of interiority and almost never make room for such women’s own words. I use terms such as ‘victim’ and ‘agent’ sparingly throughout, because rape not only already sufficiently institutes women’s violability but also because both terms are “equally fictitious” (Grosz 14). I do not dispense with the terms ‘subjectivity’ and ‘identity’ (which, in their liberal origins, imagine a mysterious inner force propelling people into action), but I would follow Elizabeth Grosz who invites critics to consider subjects as operating from “their strategic placement within power networks; that is, in terms of what they are able to do, more than in terms of who they are.”³² Therefore, I consider agency, particularly women’s sexual and political agency, as an embodied interaction with and material negotiation of cultural codes, moral imperatives, and economic incentives (see Hesford 197). Agency, just like the progressive projects past and present, can be complicit, impacted, and ethically impure.

I primarily consider the works I discuss here as evidence of middle-class and elite women’s hard-fought access to the literary and activist publishing circuit, access which seemed

³¹ Although human rights discourses today function as instruments of Western power and economic hegemony, both of which were historically responsible for the slave trade, I salvage from this historically contaminated concept the notion that each human being has the inalienable right to physical autonomy and integrity (Cheah 153).

³² Grosz 14. According to Grosz, people interact “in terms of forces, agencies (in the plural), operative vectors, points of intensity, lines of movement, resistance, or complacency” (14), a model of subjectivity that allows for more agile historical investigations than the well-honed (and still indispensable) race, class, and gender trifecta of identity politics.

to necessitate and was facilitated by the instrumentalization of laboring, black, or otherwise unruly women's sexual experiences to gain the ability to make specific political points. Writers' appropriation of rape as a social problem, that is, their participation in the "economies of flesh" that offer oppressed bodies up for the purposes of entertaining, querying medical knowledge, participating in politics, and raising money, yields simultaneous valences of subversion and complicity which interact and reinforce each other (see Miller-Young 33). Rape in this context provides a material and rhetorical site on which cultural contestations of intersecting hierarchies are ritually enacted with mostly predetermined outcomes. Rape functions as a rhetorical technology capable of activating liberal selfhood for white women writers. In turn, the subjected women's own precarious self-proprietorship, her "character," coalesces around her ability to imitate acceptable behaviors—servility, eagerness to please, productivity. As will become apparent, particularly in the first and second parts of this project, race and class as critical concepts may possess less historically interpretative force in this context than highly visible subservient or physical labor and the simultaneous erasure of reproductive labor.

Most of the historical texts I analyze are fictional and form part of a larger discursive practice of writing, circulation, and reading. Nevertheless, these representations spawned and amplified cultural narratives of reproduction, interpellating readers into subjects, conventions into institutions, and differences into hierarchies. Rhetoric is a material practice and the consequences of cultural representations of embodied experiences can transport pain forward through time when they give rise to repeated articulations of sexual, economic, and racial mastery. The socio-biological phenomena under discussion are historically real insofar as they created material legacies (see Burton 70). Moreover, nineteenth-century texts, both literary and professional, reflect how past institutions wanted to identify and remember themselves. They

project a “unity of an ideal configuration” during the moment of collection, just as scholarship does afterwards.³³ Achille Mbembe argues that all historical scholarship depends on “pieces of time to be assembled, fragments of life to be placed in order ... in an attempt to formulate a story that acquits its coherence through the ability to craft links between the beginning and the end ... creat[ing] an illusion of totality and continuity.”³⁴ The “totality” of this dissertation responds to a given generic pre-configuration, just as the works I criticize. I recognize that the conventional constraints of scholarship itself, with its mandate of dispassionate distance and invocation of discrete authorship, equally risk voyeurism, co-optation, commodification, and the conscious perpetuation of spectacular exploitation. Subject to the “critical nervousness” many scholars experience when writing about rape (Hesford 194), I have not been able to solve the crisis of representation that accompanies writing about sexual violence and trauma since I am obliged to reproduce scenes of anguish in order to present primary evidence for my argument. Yet, to analyze these scenes carefully, to balance “empathetic impulse ... and the need for historical specificity,” and to consider subjects as operating within historically specific fields of constraint and possibility, appear to produce the best methodological compromise, one that is both “enabling in the present and pay[s] respect to the past.”³⁵ The simultaneous posture of mourning and utopian possibility I assume throughout reaches towards the embattled promise of pluralistic

³³ Derrida 1995, 10; see Steedman 1.

³⁴ Mbembe 21; see Burton 66; Foucault 1969, 15; Steedman 70.

³⁵ D’Cruze 1992, 378; see Hesford 193-4; Yaeger 226-7. Although trauma studies suggest that the retelling of abuse might help facilitate recovery, I am not very optimistic about literature’s ability to “cure” rape culture when it utilizes sexual violence as an occasion for the titillating spectacle (see Hesford 195-6). I am also very aware of my own “loudspeaker of privilege” that enables me to speak about black exploitation, race relations, and questions of ethnicity with unearned authority. As Lootens cautions Victorian scholars, most of whom are currently “writing white”: “any white person who speaks of racial oppression should know enough to expect some level of ... historically justified irritation ... And through that loudspeaker, the ‘right’ thing—the thing, that is, that could be spoken without negatively ‘taking’ the ‘parts’ of people of color ... —simply cannot be said” (2017, 179).

democracy.³⁶

Personal experiences of non-elite women are mostly lost to scholarship today, and literary scholarship has only slowly come around to investigating the complex historical mediation of extant accounts of sexual violence. For reasons that this project identifies, even texts that were advertised as spoken by freed slaves or liberated working women were constrained by the generic parameters of sentimentality to such an extent that attempts to recover the ‘true’ or ‘authentic’ experience of sexual oppression are bound to fail. Particularly in the case of abolitionist prose and verse, we are often looking at “white fantasies of black lives and suffering” (M. Wood 2002, 21). Nevertheless, to reckon with the experiences of disenfranchised constituencies and to translate them into a present-day system of meaning remain urgent critical goals. Since the biological and psychological ramifications of mass sexual exploitation only four or five generations removed from the present keep haunting scholars of Victorian literature, past injustice must be made legible—particularly when our favorite women writers are its agents (see Levy 35).

Chapter Outlines

The first part of this dissertation, “Slavery’s Legacies: Mary Prince, Pornography, and the Missing Child,” focuses on the politics of editorial mediation in Mary Prince’s *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself* (1831). Building on scholarship that understands the *History* to invoke a set of carefully delimited generic requirements, particularly concerning its representation of enslaved women’s sexual and reproductive experiences, I argue that the incomplete elision of rape, pregnancy, and childbirth in the *History* purposefully gestures

³⁶ Burton 67; see Grosz 17.

towards the previously neglected representational economy of plantation pornography. The *History*'s white metropolitan editors, Susannah Strickland Moodie and Thomas Pringle, silenced the reality of systematic rape under British slavery while capitalizing on its luridness to boost sales of their pamphlet. The titillating representation of the slave woman's non-reproductive, but obviously sexually abused, body served to ensure that economic, sexual, and racial hierarchies would remain stable even after the 1834 abolition of slavery. This becomes vividly apparent when reading the few archival fragments that constitute Mary Prince's legacy against Pringle's ambitions as South African colonizer and spectator of 'Hottentot' women, and Moodie's later career as colonial wife, mother, and novelist. Although I do not understand Mary Prince to embody pure spectacle, incapable of articulating her own needs, pleasures, and ambitions, I remain overall pessimistic that critical concepts of 'agency' or 'resistance' are productive in light of the *History*'s oppressively pornographic registers.

The second part, "Motherhood's Burden: Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Rape, and the Pleasures of the Spectacle," outlines EBB's liberal feminist intervention in debates of sexual violence and female sexual desire. In addition to investigating the complicated politics of spectatorship in her slave poems, this part of the dissertation focuses on the representation of poor single mothers whose children are the product of rape in "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" and *Aurora Leigh*. Analogous to Prince's *History*, EBB's works derive their political force from the mutually reinforcing aesthetic registers of the philanthropic writer's professional discursivity and her deliberate evocation of erotic prurience. These representational modes allowed EBB to invent herself as an influential maternalist voice advocating for cultural reform while preserving the economically dependent status quo of working-class and colonial subjects. Although EBB meant to articulate a viable model for cross-class solidarity between elite and

working women, her philanthropic verse spectacularly fails to imagine strategies that would reach beyond individual salvation.

The final part, “Eliot’s Coquettes: Aborted Reproduction in *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*,” re-interprets the actions of the two novels’ most socially ambitious female characters, Rosamond Vincy and Gwendolen Harleth, in light of Victorian medical discourses surrounding miscarriage, female hysteria, and marital rape. My examination of Eliot’s coquettes concludes this project and ponders Victorian representational possibilities when unruly women’s “house arrest” is fully institutionalized. In *Middlemarch*, Eliot blurs the distinction between abortion and miscarriage to facilitate a critique of misplaced female ambition. In the latter novel, the autoerotic desires of the novel’s heroine, Gwendolen Harleth, are “treated” by means of marital rape. In both works, Eliot’s conservative narrator strains against the conventional limits of sexuality’s articulation and systematically turns to gothic registers that interrupt her default realism. She further avails herself of mid-nineteenth-century medical writings to stage transgressive women in statuesque attitudes and to produce sexual *tableaux vivants* for the reader’s arousal. As in the project as a whole, I conclude here that spectacular displays of female sexuality are associated with “common” women without claim to cultural citizenship, and that the elite woman writer’s depiction of heroines’ reproductive troubles supports a reactionary political message that is meant to endure.

PART ONE
SLAVERY’S LEGACIES: MARY PRINCE, PORNOGRAPHY,
AND THE MISSING CHILD

Introduction

Mary Prince, born into slavery on Bermuda in 1788, accompanied her owners to London in the summer of 1828 where she was, according to British law, a free woman. Overworked and ill, she escaped from the Wood family, members of St. John’s proslavery merchant elite on Antigua. After months of irregular employment during which she lodged with the Woods’ substitute laundress, Prince called at the Anti-Slavery Society’s office in Aldermanbury in November 1828. There, she met Thomas Pringle, the Anti-Slavery Society’s Secretary, who took an interest in her case and eventually hired her as his domestic servant at Claremont Square in June 1829. At this time, the campaign to abolish slavery throughout the Empire was at its peak.³⁷ The Anti-Slavery Society unsuccessfully appealed to the Woods to manumit Prince and petitioned Parliament on her behalf. In turn, the Woods presented evidence damaging Prince’s credibility which stalled presentation of the petition until the House of Commons’ session ended in late November 1829. The Woods returned to Antigua without their longtime housekeeper and Prince found herself compelled to stay in England because, by law, she would have been a slave

³⁷ The slave trade had been ruled illegal in the British Empire by 1807; slavery as an institution was abolished in 1834 in all British dominions.

again upon setting foot on Antiguan soil. Now a member of Pringle's household, Mary Prince—allegedly on her own initiative—told her story for the purpose of generating abolitionist materials and income to support her, hoping eventually to return to her Antiguan husband, Daniel James, as a free woman.

Susanna Strickland, the future Mrs. Moodie who would achieve fame for her observations of Canadian frontier life, was part of Thomas Pringle's literary circle and recorded, transcribed, and perhaps helped edit Prince's oral account in late 1830 or early 1831. The finished piece, *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave; Related by Herself*, was published as a slim pamphlet in late January 1831 in London and Edinburgh, and was met with such enormous public interest that it went through three editions within a few months. Slave women were crucial to the "war of representation" waged between pro-slavery and abolitionist media campaigns, each claiming that their respective depictions reflected the true circumstances of British Caribbean slavery (Hall 107). Pringle's prefatory remarks to the *History*, dated January 25, 1831, indicate that this media "war" was fully responsive to, and contingent on, metropolitan discourses. Pringle states that Prince's testimony was initially

written out fully, with all the narrator's repetitions and prolixities, and afterwards pruned into its present shape; retaining, as far as was practicable, Mary's exact expressions and peculiar phraseology. No fact of importance has been omitted, and not a single circumstance or sentiment has been added. It is essentially her own, without any material alteration farther than was requisite to exclude redundancies and gross grammatical errors, so as to render it clearly intelligible. (MP 55)

Pringle assures readers thrice that alterations to Prince's words were guided only by considerations to practicality, relevance, and correctness. Critics have taken this to mean that any information the editors found to deviate from their target audience's cultural comprehension was excised. The pamphlet was to foster readers' sympathy with an enslaved woman who, insufficiently empowered to achieve her own liberation, conveyed her experiences via a morally

reliable first-person narrator (Sharpe 2002, 120). Readers' willingness to read, much less accept, Prince's testimony depended on her adherence to bourgeois sexual moral codes, even if her cultural heritage and the circumstances of her enslavement prevented her from adopting such norms. As later legal documents prove, Pringle and Strickland filtered certain "redundancies," many of them pertaining to Prince's complex sexual history. As scholarship of the past two decades has argued, it is very likely that Pringle and Strickland morally purified and selectively re-plotted aspects of Prince's testimony for maximal rhetorical effectiveness and marketability, and thereby weakened the narrative's claim to historical authenticity.³⁸ The extant pamphlet enfolds Prince's memories in a semantic web of Christian moral principle and preserves her account only "as far as was practicable" for the Society's purposes (*MP* 55).

By circulating ideologically palatable representations of slaves' suffering, the Anti-Slavery Society's main publishing outlet, the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, had won much attention among mostly female evangelical readers. Its accounts of slavery employed coded, yet for publishers and audiences' tastes maximally frank, language that imagined slavery in terms of saintly martyrdom undergone by chaste women of color. Sexual experiences under slavery—whether consensual or enforced—were censored because "Christian purity, for those abolitionists, overrode regard for truth," as one of the *History*'s more recent editors, Moira Ferguson, puts it (*MP* 4). Despite an obvious willingness to display female slaves' bodies in states of extreme agony, the explicit representation of morally degrading experiences, including rape, was taboo.³⁹

³⁸ *MP* 55; see Peterman 46-7; Schroeder 272-3; Whitlock 1995, 252; Woodard 144. "Pruning" was a current euphemism for bowdlerization, itself a euphemistic term for the desexualizing of language that had become mandatory by the late eighteenth century (Marsh 218).

³⁹ Sharpe 2002, 121; see Fisch 2-3.

Over the course of the next three chapters, I consider Mary Prince's narrative as a discursive tool in a political power struggle over the limits of the representable in which the slave woman's body functions as the primary site of ideological contention. Focusing on the complex relationship between historical evidence, editorial intervention, and the representation of sexually suggestive acts in Mary Prince's *History*, I argue that 'authenticity' as a category of analysis is of very limited usefulness for scholars of British slavery. Rather, it forecloses other readings that help make visible the *History*'s proximity to plantation pornography, a genre usually excluded from considerations of the text. The *History*'s generic affinity with early nineteenth-century discourses of spectacular violence is supposed to rouse—and arouse—its readers by eroticizing slavery's unspeakable acts. I will begin my analysis with a review of the many previous approaches to Prince's *History*.

Criticism's Ontological Battles: Voice, Authenticity, and Mediation

Mary Prince's *History* has been appropriated as a paradigmatic text in the service of various academic and political projects as well as for inclusion in several colonial, black, or autobiographical canons. Scholars almost universally acknowledge the *History*'s strict adherence to the nineteenth-century British slave narrative. This faithfulness to genre delimits the *History*'s plot, ideological scope, and representation of embodied experience. However, critics have focused less on the important tension between Pringle and Strickland's (and scholars') impulse to reify the *History*'s speaker as a historical person and political agent in her own right, and the *History*'s literariness, including its indebtedness to conventions of sentimentality, Christian conversion narrative, abolitionist propaganda, racial science, and emerging genres of pornography. Despite a general awareness that the *History*'s production and the archive of

knowledge about slavery it creates seem overdetermined by genre, editorial mediation, a profusion of supplementary materials and intruding footnotes, as well as by the avalanche of legal documents in the wake of its publication, many scholars writing after Moira Ferguson's first scholarly edition of 1987 ascribed certain, if not all of the politically important rhetorical interventions performed by the *History* to its agential first author, 'Mary Prince.' Subsequent critical responses, particularly of the early 1990s, understood the *History*'s imputed author to be a self-identical, culturally aware, politically empowered, and protesting subject, and henceforth celebrated her as an authoritative figurehead of black resistance and affective solidarity, cross-racial feminist sisterhood, and founder of racial, national, literary, or postcolonial traditions.⁴⁰ The *History* allegedly showcases 'Mary Prince's' "independent spirit," "resistance," and "warriorhood"—formulations which seem to prove that some scholars participate in the sentimental epic staged by the *History*.⁴¹

The earliest, and most prominent, examples of such scholarship are Moira Ferguson's *Subject to Others* (1992) and Sandra Pouchet Paquet's essay, "The Heartbeat of a West Indian Slave" (1992). Neither engages seriously the *History*'s complicated and at times contradictory textual assemblage, but rather argues for (and inaugurates) its inclusion in black canons by virtue of its author's essential West Indian identity. Overstating the *History*'s radicality, Ferguson falsely calls Prince "the first black British woman to escape from slavery."⁴² Although Ferguson

⁴⁰ Woodard 135, 144, 145; Paquet 2002, 31, 49; Midgley 88; Salih "Black Subject," 123.

⁴¹ L. James 1999, 22; Paquet 2002, 45, 15; see Baumgartner 255. The inverted commas here suggest that 'Mary Prince,' the *History*'s narrator and object of its many intertexts, is an editorial, critical, and, above all, literary construct. Although I will discontinue the use of inverted commas from now on, it is important to keep in mind that this designation functions a placeholder, and does not necessarily denote the historical person, unless otherwise indicated by reference to historical context (see Salih "Black Subject," 124).

⁴² *MP* 1; also see M'Baye 178. Female manumission in the West Indies was rare, but far from exceptional (Morrissey 72). Prince's story is remarkably similar to the case of Grace Jones who, like Prince an Antiguan slave, arrived in England in 1822 with her owner, Mrs. Allen. She was legally free during her stay and returned to the West

gestures towards the text's mediatedness, she claims that Prince never gave up narrative authority to Pringle or Strickland; rather, Prince has created an "inviolable textual frontier for herself" as well as an "autonomous domain of her own" (Ferguson 1992, 298). Ferguson hears Prince's "sparring voice [that is] audible only to initiates," a "mimicking and deadpan" tone, and a resistant "double-voiced discourse" (1992, 284). In Ferguson's reading, Prince refuses to remain a silent, inscribed-upon object of abolitionist discourse. This critical desire results in Ferguson's detection of a "power reversal" vis-à-vis Strickland whose role it becomes to earn money and take Prince's orders.⁴³ In the same year, Pouchet Paquet, reading for Prince's "heartbeat," that is, essential selfhood expressed by a unique voice, approaches the *History* as if Prince wrote her own autobiography. Similar to Ferguson, Pouchet Paquet registers Prince's alleged Caribbean speech patterns and discursive idiosyncrasies bubbling below the text's linguistically normalized surface.⁴⁴ Further, Pouchet Paquet ascribes artistic cunning to Prince, alleging Prince's vernacular to result from lyricism and artistic craftsmanship, and resulting in an "all-inclusive ancestral voice" that communicates "the essential tropes of return and self-parody in images shot through with the dialogic overtones of a community fashioning self out of resistance."⁴⁵ This idea, likewise found in Ferguson, ahistorically assumes that Prince's intended

Indies, and slavery, a year later. Lord Stowell, in the High Court of Admiralty, ruled in 1827 that, while Jones had been free in England, her renewed presence in Antigua fell under the jurisdiction of colonial law—like Prince, she was technically, but not legally, free (Midgley 86; see Cooper 197).

⁴³ Ferguson 1992, 292; see Whitlock 1995, 252; and Rauwerda 407.

⁴⁴ For the same focus on 'voice,' see Aljoe 74-9; Bohls 176; Haynes 18-22; Rice 21; Schroeder 277-9; also see Aljoe 59, and Todorova 285, for an interrogation of 'voice' as linked to the slave's body and therefore providing authenticity. 'Voice' was brought to prominence by the work of William Andrews and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Sue Thomas still mobilizes 'voice' as analytical category in 2014 (165).

⁴⁵ 2002, 34, 49; see M'Baye 192, and Woodard 133-6, for similar claims regarding Prince's artistry and specifically Caribbean expressions. Pouchet Paquet's own intellectual location and ideological motives within African American liberationist contexts become apparent with her piece's last sentence: "Mary Prince's heart is the caged bird that

audience was a nineteenth-century Anglophone black community (Salih “Black Subject,” 129). The *History* becomes therefore “a triumphant narrative of emergent West Indian subjectivity,” single-handedly inaugurating a literary tradition and “mak[ing] permanent the foundations of a roots-derived national self-consciousness in West Indian autobiography.”⁴⁶

Inspired by such early framings, scholars of the 1990s and early 2000s read the *History* through various generic or political lenses. None of the proliferating categories applied to Prince’s story—autobiography, slave testimony, British abolitionist, African American, Anglo-African, Black Atlantic, black-authored, African womanist, Pan-Africanist, trickster narrative—are adequate or sufficient, while the abundance of taxonomic registers itself has become mind-boggling und unwieldy.⁴⁷ More recent investigations acknowledge the instability of the *History*’s narrating subject and pay ample attention to the *History*’s many intra- and intertexts, thereby contextualizing and historicizing the text’s production (Salih “Black Subject,” 124). Jenny Sharpe, Gillian Whitlock, Antje Rauwerda, and Sara Salih, by highlighting the *History*’s editorial mediation, challenge Ferguson and Pouchet Paquet’s investment in Prince’s Caribbean expressions or artistic daring, and call for “relinquishing the comforting illusion of a single black subject who protested against the evils of slavery in a self-authored, mono-vocal, mono-cultural text.”⁴⁸ Assuming that the *History*’s framing documents—those newspaper articles, essays, and letters penned by whites, many of them part of the pro-slavery lobby, for intra-British perusal—

sings the definitive song of freedom to let her people go” (Paquet 1992, 143; see “Black Subject,” 128-9). This sentence was cut from the 2002 version.

⁴⁶ Pouchet Paquet 2002, 33, 36; see Salih “Black Subject,” 129, for a critique of “roots” as critical concept applied to the *History*.

⁴⁷ Whitlock 2000, 20; Ferguson 1992, 298; M’Baye 178-9; Pouchet Paquet 2002, 40; Rice 22.

⁴⁸ Salih “Black Subject,” 134; see Rauwerda 399.

are necessary extensions of the narrative, these scholars resist the *History*'s insertion into black canons while yet defending its importance for understanding black self-narration. As a consequence, critics increasingly concede that 'voice' and embodied experience are not only irrecoverable, but that white-authored texts about slavery have taken "great care" to widen the reader's distance to this history (M. Wood 2002, 21). According to an emerging consensus, English cultural memory of slavery ought not to be conflated with slaves' own recollections.

Despite their attention to the *History*'s intertexts, recent work on Prince still inaccurately tends to interpellate the former slave woman as the first female slave-turned-abolitionist, aided by her "writing team" in an egalitarian and collaborative exercise aimed at outlawing slavery once and for all.⁴⁹ Scholarship that ignores the context of the *History*'s historical articulation—and that articulation's contingencies—invites "the dual dangers of presentism and essentialism," as Sara Salih cautions ("Black Subject," 125). In what follows, I want to keep in mind Carolyn Steedman's warning that "the resurrectionist historian creates the past that he purports to restore" (38), and generate an alternative, and perhaps less encouraging, past that sees Prince's abolitionist agency as fully circumscribed, and often eclipsed, by powerful interests not necessarily allied with those scholars ascribe to her. Critics are wary that reading Mary Prince's story as at least partly confabulated and shaped by early nineteenth-century literary conventions would do a disservice to the formerly living, breathing Mary Prince and her legacy. However, to interrogate and destabilize the *History*'s subject does not erase the validity of black history as a political project.

⁴⁹ Aljoe 20; see also Baumgartner 268; Bohls 167; Maddison-MacFadyen 2014, 3, 20; Whitlock 2000, 21. Pouchet Paquet was the first who described the *History* as "collaborative venture" between Prince and "well-intentioned supporters" (2002, 28-9, 31, 37).

A concern with whether or not scrutiny of the *History*'s literariness reduces its facticity (I do not believe it does) should not prevent scholars from interrogating 'fancy' as a constitutive part of the work ascribed to Prince. The circumstances of its publication preclude the text from adhering to certain standards of authenticity that critics ascribe to other slave memoirs or to the genre of autobiography itself (see Whitlock 2000, 15). Undoubtedly, Prince played a significant role in the composition of the narrative. As far as scholars have been able to determine, her story is perfectly 'true' and 'factual' with regards to the people and places she mentions and allows for the sequential reconstruction of Mary Prince's life.⁵⁰ Her memory for names, places, and times was in fact reliable and acute. It bears keeping in mind that in their ongoing endeavors to verify crucial parts of Prince's story, critics implicitly continue to anticipate and counter historical charges that the *History* is a forgery and that its statements regarding slavery are exaggerated. Such charges have circulated since the first edition of the *History* appeared in 1831.⁵¹ All subsequent production of text about Prince (including the present chapters), no matter how well

⁵⁰ See Appendix for my update of Sara Salih's rough timeline of Mary Prince's life in the *History*'s Penguin edition. While I am aware that this timeline perpetuates the Enlightenment impulse to contain individual biography within a (perhaps false) teleology, my attempt at chronological "order" is a reaction to the widespread inattention to detail in much Mary Prince scholarship which has led scholars to make claims about the historical Mary Prince's experiences that are contradicted by statements made in the *History* or in its intertexts, or for which there is no evidence. Bacabar M'Baye, for instance, writes that Prince died shortly after Strickland wrote down her testimony (185). Reliable information is meager, barely running over two pages.

⁵¹ Although Salih writes that "'truth' may not be a goal for contemporary readers," continued verifications do take place and yield spectacular results (Salih "Black Subject," 124). The continued proliferation of verifying materials draws attention to their *a priori* inability to guarantee authenticity and editors' persisting fears that today's readers will encounter the *History* skeptically or, in the worst case, dismissively (see Whitlock 2000, 21). Margot Maddison-MacFadyen, in her impressive recent work, explicitly anticipates charges of fictionalization and provides the remaining, previously unknown, names of Mary Prince's owners. She also supplies much additional information about the five related families who owned Prince and traded her among themselves in Bermuda, Turk's Island, and Antigua—Myners [Miners], Williams, Ingham, Darrell [Darrel], and Wood (2014, 3). Also see Bernard 240-2, for the Bermudan ancestors of John Wood, Robert Darrell, and other wealthy merchants. Horace Wood of Pembroke Parish, for example, owned the largest single group of slaves in Bermuda, 38 people, in 1773 (Bernard 236, 265-7). Clearly, the fact that the details about Mary Prince's life, as provided in the *History* (and to which neither Pringle nor Strickland would have had easy access), have proven to be "true" confirms Prince's lasting acquiescence to the genre's, her interlocutors', and scholars' fetishization of facticity and their assumption that black testimonies require intensive custodianship.

intentioned, unwrites her history (Rauwerda 397). This is Mary Prince's paradox: she is unavailable as 'authentic' eyewitness, but that does not render the experiences recorded in the *History* inauthentic or useless to scholars today. That academic readers themselves shape available evidence to suit their individual projects is clear.

My reading the *History* as a text shaped by literary conventions, including predictable emplotment, use of metaphoric language, and the presence of finely calibrated limits to the articulation of ideological messages, does not reduce the wished-for political effects of creating a scholarly 'home' for Mary Prince's legacy. Rather, such a reading, along with extensive cross-reading between the *History* and its many available intertexts, allows for the identification of previously obscure semantic possibilities that, in turn, enable a wider contextualization of and more precise reckoning with the monumental violence visited upon the victims of Euro-American slavery in general, and upon the body of the historical figure who, in the absence of better options, we continue to call Mary Prince.

Authenticating and Falsifying, Pruning and Adding

As John Thurston writes, "[t]he shaping of *Mary Prince* into an intelligible, linear, grammatically correct narrative has taken this text away from Mary. It is a corporate text—Mary, Susanna, Pringle—that finally only the Anti-Slavery Society could be said to author" (61). Rather than constituting a collaborative endeavor, the *History* was a business venture and most of its production occurred outside of Prince's sphere of influence. Some older scholarship has overstated the degree to which Prince directed the production process, even if it acknowledges the culturally and linguistically mediated nature of the work.⁵² Prince was disadvantaged by her

⁵² Pochet Paquet 2002, 33.

illiteracy, likely total ignorance of the British abolitionist literary circuit, and inability to make contact with black abolitionists in London (see Midgley 90).

What is more, scholars tend to ignore or make light of Prince's material dependence on Pringle which influenced the *History's* gestation.⁵³ Gillian Whitlock, for instance, writes that Prince "took refuge as a maid" in Pringle's home (1995, 251). Michael Peterman assumes Prince worked at the Pringles' "at least nominally" (46). While it appears that Prince was incapable of arduous physical labor by 1830, she was obliged to carry out domestic tasks in Pringle's home, such as caring for Pringle's ailing wife, and her continued residence was contingent on her ability to work. Prince left the Pringles' service in June 1832, perhaps because her rheumatism and worsening eyesight left her unable to labor, or because the allowance of ten or twelve shillings per week she received from Pringle at that time was sufficient to maintain her.⁵⁴ Pringle's offering of "refuge" at Claremont Square was subject to termination and depended on his continued goodwill.⁵⁵

⁵³ Antje Rauwerda acknowledges this question but does not investigate it further (400). Janice Schroeder's 2004 essay acknowledges the importance of Prince's domestic work in Pringle's home for abolitionist struggle (273).

⁵⁴ *MP* 29; see Thomas 2014, 121, and *Christian Advocate*, March 4, 1833, 68. The *Times* report on Wood v. Pringle incorrectly states that Prince had received a weekly allowance of £10 or £12 for the eight months leading up to the trial (6; see Thomas 2005, 131n11). Pringle's postscript, dated March 22, 1831, mentions her oncoming blindness (*MP* 129).

⁵⁵ Using the name 'Mary Prince,' she applied to London's Fetter Lane Moravian church in July 1832, a month after she left the Pringles, and asked to be admitted to the congregation. Her request was denied due to her past "immoral conduct" (Thomas 2011, 83). Sue Thomas maintains that Prince's application is evidence that "Moravianism satisfied some of her spiritual and personal needs" (2014, 121; see 2011, 82-3). I consider it just as likely that the Pringles encouraged her application because they wished her to continue her religious education (which was "indistinct" and "very limited," according to Pringle), find an alternative source of material support, or because she wished to contact her Antiguan friends with the help of the London congregation (*MP* 116). The Hatton Garden Moravian mission in London had already helped her materially when she was "destitute" in 1828 (*MP* 89). The vocabulary used by Prince to describe Antiguan Moravian teachings is "doctrinally precise and allusive," according to Thomas (2014, 125).

While the first edition sold well, its veracity was questioned and its editor personally vilified by pro-slavery outlets. The loudest voice belonged to James Macqueen, former plantation manager, editor of the ultra-conservative *Glasgow Courier*, and staunch defender of colonial slavery (Thomas 2005, 115-6). In November 1831, *Blackwood's*, Caribbean planters' "political text book," ran Macqueen's twenty-page slander in which he accused Pringle of having fabricated Prince's story. Macqueen insinuated that Prince, Anti-Slavery Society's "despicable tool," was Pringle's prostitute.⁵⁶ While Macqueen's lewd shrillness is a good indicator of the *History's* power in strengthening public support for abolition, Pringle was pressured to authenticate those details of Prince's story that Macqueen and others had diligently cast into doubt (Vigne 2012, 218). As a result, subsequent editions' page count swelled as Pringle inserted long footnotes into the main text and appended supplementary letters, legal documents, quasi-forensic statements, eyewitness accounts, and two unrelated slave testimonies to prove that the

⁵⁶ Thomas 2005, 117; "Colonial Empire," 750-1. It is one of Pringle's life's ironies that he himself had helped found *Blackwood's* in 1817 (Vigne 2012, 201). *John Bull*, a periodical as stridently pro-slavery as *Blackwood's*, circulated the same rumor when publishing a letter to the editor in December 1831: "as is also well known, [he] keeps in his house a black—hush! offend not the classic ear of MR. PRINGLE, by giving utterance to a word of undoubted import" ('Expositor' 415; see Vigne 2012, 219). Randolph Vigne is certainly correct when he states that the *History* "cost [Pringle] dear, and not just financially" (Vigne 2012, 218). Pringle wrote to his friend John Fairbairn on December 31, 1831,

Do you see how MacQueen is abusing me in Blackwood? I will ere long reply to his misrepresentations (not his abuse) in a fourth edition of "The History of Mary Prince". Meanwhile I am prosecuting him for libel. Abuse is what we must all expect—and in truth it is a distinction to be calumniated in such a case. (qt. in Vigne 2012, 219).

The fourth edition of the *History* never appeared, but the libel suit Pringle v. Cadell was heard on February 21, 1833. Thomas Cadell was the London publisher of *Blackwood's*—Macqueen resided in Scotland, outside the Court of Common Pleas' jurisdiction. Pringle won the suit but was awarded only £5 (and £435 in costs), rather than the £2,000 he had demanded (Vigne 2012, 219). Wood v. Pringle was heard before the Court of King's Bench six days later, on February 27, 1833. Wood had sued Pringle early in 1832 for libel over Pringle's accusing the Woods of cruelty towards Prince. Wood won by default because Pringle failed to assemble witnesses that could corroborate the story of Prince's abuse. Six witnesses spoke in Wood's favor, among them his own daughter, Mary Caroline Bennett, and Robert Briggs, himself indicted for cruelty towards slaves two years earlier (see Thomas 2014, 162; see Rauwerda 408). Wood was awarded £25 and costs, both of which Pringle had to pay himself, although Macqueen initially believed Pringle was backed by the Anti-Slavery Society. Trial transcripts have not survived, if they were made in the first place. The *Times* printed a 4,500-word summary of Wood v. Pringle, a trial that lasted seventeen hours without interruption; Prince's statement takes up 1,400 words, perhaps suggesting that she was cross-examined for several hours on the witness stand. While it reveals information omitted by the *History's* editors, the summary is itself tendentiously edited and contains errors (Thomas 2014, 136-7).

History's representation of Prince's experience was accurate.⁵⁷ The result is the present "concatenation of mutually validating and interlinked documents" not attributable to a single author (Salih "Black Subject," 132). Many of the added materials and footnotes (including the original Preface and Supplement) assert Prince's authorship, initiative, and control over the text's production, and place her in the tradition of well-known formerly enslaved autobiographers, such as Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, Oloudah Equiano, or Ottobah Cuguano. It bears repeating that this strategy has been extremely successful since the identity created by the *History*'s narrator is sufficiently compelling to have occasioned hundreds of creative and scholarly responses over the past two centuries.

I would nevertheless maintain that Prince's appeals to her British readership are mediated, if not effected, by the Anti-Slavery Society's objectives (see Whitlock 1995, 252). Pringle's prefatory disclaimers that the *History* was unaffiliated with the Anti-Slavery Society and that its proceeds would go to Mary Prince alone are a case in point (*MP* 56). Such posturing was meant to defuse the ideological explosiveness of Prince's narrative. Pringle expected that readers would be weary of abolitionism and, by extension, nonconformist religion. Audiences might have been deterred from purchasing the book had it fashioned itself as a product of the loudest organ of British anti-slavery propaganda. Assuring readers that a pamphlet had no connection to the Anti-Slavery Society was an effective and long-standing recruitment strategy to the abolitionist cause. Carefully dosed and politically resonant appeals to the "good people in

⁵⁷ Woodard 144; Aljoe 98-9. See Salih "Black Subject," on the individual provenance of individual additions to the *History*'s supplementary corpus. The first edition contained supplementary materials of equal length to the main text; the imbalance between the actual narrative, original supplementary materials, and critical introductions, annotations, and expanded appendixes is even greater in recent editions. Just like Prince's editors, scholars continue to be concerned with appropriately controlling readers' responses to the narrative by adding framing materials. This authenticating "gesture ... perpetuates one of the generic features of slave narratives" (130). For further commentary on the supplementary materials, see Aljoe 69; Baumgartner 261; Whitlock 2000, 13; Woodard 145.

England” are interspersed throughout the *History* and, along with the abundance of stylistic and plot devices that characterize first-person slave narratives, testify to its abolitionist leanings (*MP* 55). The *History*’s political commitments as well as its cultural intentions complicate any notions of Mary Prince’s ‘authentic voice’ or her status as primary autobiographical subject. Her authority is contingent on her ability to represent and vouch for the experience of all slaves at a moment when abolitionist campaigning had reached maximum public penetration.⁵⁸ This ability, in turn, rests on the implicit assurance that her experiences are commonplace and unremarkable. On the other hand, in best Bildungsroman tradition, the *History* accentuates the peculiarities of Prince’s life and celebrates her coming of age within slavery and her heroic spunk to facilitate the reader’s identification with this unique and pitiable individual. The resulting tension between heroism and ordinariness complicates any notions of a stable ‘I’ in the *History*.⁵⁹

Gillian Whitlock notes that “an overwhelming sense of readership, of audience, pervades the *History*” (1995, 252) because the particular formal and cultural constraints of the slave narrative delimit descriptions of slave women’s embodied female experience. The conventional “script for writing the self as a colonized subject” is not only “omnipresent,” as Whitlock suggests (2000, 38), it enables the invention of the colonial subject in abolitionist literature. In fact, the first-person subject produced by the *History* is wholly bourgeois. As Laura Ann Stoler writes, “discourses of sexuality do more than define the distinction of the bourgeois self; in identifying marginal members of the body politic, they have mapped the moral parameters of

⁵⁸ Thus Prince: “I know what slaves feel—I can tell by myself what other slaves feel” (*MP* 94).

⁵⁹ See Salih “Black Subject,” 130-1. Ferguson, Pouchet Paquet, and Woodard appear to take the *History*’s novelistic emplotment as tale of liberatory heroism at face value. This plot is itself indebted to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary conventions which continue to shape humanistic epistemologies of the present.

European nations.”⁶⁰ By endlessly casting Mary Prince’s sexual experiences under slavery as marginally representable, by *pretending* to excise all references to sexuality, the *History*, with its massive public response and subsequent proliferation of authenticating-yet-obfuscating appendices and footnotes, create ‘Mary Prince’ as black-and-poor-and-hypersexual subject and, in ever finer detail, calibrate that subject’s ability to demand public recognition, self-ownership, “property rights, citizenship, and public relief” (Stoler 1995, 8).

In the end, ‘Prince’s’ disappearance from the archive after 1834 confirms that this subject has been eliminated after and due to abolition. Nationhood, whiteness, and middle-class morality are the *History*’s, and abolition’s, true offspring. In this reading, the editors’ invention of Prince as a literary subject without claims to a biological or archival afterlife is the necessary underside of abolition’s victory, even when allowing for the possibility that Prince successfully attempted “to evade the archive and its strategies of surveillance, to elude the threat of capture and classification that official archives represent” (Baderoon 73). Prince, like so many working-class women before her, “disappears from the records leaving behind fragments of a story made for her by the legal system.”⁶¹ Having had her story taken down, she did not have the last word. Before turning to the *History*’s text itself, the first portion of my analysis pays close attention to Susanna Strickland and Thomas Pringle’s editorial ambitions and likely textual interventions in the service of creating the slave woman as British subject.

⁶⁰ 1995, 7; see A. Davis 107; Gates 12; Hartman 62. See also Elspeth Probyn’s reminder that the self “represents the process of being gendered and the project of putting that process into discourse. ... The self is not simply put forward, but rather it is reworked in its enunciation” (2).

⁶¹ Steedman 54, 57; see Aljoe 28, 70-1.

CHAPTER ONE

HOW TO GET A CHARACTER: WHITE FANTASIES OF ABOLITION

The Problem with the Amanuensis: Susanna's Plots

Scholars spend little time studying Susanna Strickland's or Thomas Pringle's personal investments in Mary Prince's *History*, although both Strickland's and Pringle's archival estates prove them to be prolific and visible colonial and literary agents in their own right. In my effort to tease apart the densely textured processes of mediation that converge in the production context of Mary Prince's *History*, I first highlight Susanna Strickland's role as Prince's amanuensis. In contrast to previous assessments of Prince and Strickland's "writing scene" as collaborative and the text's "moral fabric" as "shared," my focus is on the power differentials—in terms of class affiliation, race, sexual history, and, perhaps most importantly, cultural belonging—that existed between the two women at the moment of Strickland's recording of Prince's testimony. I then suggest how Strickland's perception of these differences might have crucially shaped the *History*.⁶² When attending to Strickland's long-standing aspirations to authorship and her attempts to gain access to London's bluestocking intelligentsia in the face of her family's precipitous economic decline, Strickland's role begins to look somewhat less politically

⁶² Whitlock 2000, 13; Thurston 61; Paquet 2002, 31; Aljoe 90. This is in contrast to Gillian Whitlock's attention to the *History* as an autobiographical occasion wherein "intersection and interdependence of identities and identifications between European and colonial women become apparent" (2000, 16). Whereas Whitlock's analysis relies on intersubjectivity and transculturation, I imagine the *History* from Strickland's perspective and as produced largely on Strickland's, rather than Prince's, terms.

unproblematic than some critics make it out to be. I argue here that the “writing scene” is not the site of Strickland’s unequivocally selfless and supportive midwifery of Prince’s text. Rather, it manifests the limits of white genteel femininity’s ability to hear and record stories from beyond the cultural and economic pale. Further, although Strickland, in retrospective, did not ascribe much importance to her work on the *History*, I suggest that “the writing scene” between herself and Prince is precondition for her later contribution to the “mythology of the founding mother of Canada” (Atwood and Beaulieu 49). Strickland’s white motherhood of babies, texts, and nations actually depends on the erasure of Prince’s maternity (see Spillers 80). Rather than being “barely visible” (Baumgartner 265), Strickland’s presence determines what we know about Prince.

Strickland, born in 1803, was twenty-eight years old when receiving Mary Prince’s testimony, having spent most of her adult life in the pursuit of building a literary career for herself. Her late father, Thomas Strickland, of North Lancashire yeoman ancestry, had advanced to manager of London’s Greenland Docks and attempted to cement his financial success by aligning himself with the landed gentry. In 1808, he purchased Reydon Hall, Suffolk, and settled there with his increasing family.⁶³ However, the ascension into the gentry was short-lived and incomplete: Strickland’s prospects deteriorated and, after a business failure precipitated his death in 1818, Mrs. Strickland and her eight children—six daughters among them—clung to leisured country life under reduced circumstances.⁶⁴ Susanna Strickland and four of her five sisters began earning their money as professional writers because any other economic pursuit would have threatened the women’s precarious hold on gentility. After her father’s death, Susanna

⁶³ E. Lee 48; Thurston 12.

⁶⁴ Thurston 19; see Peterman 24.

Strickland's existence was defined by her mother's struggle to "keep up appearances" and by her own efforts to make a living and gain recognition as an author (Peterman 24).

By the late 1820s, Strickland had published a number of children's books, and regularly contributed poems and sketches to journals that catered to the upwardly mobile segments of the middle-class, such as ladies' gift-book annuals and periodicals like *La Belle Assemblée*, or, *Bell's Court and Fashionable Magazine*. Strickland's early writings satisfied the literary tastes of the cultural establishment: adventure and historical fiction undergirded by Anglican moral principle and patriarchal authoritarianism were in high demand. Already in 1822, Strickland had published *Spartacus: A Roman Story*, "an overwritten and naïve celebration of Spartacus's nobility and sensibility," along with other "poetry and tragedy in the mode of 'gloom and grandeur,'" that is, melodramatic in tone and archaic in setting.⁶⁵ Strickland's literary output was safely and romantically removed from the social discontents of the period leading up to the 1832 Reform Act and to abolition in 1834. Strickland's writing of that time, particularly her verse, is conventional, sentimental, and clichéd, and follows a culturally and religiously conservative blueprint that ascribes political unrest to the individual's inability to curtail his or her passion (Thurston 29). In Strickland's literary imagination, excessive affect ought to be mastered to achieve social and psychological equilibrium, while untenable social or ideological contradictions, such as poverty or immoral sexual conduct, are resolved through providential salvation in the hereafter. Fairness comes to those who act according to moral principle and are eager to improve themselves through education.

As one of Strickland's recent biographers, Michael Peterman, points out, her cultural position as firmly tethered to the gentry ideologically yet tenuously connected to it in terms of

⁶⁵ Peterman 30, 29; see Thurston 28.

wealth, occasioned her adherence to a standard plot which “required, within the dictates ... of an aristocratic, class-conscious, and materialistic society, the recognition of her protagonist’s—and her own—value as an individual fully deserving of elevation and reward within the social order in which he or she had been misplaced” (Peterman 33). Strickland’s sympathy for social underdogs, such as Spartacus, the archetypical rebellious slave, was based on these figures’ availability for heroic elevation and attenuated by her trust in “benevolent and noble paternalism,” often personified by well-meaning father figures who would step in and rectify the material disadvantages of her virtuous, deserving protagonists (Peterman 33). Strickland’s socially privileged readers were thus assured that their charitable support of the virtuous poor testified to their own moral goodness (Thurston 28, 37). It is my contention that *The History of Mary Prince* is crucially enframed by these ideological paradigms. This is not to say that Strickland’s initial role as mouthpiece for the elite disqualified her from appreciating Mary Prince’s situation later on. However, the *History*’s plotting is affected—and perhaps effected—by Strickland’s spending most of the 1820s in an attempt to write herself out of poverty. Over the course of the decade she was immersed within an elite literary marketplace that pressured her to disavow her own reduced means (Thurston 21). Strickland’s writings of that period maintain and celebrate sharp class distinctions; her protagonists display the “proper diffidence [that] ought to be paid to those of superior rank” because moral worth, in Strickland’s tales, is truly grand only when accompanied by rank and wealth (qtd. in Peterman 34). Hence, Strickland’s acculturation within Regency class codes likely conditioned her grasp on and representation of Prince’s life, despite the ideological ruptures Strickland experienced in the late 1820s.

In April 1830, a religiously disaffected Susanna Strickland joined a nonconformist chapel of Congregationalists, a conversion that offended her Anglican mother and older siblings.⁶⁶ Her religious commitments of this time were fervent and restless. Although she found an “intense faith in Christianity,” her intellectual engagement with doctrine was ever-evolving and shifting.⁶⁷ She favored the dissenters for their “more personal and passionate” religious teachings over self-congratulatory and stultifying Anglican ritual (Peterman 39). At the same time, the teachings of the Congregationalist Church demanded that she extricate herself from authorial ambition and focus on her and her readers’ moral improvement. As a result, Strickland’s romantic religious enthusiasm and hunger for public recognition of her literary genius remained at odds. Even as she imagined herself piously retreating from the secular world of publishing, she continued to seek contact with famous literati (Peterman 41, 44). Nevertheless, Strickland’s—and two of her sisters’—affiliation with a dissenting Puritan sect that had a long-established base among urban traders as well as the rural yeomanry inverted her father’s social ascension and indicates that she had become disaffected with her family’s social aspirations and religious observance (Thurston 20). By 1830, Strickland had acknowledged her reduced circumstances and, with the dissenters’ help, explored alternative meanings of her coming down in the world.

As a result of her waning allegiance to establishment ideology, Strickland changed friends and professional contacts, moving among intellectuals, celebrities, and nonconformists of the London literary scene. She had met Thomas Pringle in 1828 and, although he was only fourteen years her senior, she soon considered him her “dear adopted father,” and he took to

⁶⁶ Thurston 16; see Peterman 38.

⁶⁷ Thurston 54; see Peterman 41.

calling himself her “loving papa.”⁶⁸ He introduced her to the London intelligentsia and invited her to stay with his family several times between the summer of 1830 and her marriage in April 1831.⁶⁹ While residing with the Pringles, she worked on her ambitious verse collection, *Enthusiasm, and Other Poems* (1831), which deals with “disappointed love, captivity, madness, and poverty” (Thurston 57). Just as in her *Spartacus*, slavery and indigence are imagined to result from an unknowable divine will. The collection’s titular long poem reflects upon the expansion of the poet’s imagination—and her agency to speak politically—through divine inspiration (Peterman 41). Strickland also took up writing reviews for the intellectual avant-garde journal *Athenaeum*, for which Pringle served as editor until late 1830, as well as for the Anti-Slavery Society (Thurston 59). While in Pringle’s care, Strickland wrote in realistic and romantic genres. However, Marian Fowler remarks that Strickland had a “Romantic preference for fancy rather than fact, the ideal rather than the real.”⁷⁰ Even her realistic writing was structured by desire for moral sublimity.

Pringle had connections to the Clapham Sect, the early nineteenth-century network of social reformers whose activism would strongly influence Victorian middle-class morality. After gaining access to Pringle’s inner circle, Strickland embraced their outlook on slavery and morals, and adopted the pursuits of genteel literary philanthropy, safely located within the bounds of

⁶⁸ Moodie 1985, 50; see Thurston 191n35.

⁶⁹ Peterman 45-6. Strickland was married in the Anglican Church because marriage in other churches was forbidden until 1836 when the civil register was introduced. Her husband, Captain John Dunbar Moodie, was a Scottish Presbyterian, and had been acquainted with Pringle since 1813 (Thurston 17). The fact that Mary Prince and Susanna Strickland were unable to obtain legally sanctioned marriages within their own respective churches perhaps strengthened their personal bond. Strickland had recourse to marriage within Anglicanism, of course, while Mary Prince’s legal situation as an enslaved person in Antigua had prevented her from marrying in the English Church. The Anglican Church held the monopoly to wed couples on Antigua until 1844 (Lazarus-Black 62).

⁷⁰ Peterman 45; see Fowler 95.

domestic propriety.⁷¹ Moreover, by casting Pringle as her adopted father, Strickland understood her changing political and religious outlook to result from emerging ties of affective kinship. The emotional bond with the Pringles eventually allowed her to resolve the contradiction between the reality of her social position and the ideology she had promulgated in the 1820s. With Pringle's help, she decided that she would reinvent herself as a writer serving the divine, improving public morality, and liberating slaves (Thurston 59).

Strickland, Blackness, and the Invitation to Speak

In late 1830, Strickland wrote a short poem, "An Appeal to the Free," for the *Athenaeum* in which she highlighted the detrimental effects of slavery on the British public, declaring that the unreformed minds of slavery's bystanders were themselves in shackles. Perhaps overshooting the mark, she portrays those who "suffer a brother in bondage to pine" as being themselves enslaved by their inhumanity.⁷² The "Appeal" confirms John Thurston's suspicion that Strickland's "sympathy for slaves had been overdetermined by her experience of the chains of class and gender and her adoption of evangelical morality."⁷³ Although she was well read,

⁷¹ By the 1820s, evangelical women's drawing-room philanthropy had emerged as a pursuit compatible with domestic ideology, although many female abolitionists feared for their respectability, especially when the conversation shifted from the religious register to the political one. Male political leaders, especially from conservative evangelical factions, strongly disapproved of female abolitionism. Women abolitionists countered that their activity naturally followed from other feminine religious occupations, such as missionary or Sunday School work. Female-led abolitionism was thus framed as charity rather than policy-making (Midgley 93-4; see Ferguson 1992, 294; Kidd 69-70).

⁷² Strickland 1830, 728. Pringle's line of reasoning is similar: "Slavery is an institution which, wherever it exists, must produce misery and degradation to all concerned in it; to the master as well as to the slave"; slavery "vitiates, by a terrible re-action, the heart and character of the oppressor" (Pringle 1828, 289, 292). This is a standard abolitionist trope, of course. Southey's "The Sailor who had Served in the Slave Trade" (1789) serves as an important predecessor. Strickland and Pringle rework the trope by embedding it within evangelical rhetoric (Voss 74-5).

⁷³ Thurston 59. Two further publications by Strickland from this period warrant mentioning. "The Vanquished Lion" (1832) relies on sentimental tropes and is in line with the Anti-Slavery Society's ideology and phrasing. It carefully refutes contemporary pro-slavery arguments and encourages readers to "rightly consider[] the subject" (Moodie

Strickland had little insight into, and virtually no expertise in, slavery's economic scope or its impact on daily existence in the West Indies before meeting Prince—and benefitting from Prince's domestic service—at Pringle's home. While scholars identify her encounter with Prince as primarily shaped by racial difference and the negotiation of that difference⁷⁴, I would refine this estimation and argue that, in light of Strickland's other writings, she probably comprehended Prince as culturally uncouth and economically downtrodden. Prince's phenotypical difference likely contributed to the social distance Strickland perceived to exist between herself and the destitute slave-turned-servant. However, racial difference, for Strickland, primarily signified abject class status. I also expect that she considered Prince's virtue to be besmirched, perhaps irrecoverably so, as she conspicuously avoids referring to Prince as a friend later.

It is likely that Strickland did not reflect on the circumstance that she, as the penniless spawn of a white family with genteel aspirations, was entitled to reside in Pringle's family as a

1985, 37). Strickland's speaker enumerates the shared experiences of enslaved people, a list that uncannily resembles the plot of Mary Prince's *History* and that illustrates abolitionism's focus on a limited repertoire of scenes and concerns:

To be torn from their country—to be exposed in the public market-place—to be sold like beasts of burden—to be separated from fathers, and mothers, and brothers, and sisters, and husbands, and wives, and children—to be worked beyond their strength—to have no settled home—to receive no wages for their labour—to be inhumanly punished with a cart-whip for the least offence, and often for no offence at all—to have no one to comfort them when sad, to nurse them when sick, or to feel the least pity for such aggravated sufferings—to pass a childhood, a youth, and a manhood of toil, and an old age of disease and neglect—this ... is to be a slave. (Moodie 1985, 37)

Further, the overall tone of the story is “condescending and overweeningly literary,” as Rauwerda observes. This short sample will suffice: “The eyes of the black glistened with joy as he pressed the fair youth to his dark bosom. ‘Dear young massa, think no ill of the black man—look no dark upon him. Black man have a large heart—black man love all that treat him well’” (Thurston 39). Second, the late sketch “Washing the Black-A-Moor White” (1871), a supposedly humorous anecdote about a former slave boy scratching black paint off a plaster cast of his own head, illustrates Strickland's conscious use of color binaries to mark cultural, social, and racial difference. It also repeats racist stereotypes about African-born persons' physical and intellectual inferiority that had crystallized—and worsened—by the second half of the nineteenth century, in addition to showcasing the Strickland sisters' indebtedness to phrenology as a racial discourse (see Peterman 40; see Wheeler 2000, 235). The sketch's egregious language almost lets one doubt that Strickland had actually interacted with former slaves forty years earlier (Moodie 1991, 253-6).

⁷⁴ See Baumgartner 266; Bohls 167; Haynes 30; Whitlock 1995, 253; Whitlock 2000, 40; Woodard 133; for Strickland's replication of monogenecist thought, see Cooper 206.

guest—presumably without financial contribution to her maintenance—while Prince, the penniless former slave, had to earn her keep in Pringle’s employ, notwithstanding her physical debility (see Thurston 60). If her earlier stories are any indication as to how Strickland perceived Mary Prince, it seems safe to say that, as long as Prince’s conduct towards Strickland evinced the necessary degree of humility and gratitude, Strickland would count Prince as one of the deserving poor in need of temporary guardianship and tutelage (Moodie 1985, 60). She was not always as generous. After witnessing a procession led by radical reformer Henry Hunt (whose politics would have a profound effect on the later emergence of Chartism) towards Islington in late January 1831, Strickland, in a letter to her friends James and Emma Bird, denounces the mostly male crowd of working-class demonstrators as an “incomparable blacking mass,” “dirty blacking boys,” and “motley band of rag tag notoriety” spouting “teeth jarring jargon.”⁷⁵ Their refusal to disperse leads Strickland to believe they lacked the money to pay the road toll. She dismisses revolutionary agitation from below with reference to the self-defeating spectacle of the mob’s poverty, with black dirt and uncouth shrillness signifying uninvited sights and sounds. Class (dirt), race (black appearance), and gender (unruly, possibly sexually threatening, boys) appear to converge in Strickland’s memory of the Islington procession; no voice from below is worth hearing unless Strickland herself encourages such speech. This episode suggests that, despite Strickland’s well-meaning benevolence, her abolitionist zeal co-exists with her collusion in working-class disenfranchisement, a stance widely cultivated among female anti-slavery writers.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Moodie 1985, 56-7. James Bird was a minor poet as well as stationer and bookseller in Yoxford, Suffolk, near Reydon Hall (Vigne 2011, 16n75).

⁷⁶ Whitlock 1995, 250; see Thurston 60, and Midgley 93. As Jennifer DeVere Brody notes, abolitionists often “analogized class and race” and employed dark-skinned women as stand-ins for more immediately pressing national

Whereas the first part of her letter to the Birds expresses Strickland's disdain for men whose racialized poverty illegitimately claims her attention, her beneficence towards a poor black woman determines the second half. The letter moves seamlessly from castigating working-class difference as black/dirty/male to detailing Strickland's occupation as Prince's ostensible secretary in the following paragraph. Both passages are structured by Strickland's arrogance towards, and conscious self-distancing from, the sight of blackness, and neutralize the force of Prince's own political resistance.⁷⁷

I have been writing Mr. Pringle's black Mary's life from her own dictation and for her benefit adhering to her own simple story and language without deviating to the paths of flourish or romance. It is a pathetic little history and is now printing in the form of a pamphlet to be laid before the Houses of Parliament. Of course my name does not appear. Mr. Pringle has added a very interesting appendix and I hope the work will do much good ... (Moodie 1985, 57)

The slippage of race/class performed in the letter's earlier section also shapes Strickland's description of her own contribution to the *History*. Here, "black" is the major attribute of abolitionism's grateful recipient, Mary, herself in possessive grammatical and material relationship to Strickland's father figure Pringle.⁷⁸ As the *History* details, Prince had worked as

concerns of white women's or working-class disenfranchisement. The situation of working-class whites in England was regularly compared to that of black slaves (Brody 80)—a connection that was clearly not on Strickland's mind.

⁷⁷ For Strickland's habit to conflate linguistic codes of race and class, see "Black Jenny" (1832) which, despite the title, is about an impoverished blacksmith, his sick wife, and five children who are rescued by a gentry philanthropist. The titular "Black Jenny" is a foal, symbolizing a youthful free spirit shackled by poverty (Thurston 37).

⁷⁸ See Ferguson 1992, 296; Paquet 2002, 36; Rauwerda 397-401; Todorova 292; Whitlock 1995, 255-6; and Whitlock 2000, 19 for extensive scholarly commentary on the many names of the *History*'s narrator—Mary Prince, Mary Princess, Mary Princess of Wales, Mary James, Black Mary, and Molly Wood. Each name instantiates a different owner's or editor's desire, "construct[ing] Prince in ideologically and politically loaded ways" (Rauwerda 397). "Prince" is her father's (given) name (*MP* 57), preferred by Pringle whose footnote is invested in creating the illusion of a Christian-patrilineal line of recognition that reverses slavery's erasure of descent (Rauwerda 400). "Mary, Princess of Wales" is the likely derogatory name the Anglican Reverend Curtin wrote into Prince's spelling book (Thomas 2014, 135). Obviously, "Prince" is an equally derogatory name for a slave or servant, something that Pringle fails to note in his preference of the metaphorically rich "Mary Prince." That Pringle does not opt for "Mary James" (although Prince's temporary employer, Mrs. Forsyth, calls her thus) might indicate that he, similar to John Wood, doubted the indissolubility of slave marriages or that he was loath to compete with Daniel James for

charwoman for Mrs. Forsyth in the summer of 1829 before joining Pringle's household staff (*MP* 92, 114). Twice blackened, Prince's race and occupation mark the social gap between the former slave and her amanuensis. For Strickland, who elsewhere participated in the convention of sentimentally portraying working-class people as enslaved, recognition of non-elite experience can only occur in response to Pringle's paternalistic encouragement and depends on the conflation of racial and class oppression (see Thurston 192n39). It appears that Strickland remained true to her old plots. Thus, "Papa Pringle," Prince's proprietor and Strickland's paternal guide, authorizes his servant's "simple" and "pathetic little" tale as worthy of Strickland's recording, while assuring readers of Prince's "place in a patrilineal order" (Whitlock 2000, 19). Strickland, meanwhile, doubly announces her charitable condescension while assuring her correspondents that, although not written as a sentimental novel, the *History* still contains sufficient pathos to be enjoyed as entertaining.⁷⁹

Strickland's phrasing suggests that she found it unusual to write a story unadorned by "flourish and romance" and that she might have been tempted to enliven—or generically and socially elevate—Prince's words by adding features that characterized Strickland's own literary works.⁸⁰ Drawing attention to the fact that her name will not be printed (amanuenses

authority over the former slave woman who was now under his protection. The Anti-Slavery Society's 1829 petition on Prince's behalf actually called her "*Mary Princess* or *James*, commonly called *Molly Wood*," a fact that most scholars and editors overlook. "Molly," Wood's name for her, is slang for housekeeper or prostitute (Rauwerda 402). This is all to say that the designation "Prince" is very unstable, and there might have been other, unrecorded names. It is unknown which name she would have claimed for herself.

⁷⁹ Moodie 1985, 41; see Cooper 199, and Whitlock 2000, 27.

⁸⁰ Heightened sentiment and romance were generic conventions firmly associated with pre-Victorian genteel femininity. When Strickland emphasizes the absence of flourish in the *History*, she indirectly also limits its speaker's pretense to rank (see Whitlock 2000, 18). In fact, readers of the fashionable literary annuals in which Strickland published her work during the 1820s equated simplicity and directness with vulgarity. Helena Woodard reads the *History* with Strickland's comment in mind and claims that "the grammatical roughness of the narrative flaunted the bareness of Prince's literary skills" (Woodard 144). There is no evidence attesting to the strength to Prince's "literary skills"—the formulation appears strange in light of Prince's illiteracy. The spelling book in Prince's possession and referenced by Pringle teaches one-syllable words (*MP* 84n; Thomas 2014, 135). Yet, for all

conventionally remained invisible), Strickland, ironically modest, seems to deplore that she cannot be credited with authorship for her endeavor (see Whitlock 1995, 251). However, in a letter she sends to the Birds three months later (see below), she refers to herself as Mary Prince's "Biographer." She thus reinserts her name into the *History*'s production process, despite the story's many allusions to sexual transgression and violence from which she was required to disassociate herself.⁸¹

How would Strickland remember her interactions with Prince? Antje Rauwerda helpfully points to Strickland's predilection to "fictionalize[] and render[] literary almost all details, even those of her own life" in her later autobiographical sketches (405). For instance, Strickland's series of autobiographical sketches entitled "Rachel Wilde, or, Trifles from the Burthen of a Life" (1851) tends to poeticize affective states and descriptions of everyday occurrences, and celebrates the heroine's heroic mastery of hardship despite 'Rachel's' "fragile, gentle, and romantic nature" (Rauwerda 405). "Rachel Wilde" refers to Strickland's transcription of Prince's *History* when the protagonist is addressed by Mrs. Dalton, the embodiment of pro-slavery's willful ignorance:

"Who cared for a slave? One would think," she said, "That you belonged to the Anti-Slavery Society. By the by, have you read a canting tract by that pious fraternity called 'The History of Mary P—.' It is set forth to be an authentic narrative, while I know it to be a tissue of falsehoods from beginning to end."

"Did you know Mary P—?"

"Pshaw!—who does? It is an imaginary tale, got up for party purposes."

"But I do know Mary P—, and I know that narrative to be strictly true, for I took it down myself from the woman's own lips."

"You?"—and Mrs. Dalton started from the ground, as though she had been bitten

we know, Prince might have been a gifted storyteller. She likely spoke a form of Caribbean patois (i.e. slaves' creolized language, a combination of English, French, Spanish, and West African languages), associated in the metropolis with low intelligence and black contamination of (elite) Standard English (Aljoe 78-9; see Sharpe 2002, 129).

⁸¹ Moodie 1985, 60; see Whitlock 2000, 27.

by a serpent.

“Yes, me.”

“You belong to that odious society.”

“I have many dear friends who are among its staunch supporters, whose motives are purely benevolent, who have nothing to gain by the freedom of the slave, beyond the restoration of a large portion of the human family to their rights as men.”

“Mere cant—the vanity of making a noise in the world. One of the refined hypocrisies of life. Good night, Mrs. M.—I don’t want to know any more of the writer of Mary P—.” (Moodie 1991, 228-9)

In light of the avalanche of negative commentary after the *History*’s publication and the extensive proslavery suspicion about its authenticity, Strickland might have felt compelled to affirm its veracity and her own adherence to ‘fact’ two decades later. The scene between Rachel and Mrs. Dalton indicates that Strickland might have been personally attacked for confabulating Prince’s story, and she uses her novel to stage a rebuttal. Although the women mention Mary Prince, the scene is frustrating for Prince scholars because it focuses entirely on abolitionism’s persistent difficulty to overcome British readers’ skepticism, although Strickland, when writing “Rachel Wilde,” was perhaps aware of Mary Prince’s fate after Emancipation. The scene showcases Strickland’s ambivalence about anti-slavery’s *raison d’être*, not only because Rachel denies her official affiliation with the Anti-Slavery Society, leaving membership to her “many dear friends.” In fact, the censoring of Prince’s name distances Strickland from her work on the *History*, perhaps because Strickland feared association with the politically and erotically risqué details of Prince’s libel cases and desired not to be mistaken for her alter ego ‘Rachel.’ She might have also preferred the initials’ quasi-fictional vagueness. As Rauwerda notes,

Rachel/Strickland asserts the validity of the narrative based on the existence of the amanuensis rather than on that of Prince. The narrative is true because “I took it down,” not because it really happened. The “tissue of falsehoods” is not parted to reveal Prince, but rather to reveal Strickland. The incident serves only to reinforce Prince’s absence from what is ostensibly her own text. (406)

Strickland discusses slavery in “Rachel Wilde” not for Prince’s sake, but for the purpose of highlighting the number of her professional connections and her contribution to a widely published and notorious text. “Rachel Wilde’s” treatment of Strickland’s work on the *History* suggests that Strickland considered her task as amanuensis an augmentation of her literary standing (see Aljoe 74). She did not consider herself obliged to count Prince as one of her important literary contacts—rather, if they shared a personal bond, it is disavowed in “Rachel Wilde,” and Prince’s ghostly, redacted presence serves as a means to an end.

Although Rachel Wilde does not reference Strickland’s work on another pamphlet produced in 1831, this second slave testimony, *Negro Slavery Described by a Negro: Being the Narrative of Ashton Warner, a Native of St. Vincent’s*, deepens the impression that Strickland considered her contribution to the Anti-Slavery Society’s print media campaign a vehicle to establish herself as a woman of letters with her newly-acquired evangelical moral and political affinities.⁸² Published a few weeks after Mary Prince’s *History*, *Ashton Warner* recognizes the amanuensis on the imprint page; her name appears as “S. Strickland.” Her introduction to *Negro Slavery* traces her own political conversion, brought about by her encounters with slaves:

The entire change in my own ideas, in regard to slavery, was chiefly effected by the frequent opportunities which Providence recently and unexpectedly threw in my way of conversing with several negroes, both male and female, who had been British colonial slaves, and who had borne in their own persons the marks of the brand and the whip ... (Strickland 1831, 10-1)

Conversation aids conversion, yet, as is so often the case, the visual proof of abuse is what convinces Strickland to listen.⁸³ Warner was twenty-four years old and severely ill when he told

⁸² She learned only later that Pringle had to absorb losses of £15-20 on Warner’s narrative (Vigne 2012, 205). Clearly, it did not sell as well as Prince’s pamphlet, perhaps due to its less risqué content.

⁸³ See Peterman 47; Thomas 2014, 113.

his story to Strickland, and a note added before the pamphlet went into print, dated March 1, 1831, announced Warner's death and promised that proceeds would go towards the manumission of his family in St. Vincent.⁸⁴ As is the case in Prince's *History*, the editor anticipates readers' initial dismissal of the project's validity. Strickland safely shrouds Warner's textual legacy in the progress narrative of anti-slavery's evangelical imperialism and her own culture's supremacy: "His amiable disposition and natural intelligence are striking proofs of what the African is capable, were his mental powers suffered to expand under the genial influences of civilization and Christianity."⁸⁵ These are the terms on which Strickland envisions slaves' deliverance and elevation.

Despite her recent defection from Establishment culture, Strickland continued to write within the parameters of socially conservative popular fiction in which "her long-suffering, mistreated, but noble protagonists" see their burdens lifted in ideological agreement with, and to the self-congratulating satisfaction of, British Christianity (Peterman 34-5). Resulting from Strickland's realization that she was, "until a few months ago, one of the apathetical and deluded class I am now animadverting upon," *Ashton Warner* and Mary Prince's *History* are the products, and trace the recent process, of Strickland's enthusiastic and romantic conversion to female middle-class philanthropy, echoing Pringle's "awakening" from apathy ten years earlier.⁸⁶ Strickland's training in femininity disqualified her from considering the effects of

⁸⁴ The introduction is dated February 19, 1831.

⁸⁵ Strickland 1831, 12; Midgley 93, 98, 103. Improving men's behavior towards women was an important aspect of women's enthusiasm for spreading civilization abroad and at home. Strickland's words suggest that Warner behaved properly during the interview. See Whitlock 2000, 54, for the added complexities of Strickland's relationship to "civilization" after her own emigration to Canada and her self-reconfiguration into colonial agent.

⁸⁶ Strickland 1831, 6; Midgley 94. The passage continues with a jab at James Macqueen and suggests that the pro-slavery lobby and *Blackwood's* audiences are one and the same: "The truth is, I had drawn the little knowledge I then possessed on this subject chiefly from literary periodicals on the side of the planters, such as the *Quarterly*

social, political, and economic pressures on individual and cultural identity, as these domains were inaccessible to her (see Midgley 93-4). Hence she ascribes “Africans” failure to thrive within the precepts of “civilization” to slavery’s moral failings which implicate both enslaved and enslaver. With good self-governance, such obstacles will be overcome, she assures readers.

White Virgin and Black Prostitute

When scholars discuss the *History*’s silence about significant details of Prince’s life, most of which have to do with Prince’s sexuality (for instance, her serial cohabitation with men before her marriage), they tend to ignore Susanna Strickland’s own limited ability to speak explicitly about—or even to acknowledge the existence of—sexual matters. As an unmarried evangelical woman, Strickland, at least ‘officially,’ had no access to the culturally sanctioned circulation of erotic knowledge. Still, Prince’s testimony as well as Strickland’s perusal of abolitionist literature likely acquainted the amanuensis with the “uncomfortable conjunction of eros and enslavement” in abolitionist literature. Its presence increased in prohibited pornographic texts during the first half of the nineteenth century (Thurston 61).

Just as she was living with the Pringles, Strickland—in her late twenties, moderately successful as an author, recently converted, unmarried, yet eager to settle down—appeared to try out different identities and life plans, repeatedly changing her mind over the course of only a few days or weeks. For instance, in a letter to James Bird dated October 9, 1830, Strickland playfully counts herself as one of the “bluestocking fraternity composing sublime odes” consisting of herself and her sisters; her next letter to Bird on the 19th announces her engagement to Captain

Review, Blackwood’s Magazine, and other publications of the same class; works certainly but little calculated to excite the feelings or alarm the conscience on this momentous question” (Strickland 1831, 6).

Moodie.⁸⁷ When she returned to the Pringles at Claremont Square between December 1830 and January 1831, she was encouraged by positive responses to her recent publications, and, concerned about Moodie's intentions to emigrate owing to his penury, she decided to break off the engagement (Moodie 1985, 54-5). It was back on soon: a week after inspecting the scars on Mary Prince's back in Pringle's home, Strickland married Moodie on April 4, 1831. In her letter to James Bird from the 9th, the new Mrs. Moodie writes,

I was on the 4th instant at St. Pancras Church made the happiest girl on earth ... Mr Pringle "gave me" away, and Black Mary, who had treated herself with a complete new suit upon the occasion, went on the coach box, to see her dear Missie and Biographer wed. I assure you, that instead of feeling the least regret at the step I was taking, if a tear trembled in my eyes, it was one of joy, and I pronounced the fatal obey, with a firm determination to keep it. My blue stockings, since became a wife, have turned so pale that I think they will soon be quite white ... I send you twenty copies of Mary's *History*, and 2 of *Ashton Warner*. If you can in the way of trade dispose of them, I should feel obliged. I have begun the pudding and dumpling discussions, and now find, that the noble art of housewifery is more to be desired than all the accomplishments, which are to be retailed by the literary and fashionable damsels who frequent these envied circles. (Moodie 1985, 60-1)

This passage highlights Strickland's self-conscious and rapid transformation from ambitious writer to wife. While Mrs. Moodie's biography as pioneer settler woman-cum-author in Canada commences on her wedding day, archival traces of Prince's life in the 1830s are nearly exhausted at this point. The image of "Black Mary" in her new clothes, sitting with the driver, is one of the last recorded glimpses we have of Prince. Despite the letter's careful attention to the maintenance of class boundaries (one wonders whether Prince had owned any formal holiday clothes since her arrival in England), Susanna Strickland Moodie's reference to herself as Prince's "dear Missie and Biographer" presents her relationship with Prince as affectionate. As this letter showcases Strickland's intense awareness of her own changing identity position, her

⁸⁷ Moodie 1985, 52; see Thurston 61.

ties to Prince are likely subject to the same intense scrutiny and re-evaluation. Whether that friendly feeling actually existed or, if so, whether it was mutual, is impossible to tell.⁸⁸ Yet, Gillian Whitlock's reminder that "Missie" also occurs in the *History* as Prince's appellation for Miss Betsey Darrell, to whom Prince was given as her "pet," is sobering because it highlights the possessive quality inherent in female relationships across class and race, regardless of the white woman's abolitionist sentiment.⁸⁹ "Black Mary," in fact, helps constitute "Mrs. Moodie."

In the above passage, "Black Mary" and "Missie" appear in the context of other, now stabilized, designations for Strickland. The somewhat flippant negation of intellectual ambition and Strickland's (in hindsight specious) announcement that her literary endeavors have come to an end jarringly compete with Prince's ostensibly glad spectatorship of the wedding and the former slave's financial dependence on Mr. Bird's ability to sell the pamphlets bearing the name she was given by Pringle. Moreover, "Black Mary" exists in uncomfortable opposition to Strickland's ever whitening, increasingly purified stockings. The image, reshuffling the connections between women's (un)married sexuality, erotic innuendo, and female intellectualism, suggests that once Strickland's mental transition into wifehood has been accomplished, she will turn to domestic "discussions" rather than improper ones about slaves and undergarments (Whitlock 1995, 255). The former slave and her tangled moral baggage will be jettisoned in favor of white female passionlessness. Conversely, Prince, in her permanent blackness, does not possess such claim to privacy, which becomes obvious again in February

⁸⁸ Peterman interprets Strickland's naming of Prince as "Black Mary" to signify fondness, rather than a boundary marker (46).

⁸⁹ Whitlock 2000, 27; see *MP* 57; Midgley 91. Sue Thomas interprets the name 'Missie' to refer to the "honey bee ... a colloquial term for something sweet or admired." Thomas reminds readers that, while the bee makes honey, it can also sting (2014, 147). In their assessments of Strickland and Prince's "collaboration" scholars usually do not attend to the possibility that Strickland/Moodie's discourse of affinity towards Prince is not necessarily benign.

1833, when she is required to disclose her sexual history before the libel court for several hours.⁹⁰ Such details within Strickland's report of her wedding day, alongside Prince's purported attachment to the bride (but not vice versa), implicitly assure the Birds that "Black Mary" is, at the very least, not on reciprocally friendly footing with the bride. Rather, Mary Prince, as Moodie's foil, helps sustain Moodie's white femininity and contributes to the "racialization of sex and the sexualization of race" at work here (Altink 90).

It is surprising that scholars take the *History*'s assertion regarding Prince's unproblematic alliance with Strickland at face value. The often-quoted passage, "I will say the truth to English people who may read this history that my good friend, Miss S—, is now writing down for me," is seen to symbolize a utopian convergence of anti-racist struggle, with the black woman expressing her gratitude to and political allegiance with the white scribe.⁹¹ However, I contend that the speaker's declaration of gratitude towards Strickland, the friendly amanuensis, is indispensable to the *History*'s rhetorical performance of authenticity. As has been noted, Strickland functions as the as innocent, maidenly, genteel conduit for Prince's testimony. As such, white femininity filters explicit language and—just as marriage whitens Mrs. Moodie's blue stockings—bleaches Prince's ideologically inconvenient sexual experiences into silence and respectability.⁹² Within the logic of domestic ideology, it is precisely Strickland's virginity,

⁹⁰ The *Times* report of Wood v. Pringle records three instances of the court's boisterous laughter during Prince's examination, suggesting that the assembled middle-class audience perceived Prince's reminiscences—she found another woman in her lover's bed—as entertaining low-brow bawdy. As Sue Thomas puts it, Prince likely "made a spectacle of herself" (2005, 128; see Rauwerda 408). Throughout the article the reporter refers to Prince, at this point forty years old and debilitated, as "the girl." In the *History*, middle-class editors ("Ed." and "S—") and Caribbean slaveholders ("Mr. D—" and "Capt. I—") have equal rights to anonymity and privacy. Their names are redacted in deference to their reputation and assumed ability to litigate in libel suits.

⁹¹ *MP* 94; see Whitlock 2000, 20.

⁹² The court documents and Pringle's own contextualizing materials suggest that the filter is not leak tight. Whitlock reads the narrative produced by Strickland and Prince as "a strictly policed first-person narration, with no sexually compromising material" (Whitlock 2000, 19; also see Ferguson's introduction, *MP* 4). As my readings below

announced by reference to “Miss S—” on the very last page of Prince’s eyewitness account, that authorizes the slave woman’s voice to emerge and that, by concluding the tale, certifies the text’s inoffensiveness to polite women readers, while Pringle’s implicit paternal protection of the unmarried Strickland cloaks the “writing scene” in propriety.⁹³ Strickland is required as Prince’s white double; if Pringle had been advertised as her interviewer, the narrative’s prurience would have been too strong for public taste.⁹⁴ Simultaneously, it is obvious that the *History*’s decency is weakened by the many explicit references to Prince’s sexual transgressions in the supplementary materials Pringle penned for the third edition which explicitly name Strickland as amanuensis. Why, then, should scholars trust the *History*’s speaker’s claims to friendship (and, ostensibly, equality) with “Miss S—” when the text’s rhetorical structure is thus overdetermined by the sexual burdens of slavery?⁹⁵

All this is to say that scholarly celebrations of the “writing scene’s” political radicality and its successful overcoming of racial prejudice, while certainly opportune when considering

suggests, Strickland’s/Pringle’s incomplete censorship in fact risks compromising the unmarried Strickland. Likewise, Mary Caroline Bennett, John Wood’s married daughter (who had left Antigua in 1821) risks her reputation when testifying about Prince’s moral character under cross-examination. She contradicts her father when she says that she had “[n]ever heard of any charge of immorality against Mary Prince,” as her respectability depends on her public silence about sexual knowledge (*Times* March 1, 1833, 6; see Thomas 2014, 136-7).

⁹³ Pringle, in January 1831, shields Strickland’s anonymity in the first edition’s preface: “The narrative was taken down from Mary’s own lips by a lady who happened to be at the time residing in my family as a visitor” (*MP* 55; see Whitlock 1995, 251-2).

⁹⁴ Macqueen, writing in November 1831, ignores Strickland’s role entirely apart from casting doubt on her and Mrs. Pringle’s “delicacy and modesty,” and jumps directly to sexually compromising conclusions about Pringle and Prince. These are conditioned by Prince’s status as Pringle’s employee (Macqueen “Colonial Empire,” 745, 751; see Thomas 2005, 118). For Macqueen, “the figures of the black servants mark the presence of illicit sexual activity” (Gilman 209).

⁹⁵ I ask this question in opposition to Gillian Whitlock who considers the same passage proof of Prince’s self-empowerment: “by way of thanking Strickland, Mary Prince affirms her own status as interlocutor, claiming her narrative before the very eyes of Pringle and her transcriber, her public mediators and guarantors as it were” (1995, 252).

the atrocities Prince had to suffer, are exaggerated. Multi-pronged prejudice, for example Strickland's with its particular race/class slippages, continued to affect Prince negatively after her arrival in London, even if that harm was much less vicious than the atrocities she experienced as a slave. Accounts that frame the *History*'s production as a monumental landmark in the history of anti-racist struggle risk ignoring that abolitionism itself was fully implicated in the perpetuation of racist, classist, and misogynistic power structures.

Who Gets to Be a Mother?

Women's anti-slavery writings usually invoked permissible feminine traits, such as pity and empathy, as main catalysts of their activism, and, relatedly, conscripted themselves to the abolitionist cause as obvious preservers of the slave family and black motherhood. Convinced that their own experiences, particularly the imagined universals of pregnancy and childrearing, united them with slave women, ladies' anti-slavery associations dedicated their work specifically to the improvement of female slaves' plight. Obviously, their conception of liberated slave women's future did not extend beyond their own proper sphere of action. Rather, female middle-class abolitionists idealized their social position and offered it as a privilege to be enjoyed once their 'enlightened' imperialism, along with Christian civilization and British cultural and political laws, reached foreign shores. This idealization was often blind to British working-class women's struggles and tended to exaggerate the ideological power of middle-class femininity. Female abolitionists like Susanna Strickland, then, focused their energy on drawing public attention to those aspects of slavery that violated domestic ideology, successfully reframing such aspects—female flogging, women's field work, the separation of families, the slave woman's impossible split of loyalty between her master and her husband, and the slave mother's inability

to spend her pregnancy in seclusion and care properly for her children—as slavery’s essential crimes, without regard for slave women’s own cultural memory, everyday living conditions, future aspirations, and current strategies of survival.⁹⁶ The formulaic representation of slave women “both verbally and visually as the ultimate passive victim” occurred because female abolitionists perceived them as incapable of self-assertion—and, in the ways of print culture, they were—and without male protection (Midgley 102). The brief glimpses of Mary Prince’s lived experience make the *History* so important to critics. Owing to Strickland and Pringle’s mediation, however, it is impossible to tease apart individual points of view.

The greatest logical gap within the *History*, of course, is its silence about Mary Prince’s reproductive experience.⁹⁷ The reasons for this elision might be ascertained when shifting one’s attention briefly to Strickland’s record as mother. After marriage, Strickland’s self-disciplining into proper gentlewoman and wife would be complete when she gave birth to her daughter Catharine less than a year after her wedding. Another year later, Mrs. Moodie was precariously settled in Upper Canada. Scholars have often noted that Moodie’s narratives of settlement are fundamentally shaped by her experience as a young mother, her “mother tongue” founding both a nation’s literary heritage and giving voice to the experiences of mothers surviving under dire conditions (Whitlock 2000, 250, 257). Motherhood, for Moodie, would “be constitutive, the most fundamental element in [her] articulation of self” (Whitlock 2000, 40). Prince’s “mother tongue,” that is, her patois as well as her possible maternity or pregnancy, on the other hand, is erased during the *History*’s production, because it is unintelligible outside domestic ideology, or

⁹⁶ Midgley 94-103; see Altink 2; Beckles 38.

⁹⁷ According to Ferguson, the *History* “enciphers motherhood obliquely, [Prince’s] strange silence [being] an egregiously conspicuous omission in near-Victorian, family-conscious England” (Ferguson 1992, 289).

more accurately, because domestic ideology brands Prince's experiences as those of a prostitute. My point is that Prince's sexual life, as well as the *History*'s silence about it, are constitutive of that very same domestic ideology (see Stoler 1995, 109-11). Although Moodie's genteel poverty and isolation in the Canadian wilderness strain the paradigm of domesticity to the utmost, the concurrence of whiteness, education, and Anglican marriage constitute motherhood as the core of Moodie's identity. Her maternity is necessary for spreading Christian civilization and reproducing white bodies at Empire's margins. Prince's body, the experiential site of degradation and terror as recorded in the *History*, however, cannot be mobilized as pregnant or maternal. It is disqualified, ineligible.

That only one of the two literary women gets to reproduce and have her lineage recorded illustrates the sharp disparity in scholars' ability (and often willingness) to study Moodie's and Prince's interrelated literary and biological inheritance.⁹⁸ Moodie's children and Prince's missing child(ren) are part of the very same, and increasingly anxious, inscription of motherhood as British women's fundamental social role and primary reward during the nineteenth century (see Altink 11-2). If we understand the *History* as part of a longer tradition of ritualized inquest targeting unmarried mothers among the working poor to assess the allocation of welfare aid—philanthropic organizations and governments “often demanded a [written] story in exchange for [their] dole” (Steedman 48)—the absence of Mary Prince's child is neither a contradiction nor a coincidence.

⁹⁸ For a recent exception, see Andrea Medovarski's “Roughing it in Bermuda: Mary Prince, Susanna Strickland Moodie, Dionne Brand, and the Black Diaspora” (2014).

Susanna's Plots, Cont'd

Although academic studies of autobiography had initially focused on elite self-writing, personal life stories told by the poor vastly outnumber those of the socially privileged, particularly in Britain. As Carolyn Steedman notes, the rise of the bureaucratic state entailed the enforced narration of individual experience, character, and selfhood before a magistrate, beginning in the seventeenth century (46, 55). The repetition of the telling, usually with the judge's questions and promptings edited out, encrusted oral autobiography into a conventional basic structure that eventually aided the formation of the modern literary subject. Both the Bildungsroman's protagonist, the literary character, and servants' official 'character,' a "mask that people were expected to don in the face of power," are the result of the same interpellative apparatus (Steedman 55). The overwhelming majority of working-class testimonies given by women facing bastardy examinations tell the strictly sequenced story of work, seduction, and anguished conversion, made to appear self-evident by the removal of the interlocutor and the interlocutor's implied loyalty to domestic ideology (Steedman 46-7). Such working-class narratives, written down by silent scribes, are reminiscent of early nineteenth-century stage melodrama in their reliance on social censure (i.e. articulation of shame and the meticulous recording cohabitations and fornications) as catalysts for conversion, despite their official function to determine the mother's eligibility for welfare handouts. Often, the women were servants whose possession of their own person, labor, and stories was contested, and whose moral 'character' was constituted by this rhetorical process.

I read Mary Prince's *History*, with its pedantic attention to legal detail (date and place of birth, baptism, places of residence) and moral improvement (repentance and conversion), as a 'character' statement "in which one employer described to another ... the habits and qualities of a

servant.”⁹⁹ The aim of the *History* is to give Mary Prince ‘character’—to convert her from maximally degraded black slave to a plucky, semi-autonomous agent within slavery, and afterwards to a paid servant and respectable working-class recipient of philanthropic monies. Pringle, whose expertise is a function of his class status and resulting acculturation, vouches with his name for her conversion, assuring skeptical readers of “the watchful eye I kept upon her conduct” and his “closely observing her ... for fourteen months.”¹⁰⁰ Prince-as-subject arises from the text on Pringle’s terms—he is her moral doctor and social guidance counselor. Relatedly, Jenny Sharpe and others observe that each of Prince’s decisions described in the *History* feeds into, and aligns with, antislavery’s political mission.¹⁰¹ Prince’s being periodically sold away into increasingly harsh conditions amounts to a carefully plotted “descent into evil” against which the slave supposedly creates a bulwark of Christian morality and faith (Whitlock 2000, 11, 20). The *History*, told in retrospective three years before Emancipation, stages a generic, if not archetypal, Odyssean plot of freedom for the almost-enlightened subject, catering to a teleologically/theologically-minded audience and defending England’s role as the origin of political change. Prince’s liberation from nightmarish hardship is not the primary concern, but the

⁹⁹ Steedman 55; see Schroeder 265.

¹⁰⁰ *MP* 115. Pringle’s ‘character’ statement thus, edited for length: “We have found her perfectly honest and trustworthy in all respects; so that we have no hesitation in leaving every thing in the house at her disposal. ... She is not, it is true, a very expert housemaid, nor capable of much hard work, (for her constitution appears to be a good deal broken,) but she is careful, industrious, and anxious to do her duty and to give satisfaction. She is capable of strong attachments, and feels deep, though unobtrusive, gratitude for real kindness shown her. She possesses considerable natural sense, and has much quickness of observation and discrimination of character. She is remarkable for *decency* and *propriety* of conduct—and her *delicacy*, even in trifling minutiae, has been a trait of special remark by the females of my family. ... Her chief faults, so far as we have discovered them, are, a somewhat violent and hasty temper, and a considerable share of natural pride and self-importance; but these defects have been but rarely and transiently manifested ... In short, we consider her on the whole as respectable and well-behaved a person in her station, as any domestic, white or black, (and we have had ample experience of both colours,) that we have ever had in our service” (*MP* 15-6).

¹⁰¹ 2002, 120, see 142; also see Cooper 200; Ferguson 1992, 378n37; Ferguson 1998, 51; Haynes 25-6; Todorova 288-93.

establishment of global ‘civilization’ that will mass-produce enlightened black subjects as a result of benevolent English tutelage and religious conversion. Without conversion, successful (business) relations between Europeans and former slaves cannot be established.¹⁰²

Prince had received a bad ‘character’ from the Woods that reduced the likelihood of her finding work by stating she was lazy, dishonest, and licentious: “she would be a very troublesome character should she come [to Antigua] without any restraint.”¹⁰³ According to the Woods, Prince’s continued enslavement served the public order and limited her ability to further degrade herself morally (see Thomas 2014, 162). The narrative attempts to reverse that earlier ‘character’ although Pringle, as her employer, explicitly appends an estimation of Prince’s temperament that eerily sounds like Wood’s, and that partly uphold Wood’s honor and protects both men’s entitlement to imperial masculinity. Pringle censures Prince’s “somewhat violent and hasty temper, and [her] considerable share of natural pride and self-importance,” despite her “considerable natural sense” and “quickness of observation and discrimination of character” (*MP* 115). Her failings—talking back and being difficult to manage—are those of an uneducated working-class woman, and she has proven herself worthy of freedom from slavery and of philanthropic attention. Pringle’s appreciation of Prince’s rationality is therefore, like that of colonial agents’ benevolence, contingent on her “ability to exceed his expectations” (Morgan 28). *The History of Mary Prince* operates within—and admittedly struggles against—a long history of normalized low expectations for black female subjects.

The generic particularities of the slave narrative add to this ‘character’ a marked attention to the spectacle of physical torture and pain as constitutive of the subject, something that

¹⁰² See Wood 2000, 191; see Sharpe 2002, 123.

¹⁰³ *MP* 100; see Midgley 88.

working-class autobiographies usually fail to register. I will explore their meaning for the *History*'s subject in the next chapter. Suffice it to say that Mary Prince's violent subjection and the attendant physical burden—the whippings, the scars, the illnesses—figuratively (and perhaps biologically) obviate the possibility of motherhood and family formation, the constituents of imperial domestic ideology. Prince is locked into the staple role of “potentially virtuous slave woman,” even if her political benefactors call her sadly “uneducated,” hinting at her difficulties conforming to the lofty ideals set out by Christian womanhood.¹⁰⁴

If at all, the *History* frames Prince's return to her husband and the future of her family as questions that remain to be resolved through divine grace: “I still live in the hope that God will find a way to give me my liberty, and give me back to my husband” (*MP* 93). The staging of the lovers' separation was a staple in Strickland's own poetry—Strickland actually always dissolves love thus—along with the occasional promise that heaven would bring the couple back together (Thurston 56). It is possible that we have inherited Strickland's version of Mary Prince and Daniel James's love story, to be resolved in the hereafter. Empire cannot accommodate the respectable black couple or nuclear family, even if it asserts black women's capacity to submit within marriage.¹⁰⁵ Prince's reproductive capacity cannot be deployed in the Empire's propaganda machine and remains strategically absent.

If readers of the *History* hope that Strickland and Prince achieve quasi-feminist sisterhood on the basis of their sex, these differently situated women's widely diverging claims to historical representation should make clear that “the female body” is discursively non-continuous and widely unstable. Politics and social relationships produce women's perceptions

¹⁰⁴ Altink 67; *Christian Advocate* March 4, 1833, 68.

¹⁰⁵ See Spillers 67-81; Altink 103.

of their own (and others') embodiment beyond physiological adjacency of black and white female bodies. In contrast to Susanna Strickland Moodie's maternity, Prince's is connected to conditions of debasement, violence, and alienation (although other, unexpressed scenarios are possible as I show in the third chapter), and her body's depiction in the *History* occurs in relation to nineteenth-century formulations of class (hard labor) and race (blackness), instead of gender (reproductive potential). Prince's liberated body remains an exotic literary object to be marketed, sold, and "disposed of," as Strickland so infelicitously puts it, after undergoing sentimental conscription and moral inspection. Once Mary Prince had transitioned from colonial to domestic capitalism, she is "taught to resign [herself] to Providence and look to the hereafter," just like everyone else in the working class (Thurston 60). The *History* transforms Prince's body from that of an abused black slave into that of a working-class pauper—a very common sight and unworthy of continued consideration. Not surprisingly, the *Times*'s court reporter describes Prince, during her first appearance at court and her penultimate appearance in "our" archive, as "a negress of very ordinary features" ("Pringle vs. Cadell" 4).

The Problem with the Editor: The Congenial Colonizer

Thomas Pringle, born in the Scottish town of Easterstead, Roxburghshire, in 1789, was the son of small tenant farmers and the third of seven children, six of whom would later settle in South Africa. Small farmers everywhere in the British Isles were affected by grand-scale agricultural restructuring and the economic crises of the Industrial Revolution's early phases. The Pringles, at least five generations removed from local gentry, anticipated that their children's struggles would increase over time. Thomas Pringle's right leg had been injured in infancy, which left him with a lifelong limp. His mother died when he was six years old. The disability,

along with his father's penury, predisposed Pringle to intellectual pursuits, encouraged by his surviving parent. At fourteen, Pringle was sent to Kelso Grammar School in Glasgow and joined Edinburgh University two years later in 1805. At university—only one tenth as costly as Oxford or Cambridge at the time—he was unable to decide on a profession. He began earning his living as a clerk in the General Register Office in February 1808 without having taken his degree.¹⁰⁶

While in Edinburgh, a city with a lively intellectual scene, Pringle gained access to literary and evangelical circles, immersed himself in the tradition of the Scottish Enlightenment, and began writing romantic and epic poetry according to the literary fashion of the day. He befriended Walter Scott, in whose name he published a poem in 1816 (Vigne 2012, 16). Pringle's first small collection, *Autumnal Excursion, and other Poems*, appeared in 1819. Encouraged by his connections, he resigned from his post at the General Register Office in 1817 and assumed, along with John Cleghorn, joint editorship of the *Edinburgh Monthly Magazine*, owned by publisher William Blackwood and establishing itself as a serious scholarly periodical. However, the Tory Blackwood disliked Cleghorn and intended Pringle for sole editorship, despite the latter's Whig affiliation and Presbyterianism. When Blackwood dismissed Cleghorn after six issues, Pringle followed Cleghorn out of loyalty (Vigne 2012, 31). The publication was subsequently re-named *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and surviving correspondence suggests that its new editors deliberately set out to damage Pringle's literary reputation.¹⁰⁷ At the same time, Pringle also edited the *Star Newspaper*, one of very few liberal Scottish periodicals. In October of the same year, he became co-editor of Constable's *Edinburgh (or Scots) Magazine*,

¹⁰⁶ Vigne 2012, 4-17; see Meiring 2-7.

¹⁰⁷ Pringle's first biographer in the twentieth century still writes that Pringle was simply overwhelmed with the task (Meiring 14).

a task that turned out to be too unprofitable to support his new family. He had married Margaret Brown, a farmer's daughter from East Lothian nine years his senior, in July 1817. Facing financial hardship, he grudgingly returned to the General Register Office, transcribing records.¹⁰⁸ Still, he and his wife were too poor to live together after the wedding. Having no solid prospects to realize bourgeois ideology in their daily lives at home, although they were intellectually steeped in it, the Pringles looked abroad.

Britain had annexed the Cape Colony in South Africa in 1806 and deployed troops against indigenous Xhosa tribes who had thus far been able to resist European colonization. The Dutch had already defeated and enslaved the San and Khoikhoi over the course of the eighteenth century, but the Xhosa were more numerous and better prepared for military confrontation. They lost the Frontier Wars of 1811-12 and 1818-19, however, and were driven from their homesteads and forced to resettle further east (Legassick and Ross 253, 268, 314). In Europe, meanwhile, the British government was concerned about riots of recently displaced and unemployed agricultural laborers, and encouraged emigration of "surplus" rural populations into the colonies. In response, the Cape Colony's government, under Lord Charles Somerset, permitted limited British immigration of about 5,000 people to settle the former Xhosa lands of the Zuurveld as "rural buffer" against further Xhosa resistance (Legassick and Ross 269). Impoverished Scots farmers like the Pringles welcomed the chance to ascend to economically independent landowners, a prospect impossible to realize in Britain.¹⁰⁹ Lured by the promise that they would create a new capitalist elite, transforming the local economy into a metropolitan one while reproducing middle-class British social relations, the Pringles, with a party of twenty-four settlers headed by

¹⁰⁸ Vigne 2012, 36; see Meiring 17.

¹⁰⁹ The British Government received over 90,000 applications (Meiring 5).

Thomas Pringle, left from London in February 1820, arriving at the Cape in May and at their Baviaans River Settlement in June. They hoped that the new economic order would precede African Christianization, commercialization, and civilization.¹¹⁰

Settlement was more difficult than expected. Bands of outlaw Xhosa and fugitive Khoisan remained in the hills, raiding the settlers' cattle herds; drought and rust weakened the crops, and wild animals endangered everyone. Pringle's limp and lack of capital prevented him from farming and, although the settlement prospered, Pringle, with the help of his tie to Walter Scott, secured a long-hoped-for position as under-librarian at the Public Library in Cape Town in September 1822 (Meiring 20, 65, 68). With his friend John Fairbairn, whom he had convinced to emigrate as well, he resumed editing periodicals, *The South African Journal* and the weekly newspaper *The South African Commercial Advertiser*, to support his family. He also started a school, the Classical and Commercial Academy, with Fairbairn in 1823, and hoped to take over editorship of the *Government Gazette*, a lucrative and prestigious position.¹¹¹ Governor Sir Charles Somerset, Tory autocrat, however, refused to assign that post to a young and poor Scottish Whig. Pringle was disappointed and attacked Somerset for his refusal in the *South African Journal*. This was followed by Pringle's exposure of government malfeasance in the eastern Cape colony Albany and his multi-year agitation for free press. Somerset unleashed a personal vendetta against Pringle and famously vilified him as an "*arrant dissenter*."¹¹² Eventually, Pringle was forced to resign as librarian, close his academy, and suspend his

¹¹⁰ See Legassick and Ross 269; Meiring 19; Voss 73. Pringle kept a journal during his six years in South Africa on which his *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa* is based. The Narrative, along with his collection, *Poems Illustrative of South Africa*, was first published posthumously as *African Sketches* (1834).

¹¹¹ Vigne 2012, 87, 116-7, 124-5.

¹¹² Keegan 97; see Meiring 82-3, 85, 98, 103.

publications. He returned to England in July 1826 with his wife and sister-in-law, £1,000 in debt, hoping to be compensated for his financial losses by the Government and intending to return to South Africa before too long.¹¹³

In 1821, Pringle had met Dr. John Philip, Superintendent of the London Missionary Society in South Africa and charismatic supporter of equal rights for the Khoisan and white colonizers. Philip's philanthropy and moderate Christian liberalism, themselves the result of "an increasingly broad social and moral consensus at the heart of the British body politic about the responsibilities of Empire," would greatly influence Pringle's own views on slavery.¹¹⁴ The white South African ruling class would vilify these views, and Philip in particular, for more than a century. In June 1825, Pringle stayed with Philip for several weeks, accompanied by the missionaries William Wright, James Reade, and John Brownlee. During their conversations, Pringle was exposed to eyewitness reports detailing the atrocities of colonization and quasi-enslavement of large parts of South Africa's indigenous population after the end of the slave trade in 1807. Philip's example had a direct and tangible effect on Pringle who felt "awakened" from his "lethargy by the edifying example [Philip] exhibits of indomitable pertinacity."¹¹⁵ He planned to produce a pamphlet against enslavement in South Africa which not only risked the ire of the government elite but which was to determine much of Pringle's future. The pamphlet was eventually entitled "Letter from South Africa. Slavery," dated January 5, 1826, and written at the Cape. It appeared in the *New Monthly Magazine* in October 1826 and was reprinted in the *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter* in January 1827 (Vigne 2012, 154-5).

¹¹³ Vigne 2012, 175; Meiring 109.

¹¹⁴ Keegan 88; see Vigne 2012, 69-70, and Meiring 116-7.

¹¹⁵ Quoted in Vigne 2012, 154; see Meiring 117.

Pringle's professional connections in London had remained sufficiently strong during his absence for him to find commissioned work upon his return, and he helped edit fashionable annuals and political journals to stay afloat. In May 1827, Pringle was recruited by the Clapham Sect to the Anti-Slavery Society based on his South African "Letter," and began a close professional relationship with Zachary Macauley, with whom he jointly edited the *Monthly Reporter* starting in 1828. The London Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Dominions, or simply, the Anti-Slavery Society, had been founded in 1823 as an association that, as the name suggests, promised a slow and steady, rather than a radical, end to slavery. Some of its members demanded immediate and complete abolition, although Pringle was probably not among them. When the public campaign for total and immediate abolition became increasingly noisy in 1829, and "almost frantic" in its challenge to the gradualists in the early 1830s, Pringle certainly approved.¹¹⁶

Pringle took pride in his low paying, but, in his estimation, "highly respectable," position and, while attending to the Society's business in the morning, dedicated the rest of his time to his own literary pursuits and literarily agitating for his "great cause," the emancipation of the Khoisan—which was won in July 1828.¹¹⁷ Although the Society focused the vast majority of its resources on campaigning against slavery in the West Indies, Pringle's own contributions to the *Monthly Reporter* deal with exploitation of native tribes at the Cape and in Mauritius (Vigne 2012, 203). In 1832, Pringle also assumed editorship of the *Anti-Slavery Record*, cheaply produced for a mass readership. By 1829, the Pringles, along with Margaret Pringle's sister,

¹¹⁶ Vigne 2012, 205; see Pringle 1828, 170.

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Vigne 2012, 202, 203; for the Khoisan emancipation and the passing of Ordinance 50, see Dooling 93, and Legassick and Ross 273.

Susan Brown, lived comfortably, if frugally, in Pentonville and were able to hire Mary Prince as a domestic servant. As Margaret Pringle was in poor health and their life burdened by financial struggle and debt, they received Susanna Strickland to enliven their home.¹¹⁸

Civilization and Servitude

As Pringle's biographers have argued, Pringle's anti-slavery philosophy resulted in large part from his South African settler experiences. Pringle's self-conception, the result of his university training and solidified by his six years as colonizer, was undergirded by a fervent belief in 'civilization' as an enlightened state of existence which every Christian was obliged to encourage wherever he saw it wanting. This belief also presupposed that Pringle himself was in unproblematic possession of 'civilization's' attributes. Considering his lifelong inability to ascend socially despite his deep intellectual commitment to the emerging moral bourgeois order and the more elevated social status of many of his friends, colleagues, and political allies, the promises of 'civilization' probably evaded him. In his South African poetry, Pringle explicitly identified as a Scottish settler, mobilizing Scottishness "for purposes of reverie and nostalgia"; yet, when face to face with South Africans—be they Dutch or indigenous—he identified as "Englishman" (Voss 74). Socioeconomic and cultural markers of identity are unstable in Pringle's reminiscences and uneasily shift when pressured by encounters with people he perceived to be strongly incompatible with his own cultural standpoint. Therefore, although he

¹¹⁸ Vigne 2012, 182, 201-5. In a letter to Susanna Strickland Moodie, dated December 20, 1831, Pringle writes, "The health of Mrs P is just *so so*, as Mary says. My own is tolerable" (qt. in Vigne 2012, 205). This is a rare glimpse of Prince's idiom and its (fond?) adoption in the Pringles' household and intimate circle. Prince probably helped nurse Margaret Pringle at the time; however, Prince lost her position six months later, perhaps because her own health was failing or due to the media fallout and besmirching of Pringle's name after the *History's* publication. Pringle died in late 1834, possibly of tuberculosis.

doubtlessly acted with the best intentions, Pringle's anti-slavery activism must be considered an integral part of a private project of political and cultural self-emancipation: if the Scottish abolitionist can speak for colonized subjects, he can speak—and be politically audible—to his English social superiors. Pringle's writing as evangelical abolitionist is always also an act of self-liberation from intra-British colonization and post-Revolution economic precariousness.

In 1833, a year before his premature death, Pringle attempted in vain to secure the position of district magistrate of the as yet unnamed Kat River valley settlement. If appointed, he promised he would advance

[t]he interests of humanity and civilization by the encouragement of general instruction, of infant schools, of religious missions, of temperance associations and other sound practical means, for gradually elevating long-degraded races of men in the moral and intellectual scale of being. (qt. in Vigne 2012, 242)

'Civilization,' as Pringle understood it, while defending a "universalist concept of human nature," regardless of phenotypical difference, encompassed in its practical application the goals of missionaries, government, and merchants (Legassick and Ross 271). Pringle, in true Enlightenment tradition, believed that each human being, having attained 'civilization's' tenets, would be granted the right to individuality, which, in turn, would enable him or her to make progress both spiritually and materially. This would benefit society at large. Similar to Philip, Pringle had no scruples about colonial expansion under the British military. He disliked current military and governmental methods because they were inhumane, but did not question the beneficence of imperial expansion. Likewise, he sharply disapproved of the common settler stereotypes with regards to South African indigenous peoples—although some of his writings cultivate them as well—but still considered it in these peoples' best interest that they should be delivered from "heathen darkness" (Pringle 1966, 16). Pringle's hopes in this matter overlapped

with those of the landed and merchant elites: convert Africans into a proletariat ready to adopt current European labor relations.

Owing to his yeoman background, he, perhaps too eagerly and intuitively, identified with South African slaves, indentured laborers, and native farmers, and celebrated with much nostalgia former slaves' ability to ascend to the respectable artisanal and peasant classes—the same classes from which Pringle descended and that were in the process of being wiped out in Britain. Black South Africans appeared to him, if not enslaved, as universally bound in obligation—and servitude—to the agents of Europe's civilizing mission that would ensure the continued existence of the African working class. In consequence, Pringle refers to the Khoi residing on his farm as “Hottentot vassals ... our Mulatto auxiliaries ... my Hottentot servants ... my native assistants ... our Mulatto tenantry” while he rises to “petty ‘border chief.’”¹¹⁹ Observing those natives who were touched by civilization, Pringle generously deems them to be “respectful, faithful, and honest,” virtues ideally to be found among England's upwardly oriented classes.¹²⁰ To be fair, Pringle also warned of mistaking slaves in the colonies for working-class people at home, and of grouping both classes with cattle or property, since he believed that slaves' and workers' suffering would thereby be rendered invisible (1828, 168).

Indentured laborers and peasants exist on a distinctly gradated scale of unfreedom in Pringle's writing. Pringle's poetry showcases slavery as an extreme form of servitude without the advantages of identity or speech, despite Pringle's understanding of enslavement as a distinctly

¹¹⁹ Pringle 1966, 114, 115, 117, 168; see Voss 73.

¹²⁰ Pringle 1966, 45. He finds the Moravian mission at Genadendal “neat, orderly, and demure”—the Moravian “love of order” is realized “even to excess” (1966, 86). Elsewhere, he calls the Moravians “the true descendants of the primitive Christians,” an essential version of Christianity ideally suited to convert heathens (qt. in Meiring 11; see Thomas 2014, 125). For overlap in missionaries' and abolitionist thought, see Qureshi 234-5.

economic, not essential, condition. As A. E. Voss suggests, this understanding is so acute that “*African Sketches* could be read as a tract on labour relations” (77). However, the freed black slave, owning only her body, automatically appears to Pringle not only as servant, but bound to him as his own servant. For Pringle, bodily self-possession and the ability to participate in capitalist relations, the mainstays of ‘civilization,’ through the transaction of one’s labor are the prerequisites of public speech, even if self-possession does not guarantee escape from poverty (see Holmes 49).

The terms of Mary Prince’s employment in Thomas Pringle’s household and Pringle’s concomitant bequest of “voice” to her are thus usefully contextualized: The *History*’s speaker is audible and intelligible by virtue of her servitude to the editor. Over the course of the *History*, and as a result of its production, Prince is transformed from slave—a category associated with the spectacle of nakedness and moral depravity for Pringle, as I show below—to working-class servant. In order to fully appreciate the complexities of his gaze vis-à-vis Mary Prince, Pringle’s representation of enslaved bodies elsewhere must be taken into consideration as well. His South African and abolitionist writings provide ample material previously ignored by Mary Prince scholarship.

Pringle’s African Landscapes and Bodies

The uncivilized body in Pringle’s work tends to be naked and therefore immodest; social and economic bondage, due to the enslaved person’s inability to speak, is communicated through and as visibility of skin. Immediately after stepping off the boat in Cape Town, Pringle, overwhelmed by new sights and sounds, perceives that “[w]hips were smacking, bollocks bellowing, wagons creaking; and the half-naked Hottentots who led the ... oxen, were running,

and hallooing, and waving their long lank swarthy arms ... like so many mad dervishes” (1966, 16). Here, upon Pringle’s arrival in Africa (the scene of Pringle’s first contact with black, indentured, and/or enslaved persons), animal and ‘Hottentot’ labor are conflated, and the bustle on Cape Town’s beach registers as “mad.” In his attempts to make sense of the South African landscape and the people inhabiting it, Pringle employs the naturalists’ gaze, noting “two elegant species of *protea*,” and switching into the mode of Romantic pastoralism in the next paragraph when he wanders into a ‘Hottentot’ village whose aspect from afar reminds him “of a Scottish glen” (1966, 14). Much of Pringle’s *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa* is dedicated to such ordering scientific observations of flora and fauna as well as ethnological descriptions of peoples and customs, both hallmarks of travel writing produced in the service of colonization. Mary Louise Pratt’s insights are pertinent here:

The normalizing, generalizing voice that produces the ethnographic manners-and-customs portraits is distinct from but complementary to, the landscape narrator. Both are authorized by the global project of natural history: one produces land and landscape as territory ... the other produces the indigenous inhabitants as bodyscapes ... Abstracted away from the landscape that is under contention, indigenous peoples are abstracted away from the history that is being made—a history into which European intend to reinsert them as an exploited labor pool. (63)

Pringle’s interest in the colony’s material conditions indicates his awareness that they shape social existence and that they are subject to historical change. In fact, he perceives himself as the newly appointed agent of that change. Pringle’s romantically pastoral celebration of the South African “wilderness” does not contradict his naturalist descriptions of the exotic; writing Africa as Arcadian “Promised Land” allows him to imagine that this new territory was always meant to be his (1966, 14, 34). Both romantic reverie and scientific discourse are interdependent literary manifestations of Pringle’s acquisitive posture. Crucially, the foreign female body connects those

two modes and is mobilized as the spectacle that “explains” colonial social existence at its most fundamental.

Pringle’s romantic vision briefly collapses upon entering the village. He finds himself assaulted by sights and sounds of “woolly-haired, swarthy-complexioned natives ... swarms of naked or half-naked children ... the uncouth clucking sounds of the Hottentot language ... and a hundred other traits of wild and foreign character” (1966, 14). He has not mentioned a single woman yet: Pringle, in fact, deliberately seems to avoid mentioning female natives in order to effectively stage the “Caffer woman,” a Xhosa refugee who embodies the unthreatening essence of persecuted indigeneity. Her appearance re-stabilizes Pringle’s romantic and ethnographic gaze that reconciles the “wild and foreign” aspects of the people with the already-owned landscape:

she stepped forward, drew up her figure to its full height, extended her right arm, and commenced a speech in her native tongue ... Though I did not understand a single word she uttered, I have seldom been more struck with surprise and admiration. The language, to which she appeared to give full and forcible intonation, was highly musical and sonorous; her gestures were natural, graceful, and impressive, and her dark eyes and handsome bronze countenance were full of eloquent expression. Sometimes she pointed back towards her own country, and then to her children. Sometimes she raised her tones aloud, and shook her clenched hand, as if she denounced our injustice, and threatened us with the vengeance of her tribe. Then again she would melt into tears, as if imploring clemency, and mourning for her helpless little ones. ... I was not a little struck by the scene, and could not help beginning to suspect that my European countrymen, who thus made captives of harmless women and children, were in reality greater barbarians than the savage natives of Caffraria. (1966, 16)

Pringle, not having the least idea what the woman is saying, projects a sentimental tale upon this noble savage who appears to be in need of protection from whites, and accords value to her meaningless speech according to the bodily rules of dramatic stage performance. The positive impression thus gained is reinforced when Pringle attends the evening service nearby, largely attended by local women, assuring him again that this Christian place is already familiar: “their singing of the missionary hymns was singularly pleasing and harmonious” (1966, 16). Pringle

fondly witnesses the process of native emergence “from heathen darkness into the glorious light and liberty of the Gospel” (1966, 16). Noble savage females singing Christian hymns remind Pringle of his Scottish home, and inexplicable or incompatible cultural signifiers are absent from this optimistic report of cultural and economic progress.¹²¹ When the experience is repeated elsewhere, Pringle again celebrates the “mellow” sounds “where only a very few years ago no voice was heard, save the howling of wild beasts, or the yell of savage hordes” (1966, 88-9). Christianity allows for female African voices to become audible and comprehensible; otherwise, their mouths produce only “gibberish” or are conveniently muted or superseded by dramatic or “barbarous” corporeal signifiers (1966, 25, 168).

In line with most male abolitionist writers of the 1820s, Pringle shows himself to be particularly worried about the morally degrading influence of South African slavery on colonizing men’s sexual morals. He complains about the frequency of “promiscuous intercourse” at the Cape, especially between slave women and white men, in lieu of slave marriages and baptisms.¹²² Further, he marvels that relations between non-African men and African slaves, the “objects of licentious traffic,” are “frequently even prescribed by their ‘Christian’ owners,” a formulation that transforms slave women’s inability to refuse sexual activity into neutral acquiescence and the traumas of rape (1827, 295). Although Pringle realizes that the spectacle of bodily suffering assists the production of sympathy among his readers, an enslaved woman’s

¹²¹ Pringle further: “There was, even amongst the rudest of the people, an aspect of civility and decent respect, of quietude and sober-mindedness, which evinced that they were habitually under the control of far other principles than those which regulate the movements of mere savage men. They appeared to be in general a respectable and religious native peasantry; as yet, indeed, but partially reclaimed from some of the indolent habits of nomadic life, but obviously *progressing*, and, in many instances, already farther advanced intellectually than externally” (1966, 17). If it were not for the flicker of racist phenotypical stereotyping (which is rare in his work), Pringle could also be talking about an imaginary earlier stage in the Scottish peasantry’s development.

¹²² 1827, 295; also see Pringle 1828, 165, for the same phrasing.

physical torment caused by sexual abuse is unrepresentable. The slave woman's interiority—her possible resistance to enforced prostitution or the psychological scars of abuse—cannot be rendered textually because she does not 'have' any interiority according to the logic of liberal self-ownership. She only has moral effects on others.¹²³ Pringle, apparently forgetting that he just blamed European Christians for trafficking black women among themselves, puts the moral onus on the enslaved "prostitutes" who "frightful[ly]" besmirch "the morals of the white population" with "their depravity" (1827, 295). In British metropolitan culture, prostitution had come to signify moral degeneration at large, and Pringle rightfully expected his argument to be effective among readers (see Altink 80).

Pringle's 'forgetting' bespeaks the essential contradiction of evangelical abolitionist writing about the sexual crimes of slavery. Female slaves are fully morally accountable, although they are not subjects.¹²⁴ They can have a "loose character," while their thoughts cannot be intuited or represented (Pringle 1828, 165). They do not obviously self-reflect, but obviously affect—pull down to their state—the European male.¹²⁵ If a free man happens to develop

¹²³ See Pringle 1828, 161. As an important exception, Pringle acknowledges the interiority of slave women only insofar as they are mothers. He recounts the story of a slave who, shortly before her three children were to be transported to their new proprietor, threw herself off a cliff with them. She was rescued and later executed. Pringle is outraged that "much regret and sympathy were expressed—not, however, for the unhappy slave or her children" but for the owners who had lost valuable property (1828, 172). Motherhood and its motivations are intelligible within and as sentimental discourse, overriding Pringle's potential concern for loss of property. He adds as an afterthought, "some slaves may be found possessed of good moral qualities," yet assumes that slavery most likely leads to universal depravity (Pringle 1828, 168).

¹²⁴ See Altink 68. This contradiction extends also to the male slave: "A slave has, in fact, no character ... his ambition has no scope beyond the gratification of his animal propensities, and he has few scruples about the means he employs to accomplish his object. From infancy, slaves are trained up to lie and steal; and, when they are detected, they feel no shame" (Pringle 1828, 168). Slavery as a system creates the toxic relationship between master and slave that mutually degrades the morals of both, Pringle argues. He cannot imagine enslaved subjectivity as non-degraded because Pringle's cause, his livelihood, as well as his identity as self-owning white subject, depend on the denial of slave 'character.' The slave cannot raise himself out of slavery. Pringle wrote these lines a year before Prince entered his house as a servant.

¹²⁵ "He sinks into a state of moral debasement, stands on a level with the slave" (Pringle 1828, 165).

affection for an enslaved woman or for the offspring resulting from their union, “he has the mortification to see these children slaves”; in fact, this emasculation, in Pringle’s understanding, is “more wretched and bitter than that of slavery” (1828, 166). Since masculine identity, within liberal ideology, depends on the simultaneous possession not only of one’s own independence but of full authority over one’s dependents¹²⁶, Pringle can imagine nothing worse than the specter of white men losing control over what is rightfully theirs. Women, children, and black men, after all, are not entitled to independence even when they are not enslaved. The importance of white men’s control over wife and offspring overrides male and female slaves’ right to freedom. Such rights, for Pringle, are further mediated by ethnic and cultural belonging.

Although his moral discourse is draconian and sententious, Pringle evinces more tolerance towards African people’s cultures than other colonial writers of the period, especially with his habitual careful attention to differences between individual tribes, dialects, and cultural practices. Nevertheless, his assessment of ‘Hottentot’ or ‘Bushmen’ (i.e. Khoikhoi and San) women (regardless of their status as enslaved or free) is clearly indebted to hierarchical racial categorization of South African tribes as advanced by early nineteenth-century scientific discourse. When visiting a jail in the northern Karoo, Pringle deplores the absence of any traces of civilization’s progressive influence among some of the prisoners:

There were wild Bushmen, too—with aspect, dress, and demeanour yet more barbarous and bizarre than the rudest of the colonial Hottentots. The whole raiment of the females, besides the caross, or sheep-skin mantle, consisted of a piece of leather cut into narrow thongs, and bound like an apron or small petticoat round the loins. (1966, 168)

However, a ‘Caffer’ (Xhosa) woman sits nearby. Her “womanly modesty and decorum, pleasing to meet with amidst so much wretchedness and barbarism, and forming a favourable contrast to

¹²⁶ See Altink 104; Whitlock 2000, 51.

the disgusting nudity of some of the other females around her” encapsulate the appropriately gendered traits of unobtrusiveness and covered skin, the minimum requirements for elevation into the state of noble barbarian.¹²⁷ Pringle’s otherwise uncharacteristically harsh language directed at ‘Hottentot’ women continues throughout the *Narrative*, and his most scathing comments are directed at their traditional leather girdle which he calls “a wretched sort of leathern apron” and, a few pages later, “wretched apron of leathern thongs hung around the loins” (1966, 237, 246). Pringle’s hostility towards the ‘Hottentot’ woman’s apron announces his pious rejection, yet conscious perpetuation of, older discourses regarding the sexual spectacle of African womanhood. To understand the momentousness of this realization—and its importance for Mary Prince’s *History*—the following sections briefly address Saartjie Baartmann and the Western European fetishization of the visual markers of African women’s reproductive potential. The “history of surveillance and enforced visibility that mark ways of knowing in South Africa” (Baderoon 75), especially the visibility’s of African women’s genitalia, has immediate implications for Mary Prince’s *History*.

Saartjie Baartmann and the Burden of Non-Optional Visibility

Owing to the notoriety of Saartjie Baartmann’s history, the massive “theoretical industry” that has sprung up around her (Baderoon 70), as well as its profound impact on the study of black corporeality, a brief summary will suffice.¹²⁸ Baartmann, a member of the Khoikhoi ethnic

¹²⁷ 1966, 169; see Morgan 20, and Voss 77. Pringle further: “Her deportment was quiet and subdued; and her features, if not handsome to European eyes, were yet expressive of gentleness and simplicity of character.”

¹²⁸ For the politics of naming Baartmann, which are as complex and difficult as Prince’s, see Crais and Scully 9; McKoy 87; Qureshi 235. It is unclear whether Baartmann originally had a different Khoikhoi name—most scholars assume she did.

group, was born around 1790¹²⁹ at the Eastern Cape in South Africa. She was the quasi-slave of a Dutch farmer, Peter Cezar, whose brother, Henrik, allegedly convinced her to travel with him to Europe in 1810. She was to exhibit herself as an exotic specimen in pseudo-ethnographic curiosity shows, and was promised a share of the revenue and safe return to her home country. Her London and Paris shows became (in)famous and highly politicized. Baartmann, oiled, face-painted, adorned with South African tribal accessories, and wearing a tight, flesh-colored body stocking that accentuated her large behind, starred in a spectacle that Rachel Holmes has aptly termed “sexual tourism dressed up as education” (53). This spectacle, reminiscent of zoological displays at menageries, was orchestrated by Baartmann’s ‘keeper’ who exhibited her like an exotic animal (Qureshi 237). It also self-consciously “reiterated the performances of slaves as injured spectacles/commodities on the auction block” (Young 50, see 58). Audience members would grope and prod her, trying to ascertain that her bodily contours were real (Holmes 78). The spectacle of the “Hottentot Venus” was part of the large European freak show circuit in which white sexual fantasies about Africa materialized on the stage, in advertisements, and prints, consolidating white epistemological and political mastery within the capitalist matrix of slave ownership in the years after the 1807 ban of the slave trade.¹³⁰

Suspecting foul play, the African Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior of Africa, headed by abolitionist Zachary Macauley (Pringle’s later superior in the Anti-Slavery Society), sued Cezar in November 1810, accusing him of holding Baartmann in involuntary

¹²⁹ Although Georges Cuvier wrote that Baartmann was 26 when she died in 1815 (suggesting her year of birth was 1789), the museum case containing the plaster cast of her remains stated she was born in 1780 (Cuvier 262). In any case, she is Mary Prince’s contemporary. Both women were rare sights in London in the early decades of the nineteenth century, as most persons of color in Europe were male (Fausto-Sterling 75, 77; Qureshi 240). Since the slave trade had only been outlawed in 1807, most white Britons during the 1810s likely expected dark-skinned people to be former slaves who now worked as servants (Qureshi 239).

¹³⁰ McKoy 86; see Wallace 150; Young 58.

servitude. The court then determined whether the illiterate Baartmann exhibited herself voluntarily or whether she had been forced to enter a contract she could not understand, and whether she had right to present her body—sell herself—in the first place.¹³¹ The question hinged on whether Baartmann was to be considered a prostitute or a slave forced into prostitution. The courts as well as Macauley's connections among the Clapham Sect understood Baartmann to be the former. They "romanticized" her as having "fallen from a state of atavistic noble savagery to crude sexual, scientific exploitation in the modern factory of sin" (Holmes 69). The African Association concluded that the spectacle, a result of Baartmann's own concupiscence, had sadly degraded her. In the months that followed, the *Morning Chronicle* and *Morning Post* published readers' letters complaining about Baartmann's risqué display, but no other legal or political action was taken.

Baartmann traveled through Britain and France for four or five more years until a group of French zoologists and physiologists, among them Georges Cuvier, the founder of comparative anatomy, took an interest in her body, particularly in her buttocks and supposedly elongated genitalia. During a three-day visit at the Jardin des plantes in the spring of 1815, Baartmann refused to undress completely before the assembled professors and scientific illustrators, even when Cuvier's competitors, Henri de Blainville, offered her money. The French naturalists had to wait until after her death to study her reproductive organs, producing a corpus of extremely detailed observations whose unambiguous voyeurism was protected by the socially acceptable guise of scientific inquiry.¹³²

¹³¹ Young 50; see Magubane 829.

¹³² Crais and Scully 2; see Fausto-Sterling 76, 90. The scientists' chauvinism, invasion of Baartmann's privacy, and pornographic gaze as well as Baartmann's resistance to such forced exposure has occasioned much feminist criticism. For prominent examples, see Crais and Scully 133-5; Fausto-Sterling 67; Gordon-Chipembere 7; Guy-Sheftall 18; Holmes 85-7; Miller-Young 34-5; Ndlovu 18; Young 59. Relatedly, see Baderoon 70; Gordon-Chipembere 4-5; Kistner 186; McKoy 86-7, for critiques of some scholars' tendency—among them, most

Baartmann died in December 1815, presumably of smallpox, and was immediately dissected by Cuvier who theorized that “Boschimannes” such as Baartmann were degraded humans, closer to apes than other human races and therefore situated on the lowest rung of the racial hierarchy (Qureshi 242). The Musée de l’homme in Paris exhibited a cast of her body as well as her preserved genitalia until the 1970s.¹³³ Cuvier and de Blainville as well as other French, British, and German anatomists published detailed descriptions of Baartmann’s and other ‘Hottentot’ women’s genitalia (and later, brains), positing that the over-pronounced shape of African females’ sexual organs and posterior fat deposits served as a constant bodily incitement to procreation and suggested ‘Hottentot’ people’s polygenetic origin—legitimizing their inherent political inferiority towards Europeans.¹³⁴ Most of this material reads like “scientific erotica” (Holmes 90) because the anatomists’ “desire-tinged hyperrealism ... gave as its truth the uncontained sexuality of woman” (M. Nichols 118). Feminist scholars have held Cuvier, de Blainville, and their followers accountable for their scopic violations under the guise of racist science, although many of the physiologists, including Cuvier, were nominally opposed to slavery.¹³⁵

prominently, Sander Gilman—to criticize scientific racism while reproducing images of Baartmann’s body, thereby satisfying scholars’ own voyeuristic impulses.

¹³³ Cuvier alleged that her condition was exacerbated by the effects of alcohol abuse and a previous misdiagnosis of pleurisy (Fausto-Sterling 76; see Qureshi 242). Natasha Gordon-Chipembere considers critics’ repetition of Cuvier’s allegations a further confinement of Baartmann “to the space of victim, prostitute, and drunkard, labels that have now become synonymous with black womanhood” (4). For Cuvier’s and de Blainville’s reports of Baartmann’s physique, as well as her fraught exhibition history, see Cuvier; de Blainville; Fausto-Sterling 80-1, 85; Guy-Sheftall 18; Qureshi 233.

¹³⁴ Crais and Scully 133; see Miller-Young 34; Moscucci 70; Schiebinger 395.

¹³⁵ For examples of such writing, see William Somerville’s “On the Structure of Hottentot Women” (1816 [1806]) as well as “Anatomical Description of the Organs of Generation in a Hottentot Female” (1833). Somerville states that a host of European travellers to the Cape have remarked upon the curious genitalia of female ‘Hottentots.’ He laments that he had trouble convincing women and very young girls—“maidens almost naked”—to expose their vaginas, even when he tried to persuade these women and girls with “high bribes” (236-40). He adds that ‘Hottentot’ women have strong libido, engage in sexual intercourse “with little restraint,” and give birth painlessly and easily (240).

Much recent writing about Baartmann has countered Sander Gilman's conceptualization of Baartmann as the epitome of pseudo-scientific sexual spectacle and African female corporeality in general in the early nineteenth century (see Gilman 206-16). Contextualizing Baartmann's stage performance as the result of political, economic, and social colonial activity in South Africa as well as of "the acquisition of fresh territory just four years earlier,"¹³⁶ scholarship of the past decade has rethought the phenomenon of the "Hottentot Venus" as a metropolitan representation of imperial pursuits at the Cape. Rather than understanding the ethnographic spectacle as an inaugural moment of supposedly historically stable discourses about race and degeneracy, critics have paid close attention to the social relations underlying such discourses. Zine Magubane's crucial essay shows that theories of degeneracy, as well as much racial science, were elite responses to post-Revolution political movements that threatened to blur traditional class and status boundaries (820).

When people paid to watch the "Hottentot Venus," then, they did not indulge in the fantasy that black female sexuality bespoke racial degeneration—Magubane reminds readers that degeneration was considered threatening because it could not be predicted by outer appearance

Somerville's status as naturalist pornographer implicated in a project of masculinist colonialism is further heightened when considering that the Khoisan did not engage in genital manipulation whatsoever (Gordon-Chipembere 8; see Miller-Young 33-4, for the claim that some African women possibly practiced genital manipulation for aesthetic purposes). De Blainville also marveled at Baartmann's modesty (189). See Qureshi 243, for another disturbing example involving zoologist and explorer François Le Vaillant. Roxann Wheeler shows that British obsession with African women's buttocks had made its first appearance in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1797 (2000, 249). For European perceptions of 'Hottentot' women as simian prior to 1800, see Bush 14, and the first two chapters in Morgan. For early nineteenth-century medical displays of women's reproductive organs (as wax objects or in print) serving as thinly veiled conveyors of pornographic fantasy, see M. Nichols 117. The centrality of the 'Hottentot apron' to medical science—and scientific men's enduring fascination with it—is illustrated by the fact that William Flower, editor of the *Journal of Anatomy and Physiology*, included an essay on his dissection of a Hottentot woman in the journal's very first volume in 1867, devoting the article's final two pages to the description of the deceased's genitalia (Flower 207-8). A few years later, overdeveloped labia became not only associated with black women, but with prostitutes in general, indicating their innate atavism (Moscucci 70).

¹³⁶ Qureshi 235; see Magubane 817.

alone. Scientific racial theories had solidified as inexorable cultural knowledge only by 1850 and were intimately tied to the growth of the British Empire after Emancipation in 1834 (Gates 3). What was contested, rather, were ideas of liberty, social hierarchy, property, and servitude (Magubane 827-8). Cuvier's racialist writings, produced during the reconsolidation of elite power in the aftermath of the French Revolution, "scientifically" reject nascent political theories of liberty, political participation of the masses, and, ultimately, democracy. Baartmann's mobilization as a popular and scientific spectacle is not the result of some automatic, scopically ignited racial or sexual alterity, unproblematically linked to the political goals of twenty-first-century academic anti-racist struggle. Rather, the "Hottentot Venus" was a symptom of the intertwined ideologies of European imperialism and white African nationalism, providing much needed popular distraction as well as reassurance of colonial—and epistemological—superiority during times of European social unrest and industrial restructuring. The lurid display of Baartmann's body, far from epitomizing fully-fledged British racism based on skin color, functioned as the most perceptually convenient "imaginative surface" for complex ideological contestation (Hartman 7). Baartmann's jarred, labeled, and preserved genitals assured scientific elites that, as long as African women's reproductive organs were fully understood and owned, their offspring could never demand social parity in the future.¹³⁷

Macauley's legal intervention on behalf of Baartmann is later mirrored by Pringle's investment in the liberation of the Khoisan, a cause ultimately about ownership of Khoisan labor and "'voluntary' commodification of the self," as well as his advocacy for Mary Prince's

¹³⁷ McKoy 92; Wallace 150, 153; Wheeler 2000, 241.

manumission.¹³⁸ Pringle's colonial writings and the *History of Mary Prince* must therefore be understood as indebted to the interplay of colonial ideologies and popular spectacle. In my estimation, Pringle's unusually disparaging comments about 'Hottentot' women's leather aprons indicate that he was aware of—and probably uncomfortable with—the long tradition of the spectacularized European exploitation of black female bodies. He wished to rescue such women from their supposed self-degradation, not because he advocated for African women's right to control their bodies' representation in public, but as a reaction to 'Hottentot' women's association with sexual impropriety. For Pringle and his fellow abolitionists, such impropriety, communicated via naked skin and leather aprons reminiscent of elongated labia, was equivalent to prostitution.¹³⁹ Pringle's sexual panic therefore criticizes, yet requires, the cultural currency of popular spectacles of African women's bodies on display, and it is aimed at rendering that body invisible by turning it into that of a respectable servant.¹⁴⁰ What Pringle's 'character' of Mary Prince—his testifying to her work ethic and eagerness to please—proves is that the freed slave is converted from (sexual) property on public display into respectable self-owning worker whose abject living conditions and negligible political clout remain essentially unaltered. Scholarship on the *History* often ignores that self-possession does not guarantee political participation or automatic access to elite systems of knowledge formation. What working-class self-possession does bring about, though, is invisibility—or, depending on one's perspective, privacy.

¹³⁸ Magubane 829. I am unable to explore the many overlaps in Baartmann's and Prince's reproductive histories here. Baartmann was rumored to have given birth once or twice (Cuvier 262). De Blainville wrote that her child was dead by the time she came to Europe (183; see Fausto-Sterling 75).

¹³⁹ See Bush 96; Gilman 221.

¹⁴⁰ The trope had survived well into the 1820s. See Gilman 213, for the example of another "Hottentot Venus" being staged during a Parisian ball given by the Duchess Du Barry in 1829.

CHAPTER TWO
SLAVERY’S PORNOTOPIAS:
MARY PRINCE AND THE NON-OPTIONAL VISIBILITY OF SCARS

Slavery’s Pornotopias

I have focused on Saartjie Baartmann’s legacy as prodded, painted, described, and dissected colonial body because her legacy of ritualized subjection uniquely exemplifies the eroticization of spectacular institutional power (colonial, legal, and scientific) at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Slavery’s voyeuristic visual regime permitted British fantasies about black women’s enthusiastic participation in their own enslavement and objectification via “‘the gaze’ as an institutional micro-strategy” at the time when sexual continence became mandatory for middle and elite women.¹⁴¹ As some scholars have noted, usually in passing, in *The History of Mary Prince*, Saartjie Baartmann’s ghostly afterimage continually hovers in the background.¹⁴² Two highly influential, and seemingly unrelated, critical texts allow me to account for that ‘hovering.’ I read the *History* as fundamentally indebted to pre-Victorian slave pornography, an association that most Prince scholarship appears to avoid.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Wallace 150; see McKoy 88; Miller-Young 32; M. Nichols 109.

¹⁴² See Cooper 201; Whitlock 2000, 25; Woodard 141.

¹⁴³ For instance, Ferguson writes that “Mary Prince ... refuses a totalizing conception of black women as flogged, half-naked victims of slavery’s entourage” (1992, 298). I suggest that the narrative derives much of its rhetorical

First, Steven Marcus's study on early Victorian pornographic fiction, *The Other Victorians* (1971), identifies 'pornotopia' as the fantasy space in which realism, denotative language, and linear temporality are suspended to produce in the (white, male) reader sensations of maximal sexual abandon and erotic transport; for Marcus, "language ... is the prison from which [pornography] is continually trying to escape."¹⁴⁴ Language must be overcome to result in the dissolution of the self. Second, Hortense Spillers's "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" (1987) introduces the term 'pornotrope,' which, for Spillers, comprises the ideological effects of slavery's erasure of subjectivity and political authority on the body in shackles. The sovereign subject-as-beholder endows the slave body with eros, luring itself away from the bourgeois sexual order and linguistic representation.¹⁴⁵ By virtue of the slave body's association with sensuality rather than self-ownership, the body becomes an object, "a thing" or "flesh," appearing prostrate, passive, and powerless even long after slavery's abolition (Spillers 67). Both terms rely on an assumed male spectator who observes a scene of extra-linguistic excess from a private psychic and safe legal location within Enlightenment's hegemonic sphere. Violent, racialized pornography emerged in support of "the formation of an autonomous, self-determining, 'sovereign' individual," as Mary Favret argues (22). Both 'pornotopia' and 'pornotrope' require the planned enactment of grotesque physical excess to

allure from representing slave women as "flogged, half-naked victims," even if that depiction is not totalizing, as Ferguson notes.

¹⁴⁴ Marcus 279; also 268-9; see Scarry 35, on pain's very similar effect of destroying language and the self. Eros and pain are closely intertwined throughout the scenes studied in this project.

¹⁴⁵ Effacing its own power to control discourse (along with its role in forming the institution of slavery itself), the subject pretends it has been seduced by the slave's "'otherness'" (Spillers 67; see Hartman 87).

shock, arouse, and educate audiences into erotico-political action, and both rely on “flesh,” the pre-cultural, non-conceptual materiality of the body, to produce this effect.

I suggest that, taken together, these terms circumscribe the *History*’s staging of black female suffering and its desired effects on the reader.¹⁴⁶ The modern subject—in this case, the ‘proper’ English abolitionist reader (assumed male, but just as often female)—stabilizes itself by consuming the spectacle of violence in the slave colony, the imagined locus of quasi-aristocratic luxury, decadent sensuality, and excessive brutality, far removed from the European metropolis and modernity itself. Late eighteenth-century intellectual discourse had newly described the spectacle of pain as an aesthetic, if not sublime, event, producing in the spectator the relief of delightful vitality after facing an existential threat or witnessing the faithful representation of such a threat.¹⁴⁷ Theories of sympathy linked individual sensibility to gentility, and implicitly required readers’ complicity in the spectacle to produce both aesthetic pleasure and social status.¹⁴⁸ The extreme end of this “new erotics of cruelty” was voyeuristic Sadeian pornography which eroticized the spectator’s ability to discard sympathetic projection altogether.¹⁴⁹ Empathy

¹⁴⁶ Unlike early feminist theorists, I do not understand pornography necessarily as a sexual scene with coercive, degrading, or violent power dynamics producing a victim or a commodified body (see Steinem 37-8; Longino 44), or even as a representational regime strictly limited to the sexual (see Kipnis viii). Pornography appropriates political and cultural taboos to achieve maximum visibility of that taboo for a limited audience (see Miller-Young 27; Williams 1989, 30). The genre’s modus operandi is culturally and historically contingent, although it usually has the explicit purpose to arouse readers or spectators sexually. The taboos at play in abolitionist writing with pornographic elements are precisely miscegenation and “the stripped, exposed and desired truth” of sexual exploitation of slaves through white slaveholding elites (Favret 19). For very recent work on the history of pornography, its connection to slavery, feminist approaches to pornography, and the rise of porn studies, see Marcus Wood’s *Slavery, Empathy, Pornography* (2002), Linda Williams’s collection, *Porn Studies* (2004), Jennifer Nash’s *The Black Body in Ecstasy* (2014), Mireille Miller-Young’s *Black Sugar: Black Women in Pornography* (2014), Helen Hester’s *Beyond Explicit: Pornography and the Displacement of Sex* (2014), as well as Lynn Comella and Shira Tarrant’s collection, *New Views on Pornography* (2015).

¹⁴⁷ Burke 55; see Wurth 27-9.

¹⁴⁸ Colligan 68; see Hartman 4.

¹⁴⁹ Colligan 68; see Wood 2002, 100.

is precarious, as Saidiya Hartman argues, as is the distinction between sympathetic witness and aroused spectator (4).

Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century slave narratives, with their focus on spectacular pain, take part in a broader tradition of educating European readers to become properly sympathetic readers, directing sexual desire “into a discourse of punishment” (Cooper 201). With its limited, yet complex and often contradictory, repertoire of graphic scenes of torture and victimization, abolitionist literature enabled the Christian subject-as-reader to imagine an authentic, shared humanity with the slave on the basis of the mutual capacity to feel pain, and then to claim to relieve that pain by liberating the oppressed.¹⁵⁰ Scenes in which naked slaves were abused served as uncomfortable reminders of the body’s fragility, ultimate corporeal decay, and death, and were designed to evoke disgust and fear (see M. Nichols 105). The slave’s suffering functioned as an index of the liberal subject’s ability to “simulate empathetic suffering” (M. Wood 2002, 98-100).

Announcing that they are merely invested in showing the slave body as human (as deserving of sympathy and rescue by the liberal state), abolitionist testimonies rested on pornotopia’s pleasures to assure readers that European imperial hegemony would remain intact even after the rescue. The purchase of voyeuristic abolitionist material constituted the reader’s reward for ending slavery, a reform effort that, for contemporaries, posed great risk to national wealth and identity. Rather than considering the production of “a sexual dimension that cannot be controlled by the forces that (re)produce it” as an incidental byproduct of abolitionism (Weheliye 71), I suggest that slave narratives, with their “obligatory scene[s] of gratuitous whipping, branding, boiling” (Weheliye 72), strategically utilized the potential for pornotroping.

¹⁵⁰ See Hartman 18; Schroeder 262, 271; Weheliye 71.

The production of exploitative sexual titillation and the manifestation of punitive fantasies encouraged repeated and guilt-free consumption of the scene of terror, and assured readers that existing economic, social, cultural, ethnic, and material hierarchies would remain *the same* after Emancipation. When sentimental identification, sexual frisson, and “philanthropic patriotism”¹⁵¹ merged into sexualized political urgency, the right to voyeuristic excitement is traded for the possibility of Emancipation.

Historians suggest that a generic repertoire of titillating slave imagery, both literary and visual, flourished both clandestinely and publicly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as erotic high art, often depicting the torture and sexual abuse of men, women, and children, particularly in scenes of flogging.¹⁵² Punishment had been conceptualized as a public event since the seventeenth century, and abolitionism’s scrutiny of colonial cruelty was considered self-evident penalty for slavery’s ethical transgressions.¹⁵³ Representations of racialized sexual violence circulated in the explicit service of British and American anti-slavery agitation in pamphlets and periodicals, not only energizing a Western imaginary of slavery, but contributing to the formation of stable literary representations and abolitionist institutions. Doubtless, abolitionism was ideologically supported by humanitarian concerns and initiatives towards economic reorientation. But prurience also played a role as well, particularly during drawn-out parliamentary sessions when “sexualized looking ... spliced legislative surveillance with the

¹⁵¹ Wood 2000, 44; see Colligan 70; Fisch 54-5; Miller-Young 27. Modern racist attitudes fully emerged in the three decades after 1834’s Emancipation (see Wood 2000, 190).

¹⁵² Wood 2002, 89; see Colligan 67; Favret 19.

¹⁵³ Foucault 1979, 9; Morrissey 144-5; see Cooper 201. Slavery’s spectacles of torture and punishment are holdovers of eighteenth-century practices to enforce bodily discipline. They are obsolescent by the time of Emancipation; it is perhaps no coincidence that the gallows disappear from English public spaces by 1837 (see Foucault 1979, 7-9). At times, anti-slavery writers, highlighting their sensibility, expressly shunned graphic descriptions of abuse and stated that they had been forced to look away (see Altink 132).

often unconscious desires of voyeurism” (Favret 26-7). Imperfectly silencing their own erotic valences, abolitionist representations of the slave body in distress required readerly titillation—a repeated and expanding “English libidinal investment in the whip,” as Colligan writes (67)—to generate the intended affective response and necessary immersion in the text. The spectacle of bodily and individual disintegration likely produced an unfortunate “confusion of slavery with freedom” among some readers (Favret 21).

As Marcus Wood points out, abolitionist texts have rarely ever been studied *as* pornographic although they present the slave body in remarkably graphic and eroticized terms and, anomalous in an age of rampant censorship and moral didacticism, hardly interrogate their own explicitness. The naturalization and neutralization of the exposed slave body—the fact that British and American slaveholding societies rendered the pornographic potential of plantation and slave literature invisible to themselves—seem to indicate that Western “definitional frameworks for the pornographic,” as Marcus Wood calls them (2002, 91), are themselves the result of power hierarchies dependent on the commodification of colonial bodies.¹⁵⁴ Such societies are less likely to acknowledge the slave body as a site of erotic exploitation even as they attempt to dismantle slavery’s legal framework. Political economy and sadistic fantasy may mix to produce slavery *as* pornography, as a system of commodified sexuality, in literature (see Colligan 72). I argue that *The History of Mary Prince* is part of this larger corpus owing its creation to the “abolitionist strategy of political arousal” (Colligan 70).

¹⁵⁴ As Michele Wallace puts it, “The entertainment values of the gaze in this ... visual regime neutralized the capacity of the audience to perceive the military and economic violence the visual regime made possible” (153). Also see E. Kaplan 66; Miller-Young 17.

“Such Connexions Are So Common”

The historical convergence of institutionalized colonialism and sexual fantasy determined public response following the publication of the *History*'s first edition. As the documents appended to the *History* reveal, the libel suit that John Adams Wood brought against Pringle and the ensuing public controversy in antislavery publications centered on the question of Prince's moral character and sexual record, both unambiguously tied to her credibility as a witness of slavery as an inhumane system based on nonconsensual (re)production. Testimony given by Prince in court reveals that Susanna Strickland had neglected to include information about Prince's extramarital relationships, one of them a longer and potentially commercial affair with a Captain Abbott, the other a period of cohabitation with a man called Oyskman who deceived Prince with a promise of freeing her. Furthermore, Prince was denied participation in the Moravian mission's religious service when her relationship with Abbott became known, an injunction that was far from unusual (Lazarus-Black 92). Strickland also failed to include information about Prince's whipping of a slave woman whom she “found ... in bed with the Captain in her house,” an action for which she was presumably sentenced later to spend a night in “the Cage.”¹⁵⁵ Macqueen's article in *Blackwood's* indulges in a lengthy description of the same event, with Martha Wilcox, the Woods' free mulatta nursemaid, supplying information

¹⁵⁵ *Times* March 1, 1833, 7. “She told all this to Miss Strickland when that lady took down her narrative,” writes the *Times*; however, “[t]hese statements were not in the narrative published by the defendant” (7). According to the report, Prince further conceded that Wood purchased her at her own request, and “[s]ome years afterwards, when [Wood] was about to sell her, she went on her knees and entreated Mrs. Wood to persuade him not to sell her. She did not mention that fact to Miss Strickland” (7). As Sara Salih writes, this “cross-examination ... was evidently designed to discredit *The History* by drawing attention to the ways in which Strickland and Pringle—not to mention Prince—may have ‘compromised’ the truth” (“Black Subject,” 133). See Rauwerda 404; Thomas 2005, 128. Obviously, the *Times* and *Blackwood's* articles are not more authentic than the *History* itself, but must be read as both complementary and productively contradictory to it. For the *History*'s “official” version of the incident, see *MP* 80. Ironically, the conflict is rendered as concerning a pig, Captain William remaining unnamed. Prince actually appeared before Justice Dyett twice, once about the pig, and once because she had flogged Phibba. She was flogged herself and put in “the Cage” after the quarrel over the pig, suggesting that property struggles among slaves were considered more disruptive to the social order than those over prostitution.

designed to harm Prince's credibility.¹⁵⁶ Wilcox states that Prince continuously fought with the Woods because she was not permitted to leave the property at night or allow in strangers. One night she enlisted a boy to steal the key to the yard, allowing a certain Captain William to enter and spend the night. Wilcox's report culminates by half-hiding the unspeakable: "She took in washing and made money by it. She also made money *many, many* other ways by her badness; I mean, by allowing men to visit her, and by selling ***** to worthless men" (Macqueen "Colonial Empire, 749). In the context of the *History*'s formulation of a respectable 'character' for Prince, her sexual experiences, intimate life, and possible complicity in the culture of colonial violence had to be hushed up. Prince could embody the victimized ex-slave and function as ventriloquized spokesperson for the abolitionist cause only as long as her life was narrated according to bourgeois norms of chaste womanhood, although colonial trading and plantation culture had never conceptualized African women thus.¹⁵⁷ It was only logical that Wood would accuse Prince of illicit sexual behavior to reduce her ideological bargaining power after steadfastly refusing to release her between 1828 and 1833.

If I am correct in my assumption that the *History* requires pornotroping for full political and marketing effect, the most important rhetorical skirmish for Prince's authority as witness is actually staged in Pringle's Supplement to the *History*'s first edition from early 1831. Pringle anticipates the nature of the representational battlefield and, precisely like the pro-slavery camp, normalizes the focus on Prince's chastity as sole indicator of her authorial legitimacy although the *History*'s representation of Prince's struggles appealed to other, more complex, cultural

¹⁵⁶ Macqueen "Colonial Empire," 749. Prince and Wilcox appear to have been at odds. In the *History*, the narrator refers to her as a "saucy woman, very saucy" (79). Also see Sharpe 2002, 148-9.

¹⁵⁷ See Beckles 24, 131; Midgley 90; Salih "Introduction," ix; Woodard 135.

markers of virtuous Christian womanhood, such as piety, feeling, discipline, pride, and the will to self-improvement (Santamarina 234). The Supplement included a letter from the Antiguan abolitionist Joseph Phillips, a long-time acquaintance of the Woods and himself married to a black woman, who, after affirming Mary Prince's general respectability in the community, vouched for the routineness of non-marital sexual relationships among Antiguan slave women and white men:

Of the immoral conduct ascribed to Molly by Mr. Wood, I can say ... that I have heard she had at a former period (previous to her marriage) a connexion with a white person, a Capt.—, which I have no doubt was broken off when she became seriously impressed with religion. But, at any rate, such connexions are so common, I might almost say universal, in our slave colonies, that except by the missionaries and a few serious persons, they are considered, if faults at all, so very venial as scarcely to deserve the name of immorality. Mr. Wood knows this colonial estimate of such connexions as well as I do; ... when he ascribes to a negro slave, to whom legal marriage was denied, such great criminality for laxity of this sort, and professes to be so exceedingly shocked and amazed at the tale he himself relates, he must, I am confident, have ... adapted it ... *for effect in England*. The tale of the slave Molly's immoralities, be assured, was not intended for Antigua so much as for Stoke Newington, and Peckham, and Aldermanbury. (MP 111)

Pringle's apparently counterintuitive choice to include both Wood's and Phillip's letters shifts attention from Prince's broken down, rheumatic, and "done up" body to her body as contaminated by concubinage, unambiguously linking textual and sexual truth (MP 94). Both sides end up trafficking Prince's body as evidence in their drawn-out legal battle, ostensibly to save her from different kinds of savagery. The attention shifts to Pringle and Wood's struggle over the correct kind of English masculinity, with Prince functioning as the discursive occasion, or, less generously, as Pringle's "despicable tool," as Macqueen calls her.

Several critics have wrestled with Pringle's apparently contradictory decision to print Phillip's frank remarks about Antiguan "connexions" when Pringle, not five pages earlier, had censored Wood's description of Prince's flogging the other slave woman, Phibba, over finding

Phibba in bed with Captain William “because it is too indecent to appear in a publication perused by females.”¹⁵⁸ I suggest that there is no contradiction: Pringle’s suggestion that he censored the text is in line with Phillip’s comments in that they both imagine Antigua as a pornotopian space of universal sexual access and violent excess, a “land of sexual opportunity for young European males” (Morrissey 147). Pringle’s ostensible concern for female readers’ modesty ensures continued respectability of his publication and, at the same time, profitably increases the Supplement’s frisson. At issue is not Prince’s credibility as a moral agent; it is Pringle’s ability to remove audience’s scruples as they relate to the continued circulation of his pamphlet. Lastly, for the sake of clarity regarding abolitionism’s message, it would not do to show the flogged slave as holding the whip herself.

Risking what Saidiya Hartman has deemed historians’ too liberal bestowal of agency on slaves, I would suggest that the image of Prince flogging another slave woman allows for another “vision of value and desire—a competing gaze.”¹⁵⁹ Pringle censors the incident not only because Captain William’s sexual relationships with the two slave women are unseemly, threatening the

¹⁵⁸ *MP* 101n; Macqueen “Colonial Empire,” 749; see Baumgartner 262; see Haynes 26-7; Sharpe 2002, 121, 140-1, Thomas 2014, 136; Todorova 297. Sue Thomas shows that when Pringle edited another slave women’s “case” in March 1833, he freely acknowledged concubinage as universal practice in all of England’s slave colonies (2014, 138). The woman, Betto Douglas, does not speak at all. Pringle’s three asterisks would become “one of the specific counts of libel cited by Wood, a count that meant that Prince could be subjected to questioning about her sexual history in court” (Thomas 2014, 136; see Thomas 2005, 115). Pringle’s censorship actually leads to a massive proliferation of public sexual counter-discourse in the form of court testimonies, newspaper articles, and magazine essays, demolishing Prince’s narrative authority. In the end, the political urgency of slavery’s system of sexual abuse and concubinage is rhetorically defused and serves as bawdry courtroom amusement while colonial capitalism continues for another year. The stakes are high, as Macqueen’s slanderous article loudly proclaims; they are “the LOSS OF ONE HUNDRED AND FORTY MILLIONS STERLING of British capital and property” as well as “deep national humiliation and degradation” (“Colonial Empire,” 754, 764; see Bohls 180). The second half of Macqueen’s twenty-page *Blackwood’s* essay is a long apologia in favor of slavery, including a detailed six-page breakdown of Britain’s colonial assets and trade volume depending on slavery’s continuation. Macqueen had adjusted the number down: in the earlier one-page appeal to Lord Grey from February 1831, he had claimed “One hundred and fifty millions of British property in the colonies” (“British Colonies,” 186). Also see Thomas 2005, 116, for Macqueen’s promulgation of planter myths regarding African slaves’ improvement through Christian civilization and hard work.

¹⁵⁹ Miller-Young 29; see Hartman 54-5.

stability of the white colonial family and the nation, but because Prince's violence towards Phibba draws attention to the competitive impulse at the root of the carnal transaction and of British slave economy itself.¹⁶⁰ Prince flogs the other woman because she risks losing profits, which would reduce her already scant chances to manumit herself and impact her standard of living (see Sharpe 2002, 149). Most Prince scholarship leaves this event unexplored, since Prince's participation in the very regime of violence that shaped her circumstances may contradict critical desires.

Nevertheless, it is a useful reminder that such a "competing gaze may not always be successful, or progressive, but [it is] always contestatory of existing looking relations" (Miller-Young 29). The two reports of Prince flogging Phibba destabilize the dichotomy between subject and slave, and they potentially short-circuit the critic's own speculative gaze. The possibility that Prince brutalized others as she was brutalized herself troubles the abolitionist (and perhaps critical) fantasy of the slave's needy passivity and complicates Prince's retroactive elevation as anti-racist icon. They further confirm that agency exists "in the interstices of performances by black people on display," rather than in the spectacle itself (Young 53-4); that is, Prince's complicity in the oppressive system means that she appropriated slavery's technologies of power in the absence of other ways to negotiate freedom.

¹⁶⁰ Mary Prince's sexual history might also be under so much scrutiny due its proximity to the seat of colonial power. According to Antigua's slave registers from 1824, Rowland Edward Williams, Sr., owned a slave woman named Phibba who was about five years younger than Prince (T 71/248). His son, Samuel Williams, was a Captain in the Royal Navy. His brother, Rowland Edward, Jr., married the daughter of Sir Patrick Ross, Lieutenant Governor of Antigua ("Antigua and the Antiguans" 334). Samuel Williams and Samuel Abbott share the same first name, which could account for the *Times*'s error in reporting that Prince and Phibba fought over Abbott. It is also possible that the powerful Williams family interfered before the *Times* report appeared since *Blackwood's* had already revealed the identity of "Captain William" through Martha Wilcox's testimony (Macqueen "Colonial Empire," 749). The letter Pringle had censored in the *History*'s third edition was written by John Adams Wood and addressed to Mr. Taylor, Sir Patrick Ross's secretary.

Taken together with Pringle's unflattering 'character' of his servant as well as Macqueen's reports about Prince's "very sullen disposition," Prince's flogging of Phibba counteracts pro-slavery truisms about slavery's beneficence and the requirement that slaves simulate consent and pleasure. It also works against abolitionism's demand for the liberated slave's gratitude.¹⁶¹ Prince's work slowdowns, "ill temper," and recalcitrance (Macqueen scolds her refusing to eat cold meat upon her arrival in London) must be read as alternative performances during which Prince proclaims herself to be captive and dissatisfied.¹⁶² Having internalized the colonial gaze, Prince seems to gaze back at those British experts debating slavery's future with an attitude of continuous "compliant noncompliance."¹⁶³ She likely knew that her resistance would neither erase past physical traumas, nor fundamentally improve her situation, but perhaps she confronted everyday domination by exasperating first her owners and then her employers, never quite consenting nor arriving at ideologies of liberal selfhood in whose historical emergence she was entangled (see Hartman 51).

As Barbara Baumgartner notes, the *History* presents Prince's physical debility as another important source of resistance against her owners.¹⁶⁴ If the slave is made to work by the threat of corporeal punishment, the *History* imagines pain as allowing slaves to muster opposition, establishing a metonymic relationship between Prince's "quite done up" and "sickly" body and

¹⁶¹ Macqueen "Colonial Empire," 750; see Hartman 38.

¹⁶² Macqueen "Colonial Empire," 745; see Young 59.

¹⁶³ Young 60; see Hartman 54.

¹⁶⁴ Baumgartner 'bestows' the agency to communicate her resistance via pain onto Prince; I understand this performance to be embedded within the *History*'s sentimental register.

the failing system of slavery.¹⁶⁵ Although the narrative is extremely attentive to Prince's long series of injuries and degradations, it is incapable of actually describing the slave's pain without resorting to spectacular descriptions of sights and sounds available to the observer rather than the sufferer. The following passage, depicting Prince's work in the salt ponds on Turk's Island, is one of the few instances in which the experience of pain is actually related:

the sun flaming upon our heads like fire ... Our feet and legs, from standing in the salt water for so many hours, soon became full of dreadful boils, which eat down in some cases to the very bone, afflicting the sufferers with great torment (*MP* 72).

Pain is a communal, shared, general sensation, rather than Prince's alone. Whenever the *History* refers to Prince's physical condition, for instance in the many passages that cover the causes and manifestations of her rheumatism, it prioritizes the visual outcome. Baumgartner suggests that Prince's body performs illness as protest against the demand for increased (labor) performance (260). However, this performance, soliciting the reader's sympathy with the slave, is limited by the narrative's inability to represent black interiority.

The *History* mobilizes illness to heighten Prince's victimization through economic exploitation, but quickly and conveniently 'forgets' the debilitating effects when the narrative praises other aspects of Prince's fledgling liberal selfhood, like her work ethic and quest for freedom. For instance, the narrator mentions her painfully swollen joints necessitating the use of a cane, and then, on the very next page, relates her eagerness, and ability, to labor energetically when reaping the profits herself.¹⁶⁶ Prince takes in washing "to earn money to buy my freedom," although laundry work causes the debilitating illness which completely halts her work for the Woods and later forces her to run away in London (*MP* 81, see 80-6). Macqueen notes the

¹⁶⁵ *MP* 94; see Baumgartner 253-4; Thomas 2014, 136.

¹⁶⁶ *MP* 80-1; see Baumgartner 258.

contradiction as well, accusing the *History*'s editors of "sophistry" and of "calumniat[ing]" the Woods.¹⁶⁷ Considering the *History*'s self-contradictory rhetoric of the slave's undeserved, passive martyrdom and her simultaneous advancement into liberal selfhood, Macqueen's first allegation is probably correct. I would argue that, according to the *History*'s logic, unwaged labor leads to (communal) physical depletion and pain, while the labor necessary to acquire profits is liberating, pain-free, even productive of joy. Because Prince, in the course of her narrative, turns into a working-class domestic servant in need of future employment, her bodily pains remain mostly inaccessible and irrelevant. Her suffering can be shown, but not outside the parameters of abolitionist pornotopia.

Spectacles of Skin, Scenes of Horror

After the *History*'s narrator relates Prince's childhood in more or less Arcadian terms (her mistress only ever hits her once for coming home late), the slave's downward spiral into brutalization and grotesque horror begins with what abolitionists perceived as slavery's primal scene, the auction. Especially for those metropolitan readers who had never witnessed slave auctions themselves, the spectacle of racialized bodies' commodification was associated with Baartmann's and other "Venuses'" suggestive performances via a series of cultural displacements and surrogations (see Young 56). Both metropolitan burlesque spectacle and public colonial traffic in enslaved bodies at the auction were instantiations of colonial force and required that the "exercise of power was inseparable from its display" (Hartman 7). There is no doubt in historians' minds that white men perceived their intimate probing and examining of

¹⁶⁷ "Colonial Empire," 748. Thus Macqueen: "During those periods at least, sickness seems to have forsaken her" (747).

slave bodies at auction as erotic. Women's bodies were inspected for their youth, health, and beauty with the explicit intention to use them for community concubinage, private sexual exploitation, and reproduction of the slave owner's labor force. The auction is a pivotal cultural event because it is an "explicitly sexual, even pornographic process of exhibition, performance, and psychosocial trauma" producing ways of reading black female bodies that continue to shape modern ways of looking (Miller-Young 31).

[The vendue master] took me by the hand, and, turning me slowly round, exposed me to the view of those who attended the vendue. I was soon surrounded by strange men, who examined and handled me in the same manner that a butcher would a calf or a lamb he was about to purchase, and who talked about my shape and size in like words—as if I could no more understand their meaning than the dumb beasts. (*MP* 62)

The *History*'s narrator highlights the indecency of the child's auction-block exposure by drawing attention to the spectators' invasive, dehumanizing participation. Anti-slavery publications commonly represented auctions as "the ultimate in human pathos—a potent sentimental symbol of the inhumanity of slavery."¹⁶⁸ The scene gains much of its melodramatic effect from the preceding funereal parting scene in which Prince's mother laments the transformation of her children into property, the dissolution of the family, and the possible extinction of her children's lives (see Rice 21):

The black morning at length came; it came too soon for my poor mother and us. ... she said, in a sorrowful voice, (I shall never forget it!) 'See, I am shrouding my poor children; what a task for a mother!'—She then called Miss Betsey to take leave of us. 'I am going to carry my little chickens to market,' (these were her very words.) 'take your last look of them: may be you will see them no more.'" (*MP* 61)

Pringle and Strickland's imagination rather than Prince's likely furnished the scene with a "pious image of a Madonna and children" (Aljoe 76), requiring two parenthetical emphases to assure skeptical readers that Prince's mother had actually uttered those words. The narrator's stance of

¹⁶⁸ Aljoe 75; see Mallipeddi 19.

victimized exposure is counteracted by the apparent pride in having been sold for fifty-seven pounds at the scene's very end ("I had fetched a great sum for so a young a slave," *MP* 63). The passage's final sentence deflates the passage's critique of chattel slavery and returns the reader to the speaking situation of the grown-up slave who appears to have internalized slavery's dehumanizing value system. If Prince's pride in her "great sum" and the scene's intended sentimental cachet seem at odds, as Nicole Aljoe writes (75), their contiguity is not coincidental. As I will show, the *History* continuously shifts back and forth between pious, scandalized containment of slavery's centuries-old pornographic tropes and bursts of exhibitionist narrated selfhood. Mass popular desire and anti-slavery abhorrence entwine when the former slave narrates her own commodification, closely detailing the erotic dimensions of objectification. As such, sentimentalism with its repeated reminders of the slave's wounded modesty fuels the pornographic spectacle.

In his other writings Thomas Pringle repeatedly utilized the trope of the family-as-torn-apart at the slave venue, often voicing outrage that participants were immune to the sentimental charge that so affected Pringle: "the distressing spectacle of the wife torn from the husband, and the children from the parents, is so familiar as scarcely to interest the feelings of the spectators" (1827, 290). The observers' capacity to feel deep affliction is a marker of their heightened sensibility (and attendant cultural authority), while the common "spectators" have become desensitized. "Coarse jocular and indecent merriment seldom fail, on such occasions, to be rudely bandied between the auctioneers and the rival bidders," as Pringle writes, dismissing the bawdy in favor of pathos (1827, 290). The slave's interiority—what it must feel like to be sold away thus—is less rhetorically stressed than the abolitionist's own cultivated affect. This explains why Pringle's editorial note below the *History*'s auction scene so obviously competes

with Prince's ability to report the experience of being sold away. Not only is it twice as long as the narrator's account, but it hyper-aestheticizes the spectacular commodification of bodies.

While the sale was going on, the mother and her children were exhibited on a table, that they might be seen by the company, which was very large. There could not have been a finer subject for an able painter than this unhappy group. The tears, the anxiety, the anguish of the mother, while she met the gaze of the multitude, eyed the different countenances of the bidders, or cast a heart-rending look upon the children; and the simplicity and touching sorrow of the poor young ones, while they clung to their distracted parent, wiping their eyes, and half concealing their faces ... furnished a striking commentary on the miseries of slavery, and its debasing effects upon the hearts of its abettors. (*MP* 63; see Pringle 1827, 294)

Obviously, Pringle, in describing this tableau, wants to make a point about the ethics of the slave auction. However, his aestheticizing gaze cannot spot its own complicity in reifying the spectacle (see Thurston 192n40). What is so striking about this footnote is that it does not even solicit readers' empathy owing to its overriding objective to educate readers in scopic sensibility. If the reader's empathy is contingent because it invites facile identification that makes no space for the other's difference or sentience (see Hartman 20), the kind of sensibility Pringle invites risks an even greater violence because it freezes the moment of maximal personal and familial anguish into an aesthetic object to be contemplated and consumed at leisure. Aestheticizing the dissolution of the slave family "naturaliz[es] this condition of pained embodiment" (Hartman 20) and turns slavery's physical and psychological injuries into necessary accessories of white bourgeois self-constitution. This process ensures that slavery's subordinations continue as aesthetic sensation enshrined within liberal bourgeois ideology even after abolition has been won. Pringle's aesthetic sentimentalism not only turns suffering into art; it attempts to neutralize the long-term political effects of suffering. Although scholars have long considered subjective experiences of pain to be essentially unrepresentable¹⁶⁹, Pringle's aestheticizing observations of

¹⁶⁹ See Scarry 35; Schroeder 264.

slaves here and in his South African writings erase black consciousness, even sentence, to enable his own “wielding of power and the extraction of enjoyment” (Hartman 23). It is not a far cry from abolitionism’s romantic elation to the register of auctioneers’ lecherous enthusiasm: both states signify property relationships creating pleasant affect in the observer.

Matters were more complicated when white women became observers of slavery’s public spectacles. A crucial element of provincial abolitionist media campaigns run by women during the 1820s concerned the public flogging of slave women.¹⁷⁰ As Moira Ferguson observes,

flogging was one of the worst punishments evangelical women could imagine—especially, but not only, in the case of females—since it combined absolute control and remorseless abuse of the female body by males ... Flogging, in a word, was anti-Christian. Worst of all, it was a public act, involving an exposed nakedness and an unsolicited male gaze, sometimes even attracting spectators and enthusiasts.¹⁷¹

When Parliament passed resolutions for the amelioration of slavery in 1823, flogging of female slaves had been prohibited, which illustrates the strength of male and female abolitionists’ abhorrence of the practice.¹⁷² Nevertheless, abolitionist writing in the 1820s and 1830s continued to focus on flogging because the practice continued mostly unabated in the colonies. Not incidentally, the height of abolition coincided with an increase in flagellation obscenity, leading some reviewers to remark on slave narratives’ moral corruption. The image of the flogged slave

¹⁷⁰ Ferguson 1992, 293; see Whitlock 1995, 253. See Colligan 68-70, for a brief account of flogging’s cultural role in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century England, most prominently as an educational device utilized to form ‘gentlemen’ at public schools. Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, childhood memories of schoolroom whippings were erotically transposed onto fantasies starring sadistic schoolmistresses and blushing youngsters. Plantation pornography replaced the whipped white boy (or girl) with the black slave (often a woman), catering to white men’s “punitive desires” (Favret 32). Whipping scenes were culturally associated with the education of reason at school as well as the initiation into sexuality (Favret 26). The chains of signification were never causal or simple, however, as associations with Christian martyrdom and agrarian animal labor were also evident. Although slave narratives focused on ritual floggings, in the colonies, the whip was most often casually used as a means to speed up slaves’ work (Wood 2000, 260).

¹⁷¹ Ferguson 1992, 293; see Altink 130.

¹⁷² Midgley 95; see Aljoe 10.

woman had already circulated for a century and strongly suggested sexual transgression (Colligan 70-2). Many female abolitionist campaigners, when drawing attention to floggings and public vendues of female slaves, focused on public exposure of skin instead of, say, the loss of freedom or the experience of severe pain. To shield themselves from accusations of salaciousness, women abolitionists framed public flogging and the resulting exposure of skin as “a crime of the heart” (Hartman 27). By exposing their bodies in public, flogged mothers and wives were imagined to lose moral guardianship over their children and become disgusting to their husbands (Altink 132). In 1828, for instance, the Bristol Female Society argued that their reform agitation was not “unbecoming” in light of the

deep degradation of *our own sex* under this dreadful system, for the exposure of their persons to the lacerating whip, and the exposure of their untaught minds to the most awful licentiousness in its most debasing form, which even leads its captives to glory in their shame. Surely these things must stir up our spirits within us, when we behold so large a number of our own sex helpless victims alternately of cruelty and lust¹⁷³

While accounts of flogging usually relied on actual cases, stories about abused slave mothers and raped women were often sentimental imaginings (Altink 130-1). The *History*’s relative silence about Prince’s sexual abuse and motherhood reflects the generic default, intended to highlight Prince’s dehumanization and resulting physical debility under the whip (see Altink 81). Notwithstanding the editors’ reluctance to concentrate on Mary Prince’s sexual experiences under slavery, the *History* contains scenes of abuse indicating that sexuality and corporeal punishment were part of the same system of social control and discipline.¹⁷⁴ Interracial sex remains the taboo that cannot be spoken, despite the many instances of implied nudity, wherein bodies are reduced to flesh, observed by whites.

¹⁷³ *Second Report* 11; see Midgley 96.

¹⁷⁴ Cooper 201; see Haynes 26; Rice 21; Sharpe 2002, 132, 201-2; Thomas 2014, 136.

For instance, Prince notes her regular experiences of humiliating violations while living with the Inghams at the age of twelve: “To strip me naked—to hang me up by the wrists and lay my flesh open with the cow-skin, was an ordinary punishment for even the slightest offence” (*MP* 66). The description of torture is repeated nearly verbatim when the narrator recounts her years on Turks Island: “Mr. D— has often stripped me naked, hung me up by the wrists, and beat me with the cow-skin, with his own hand, till my body was raw with gashes.”¹⁷⁵ Prince mentions that her transfer to a new owner is like “going from one butcher to another”; the children Cyrus and Jack are beaten “at [the Inghams’] pleasure” until their “flesh [was] ragged and raw with licks”; Mrs. Ingham “lick[s], and flog[s], and pinche[s] ... the neck and arms” before worse punishments ensue; Prince observes how Darrell “fling[s] [salt] upon the raw flesh till the [elderly slave Daniel] writhed on the ground like a worm, and screamed aloud with agony”; his “wounds were never healed, and [were] full of maggots” (*MP* 72, 66, 74). Similarly, Darrell throws the old woman Sarah, “who was subject to several bodily infirmities, and was not quite right in her head,” “among the prickly-pear bushes” which enter “her naked flesh so grievously ... that her body swelled and festered all over, and she died a few days after” (*MP* 75). Finally, although likely subjected to a less barbarous regime at the Woods’, Mrs. Wood still “fretted the flesh off my bones” (*MP* 85). This textual display of defenseless nudity and ruptured skin, even if restricted to the same repetitive phrases, likely produced mortification and possibly titillation

¹⁷⁵ *MP* 72-3. Moira Ferguson had already identified “Mr. I—” as John Ingham (or Ingraham) of Spanish Point, Bermuda (1992, 376n25); Maddison-MacFadyen suggests that the sadistic “Mr. D—” and his son, “Master Dicky,” are Robert and Richard Darrell, respectively. Most of these families arrived on Bermuda in the 1620s, had intermarried, and worked as maritime traders, specializing in slave transport throughout the Caribbean, shipbuilding, (illegal) salvaging, and salting. Maddison-MacFadyen shows that Prince was sold within a tightly knit family network; for instance, Sarah Williams, Mary Spencer Ingham, and Margaret Gilbert Wood were all descended from the Albuoy family; Sarah Williams was the daughter of George Darrell (who had bought Mary Prince as a child) as well as Robert Darrell’s half-sister (Maddison-MacFadyen 2008; also see her 2013 and 2014 essays). Maddison-MacFadyen also notes that “Rebellious slaves were often split from their families and sold out of the colony for punishment, and this is probably what happened to Prince” (2014, 8).

among the *History*'s readers, encouraging visceral, political outrage at Prince's owners, the Inghams, Darrells, and Woods.

Rape's Eloquence: Death of the Mother

The *History*'s most violent episode concerns Hetty, the Ingham's pregnant slave. Abolitionist tales often prefaced the narrator's own abuse with an eyewitness account of another slave woman's beating to establish the speaker's reliability and prepare the reader for the (often feminized) martyrdom the narrator would have to undergo. Hetty's horrific experience anticipates the full scope of Prince's own, and since Prince cannot tell her sexual abuse in detail, the narrative employs Hetty as Prince's double, or "othermother," to do so.¹⁷⁶ Hetty, a "French Black" Captain Ingham captured from a pirated vessel, embodies the innocent woman punished for following her prime duty, motherhood, a stock motif employed by abolitionists to demand an end to the flogging of pregnant women (see Altink 135). Miscarriage after flogging was cited as the primary cause for the British Caribbean's lack of natural increase among its slave populations. In the context of the *History*, miscarriage is displaced onto a body that, in its Frenchness, is even more foreign than Prince's. Hetty's speech is the *History*'s only representation of creole dialect, 'bad speech,' that exoticizes her and affirms Prince's status as the observing subject (Aljoe 82):

my master started up from his bed, and just as he was, in his shirt, ran down stairs with a long cow-skin in his hand. I heard immediately after, the cracking of the thong, and the house rang to the shrieks of poor Hetty, who kept crying out, 'Oh, Massa! Massa! me dead. Massa! have mercy upon me—don't kill me outright.'—This was a sad beginning for me. (*MP* 65)

¹⁷⁶ Thomas 2014, 127; see Sharpe 2002, 130.

Prince's introduction into the Inghams' home begins with the auditory witnessing of a flogging that, considering Ingham's state of undress and the mentioning of "his bed," could equally well involve a rape. Since Hetty is already pregnant, the scene doubly announces her status as chattel. Hetty's screams indicate that Ingham indulges in both reproductive and destructive sexual activities (see Favret 34). Hetty's fate warrants a longer quotation, despite its heinousness:

Poor Hetty, my fellow slave, was very kind to me, and I used to call her my Aunt; but she led a most miserable life, and her death was hastened ... by the dreadful chastisement she received from my master during her pregnancy. ... One of the cows had dragged the rope away from the stake to which Hetty had fastened it, and got loose. My master flew into a terrible passion, and ordered the poor creature to be stripped quite naked, notwithstanding her pregnancy, and to be tied up to a tree in the yard. He then flogged her as hard as he could lick, both with the whip and cow-skin, till she was all over streaming with blood. He rested, and then beat her again and again. Her shrieks were terrible. The consequence was that poor Hetty was brought to bed before her time, and was delivered after severe labour of a dead child. She appeared to recover after her confinement, so far that she was repeatedly flogged by both master and mistress afterwards; but her former strength never returned to her. Ere long her body and limbs swelled to a great size; and she lay on a mat in the kitchen, till the water burst out of her body and she died. ... I cried very much for her death. The manner of it filled me with horror. ... After Hetty died all her labours fell upon me, in addition to my own. (*MP* 67)

After having been torn from her mother, Prince looks to Hetty as a surrogate relative and forges ties of familial intimacy to resist the insulating effects of slavery's objectifications. Hetty who likely carries Ingham's child is exclusively defined by her reproductive and maternal potential. From the beginning, Prince's relationship to the Inghams is ambivalent: if Hetty is her aunt/substitute mother, Mr. Ingham turns into the girl's father/uncle, while his jealous wife, the evil stepmother, stands ready to deny and destroy the kinship through ritualized violence. After miscarrying the child—a result the Inghams perhaps intended to bring about—Hetty's body continues to swell until it gruesomely ejects edematous fluid, slavery's monstrous afterbirth, upon the kitchen floor. Hetty's gothic death suggests that intra- and cross-racial kinship is impossible. Slavery's sexual violence results in slave women's unwilling maternity and finds its

horrible climactic release in the abject soiling of the space where the system nourishes its laboring bodies. Prince is the next body to be inserted into this atrocity-producing economy, as the girl inherits “all her [that is, Hetty’s] labours.” The slippage of productive and reproductive labor is unmistakable.¹⁷⁷

With this in mind, it is useful to analyze the scene of extreme corporal punishment that occurs right after Hetty’s story. When ordered to “empty a large earthen jar” with a long crack running through it, Prince feels the jar coming apart in her hands. “[D]readfully frightened,” she reports the “accident” (nevertheless “my fault”) to her mistress who gives her a severe beating and denounces her to Ingham. Her master then ties her “up upon a ladder, and [gives her] a hundred lashes with his own hand.” When he pauses to catch his breath, a sudden and supernatural “heavy squall of wind and rain” occurs before “a dreadful earthquake” shakes the house, destroys part of the roof, and provides the girl with the opportunity to run away. Prince, “all blood and bruises,” finds herself near death as she hides under the porch until the next morning.¹⁷⁸ Nature mirrors the narrator’s inner perturbation and comes to her rescue when she undergoes the worst bodily chastisement yet. Brought near the brink of death, Prince’s body, her earthen jar, and earth itself break open during the crazed bout of arbitrary violence. All three vessels equally signify femininity and become irreparably damaged. I would suggest that the jar scene signals Prince’s absent maternity as terrifyingly violent haunting because a literal description would be “too, too bad to speak in England” (*MP* 68). The twelve year-old child’s experience of physical and sexual violence materializes as a broken jar, “part[ing] in my hand”

¹⁷⁷ Later in the narrative, Prince’s body “dreadfully swell[s]” due to rheumatism (*MP* 86). Hetty’s ghost is still present.

¹⁷⁸ *MP* 68-9; see Aljoe 140.

(*MP* 68). The abuse finds its catastrophic culmination—the last rung of the ladder to which the slave girl is tied—in a final and literal natural cataclysm. On the day the jar breaks, Prince is raped by Mr. Ingham, perhaps not for the first time, since the jar bears the mark of an “old deep crack” (*MP* 68). The event is so horrifically brutal that her ‘vessel’ breaks. The earth’s opening and the jar’s destruction signify Prince’s miscarriage or sterilization, metaphorizing the slave woman’s impossible motherhood as raw, gothic violence.¹⁷⁹

The jar episode with its atmospheric stage directions (“the weather was very sultry,” *MP* 68) and nightmarish causal determinism presents the girl’s abuse as gothic drama, implicating the reader in the orgasmic, pornotropic spectacle with its barrage of erotic signifiers: the white mistress flogging with irrational fury; the sadistic male punisher getting “hot” and “exhausted” from whipping the girl; Ingham’s voyeuristic son, Benjy, standing by to count the lashes; the earth “groaning and shaking”; and, finally, Prince’s body, first “trembling,” then “all blood and bruises ... moaning piteously.”¹⁸⁰ Prince is reduced to bloody flesh close to death, her identity about to dissolve even as the first-person narrator continues to provide auditory and visual cues (“moaning piteously,” “when they saw me,” *MP* 69). Subsequently, Prince mentions that Mrs. Ingham constantly reminds the girl of the broken jar, possibly encoding accusations that Prince seduced Mr. Ingham and that there had been a pregnancy. The next sentence relates that the cow had freed itself again, just when the girl is “milking” it (*MP* 69). Two pages prior, Hetty’s brutal beating had occurred for precisely the same reason. Prince has inherited Hetty’s place, and the

¹⁷⁹ Ferguson cites evidence for an earthquake occurring on 19 February 1801. Weather conditions in Bermuda during Prince’s youth were prone to hurricanes (*MP* 37n20). Ferguson considers sterilization a possible result of the many beatings Prince endured (1992, 289). While I prefer to read the earthquake as gothic spectacle, Nicole Aljoe sees connections to zombie iconography and *voudou* via Hetty, thus endowing Prince with the compositional authority to undergird her narrative with African diasporic ontologies (140). I remain skeptical.

¹⁸⁰ *MP* 68-9. For the common trope of men’s sexualized exhaustion as they take turns whipping female slaves, see Favret 38.

two women's association with a runaway milk-cow is likely not coincidental. Mr. Ingham notices the cow's flight, brutally beats Prince's lower back with a boot (her "agony" is not described, only its manifestation as a "shriek"), inducing the girl to run to her mother (*MP* 69-70). The unbearable, undeserved violence of slavery's (re)productive labor leads to bovine and human escape—both valuable, lactating commodities whose pain is inarticulate.

The editors' display of the tormented body forestalls descriptions of the slave's pain and invites readers to immerse themselves in the sadistic spectacle (see Baumgartner 256). Overall, the jar scene, along with later scenes that operate similarly, serves as an official educational exercise in mastering the passions as they are called forth (Favret 21). Through recourse to (repeatable) sadistic fantasy the scene wants to educate the metropolitan reader about the destruction of the self while reconstituting it in corrected form. This is why, in the world of the *History*, Ingham's cruelty lies in his emotional detachment as a punisher rather than his sexual abuse of slave women. The arbitrary, wildly disproportionate punishment is rationed into "a round hundred," total percentage, and Ingham delivers this totality illegally and without consideration for the girl's survival.¹⁸¹ Readers observe the abandonment of liberal rationality as contained by precisely one hundred lashes. Similar to other white men starring in depictions of slave torture, Ingham, like his account-keeping son, "is spectacularly unexcited and unaware," his feelings having become entirely deadened.¹⁸²

A few pages later, Prince's next owner, Darrell, oversees Prince's punishment with the same calculated disengagement:

¹⁸¹ *MP* 68. The maximum number of lashes for women, regardless of whether they were pregnant, old, or disabled, had been 39 since the introduction of the 1788 Slave Law (Altink 129).

¹⁸² Wood 2013, 178; see Woodard 139.

Mr. D— was usually quite calm. He would stand by and give orders for a slave to be cruelly whipped, and assist in the punishment, without moving a muscle of his face; walking about and taking snuff with the greatest composure. Nothing could touch his hard heart—neither sighs, nor tears, nor prayers, nor streaming blood; he was deaf to our cries, and careless of our sufferings. (*MP* 72)

Punishment, in the *History* (as in slavery in general), functions as a system of controlled excess. Even as these scenes disclose the truth of colonial Englishmen's moral monstrosity, readers learn that, in the colony, sexual fury is permissible when it is numerically and situationally accounted for. Since slaveholders have trained their passions to operate hydraulically, white colonial masculinity retains its difference from the dissoluble identity of white women and slaves (see Favret 21). As Marcus Wood suggests, for metropolitan readers, an impassivity like Darrell and Ingham's becomes "the unacceptable and un-acknowledgeable face of slavery, a new kind of demon who is uninterested, and uninteresting, and one of us" (Wood 2013, 179). Learning that the slave-owner acts with the same degree of self-restraint as themselves, readers at home ideally rework their initial erotic excitement into intellectual and activist desires, and, at least in public maintain heightened control over their erotic and aggressive impulses. The *History* wants to teach properly acculturated Englishmen (and –women) to reject cruelty and to uphold sexual morality by protecting women's bodies from harm and the gazes of others, while allowing for the endlessly repeatable consumption of the sadistic scene.¹⁸³ Abolitionism must show how the slave-owner constitutes himself to encourage the audiences' own, superior self-constitution in the form of a moral national identity that favors intellectualism and anti-violence. To make this education attractive, it is offered in the potentially self-defeating register of repeatable

¹⁸³ See Altink 145; Favret 35-6, 39. Further see Pringle 1827, 291, for a similar account of a planter's cold sadism.

voyeurism.¹⁸⁴ Meanwhile, “the activity of [the abolitionist’s] own body remains out of sight,” and the slave woman’s body is deprived of a legacy (Favret 39).

It is obvious that Pringle was aware of the possibility of sadistic enjoyment of the spectacle. Elsewhere, he observes that slavery’s scenes of violence derive from the most essential of human impulses, the primary obstacle to abolition: “the love of power” which, once it “approaches ... absolute despotism,” is ever more “desired and enjoyed” (1828, 161-2). Whereas Mary Prince’s narrator believes that “to be free is very sweet,” Pringle, outlining the inner logic of slavery’s pornotopias, reverses the thought and echoes Tacitus’s position “that there is nothing so sweet to the human heart, as the gratification which arises from the consciousness of having the life of a fellow-creature at one’s disposal” (1828, 162). Therefore, “to find a pleasure in the sufferings of human beings, and even in teasing and tormenting them, is no uncommon thing to be witnessed in the present state of colonial society” (Pringle 1828, 162).

As a few scholars have noted, the *History*’s washing scene provides a final clue to the immensity of the narrative’s factual elisions regarding Robert Darrell’s sexual exploitation of Prince:

He had an ugly fashion of stripping himself quite naked and ordering me then to wash him in a tub of water. This was worse to me than all the licks. Sometimes when he called me to wash him I would not come, my eyes were so full of shame. [...] he was a very indecent man—very spiteful, and too indecent; with no shame for his servants, no shame for his own flesh. (*MP* 77-8)

¹⁸⁴ Pringle’s program of reeducating men is apparent elsewhere as well. In his 1830 poem, “The Slave Dealer,” the speaker repents flogging a woman to death: “‘There’s blood upon my hands!’ he said, / ‘Which water cannot wash; / It was not shed where warriors bled / It dropped from the gory lash, / As I whirled it o’er and o’er my head, / And with each stroke left a gash. // With every stroke I left a gash, / While Negro blood sprang high; / And now all ocean cannot wash / My soul from murder’s dye; / Nor e’en thy prayer, dear Mother, quash / That Woman’s wild death-cry!’” (Pringle 1834, 92). The twice-repeated spectacle of the bloody “gash” overrides concern for the woman’s experience. At the end of the poem, the slave dealer realizes he will not ascend to heaven. The speaker’s primary concern is his soul rather than the consequences of the suffering he has caused.

This passage is marked by the restrictions imposed upon the vocabulary available to Prince—or Strickland—as the *History* attempts to relate what cannot be told. Only two words, “shame” and “indecent,” hint at the nature of Prince’s relationship with Darrell. Particularly the passage’s last sentence is a stumbling attempt to rein in meaning; its staccato echo cannot avoid tautology in its struggle to make the reader understand when understanding must be prevented for propriety’s sake. The narrator tells of degradation and violence to produce the reader’s political arousal while pretending that no such telling occurs. Stuck between telling and not-telling, the language becomes repetitive, fettered, and narrow, manifesting the limitations imposed upon the narrator’s otherwise analytic discourse. The disruption, even mutilation, of syntactical and semantic flow in the above sentence is not only suggestive of the mutilations Prince’s tormenters unleashed on her body (see Hartman 108), it is proof of the linguistic restraint under which the *History* operates. The sheer effort required to keep the discourse respectable loudly announces that disresponsible acts have occurred. ‘Washing’ functions as an inverted rhetorical substitute for and concentration point of the implied sexual activity with the master, effectively besmirching speaker and master rather than cleaning them. Although the scene purports to preserve the slave’s innocence, its narrator’s incomplete self-censorship indicates that the editors already believe in the slave woman’s moral fall.

The effect of ‘washing,’ “shame,” is conferred upon both Darrell and Prince, confirming the suspicion that rape renders slave women unchaste.¹⁸⁵ The other tag, “indecent,” however, is solely applied to the master. The narrative hence seems to allow for variations in moral guilt.

¹⁸⁵ Incredibly, scholars themselves appear to uphold such moral standards: Woodard calls the abuse at which the bathing scene hints “further improprieties” (140). Pringle’s South African biographer, Randolph Vigne, sounds disapproving when he notes that, despite all the “stigma” surrounding Prince, she is “admired today,” “whatever her faults” (Vigne 2012, 220). Also see Cooper 201, and Haynes 26, for similar moral pronouncements. Whitlock’s analysis of the bathing scene balances “impropriety” with “abuse” (2000, 21).

Both the rapist and the victim are accountable for sexual trespassing, but Darrell's culpability weighs heavier than Prince's. The sentence might even vindicate Prince's conduct. It acknowledges the moral blemish, yet resists the assumption that both parties are equally blameworthy. Since female virtue thus becomes negotiable and gradable, the speaker's half-swallowed confessions "effect a [temporary] reversal in which the standards of virtue are deemed inappropriate in measuring the lives of enslaved women."¹⁸⁶

In an episode strategically placed directly prior to the 'washing' revelation, the text performs a crucial rhetorical move that assures its readers of Darrell's moral depravity:

My old master often got drunk, and then he would get in a fury with his daughter, and beat her till she was not fit to be seen. [...] I found my master beating Miss D—dreadfully. I strove with all my strength to get her away from him; for she was all black and blue with bruises. He had beat her with his fist, and almost killed her. The people gave me credit for getting her away. He turned around and began to lick me. I said, 'Sir, this is not Turk's Island.'"¹⁸⁷ (*MP* 77)

Just when Miss Darrell's violated skin risks becoming as "black" as her own, Prince saves her from her nearest relation and legal guardian. Although Miss Darrell's wounds are "not fit to be seen"—the narrator obviously delimits the scope of representable violence here—the formulation "all black and blue with bruises" leaves sufficient room for prurient fantasy. If, as Collette Colligan writes, "the image of the flogged slave woman in abolitionist print culture roused sadistic flagellation fantasies about whipping white women" (71), Darrell's assault on his daughter, although a beating rather than a whipping, contains some incestuous pornographic charge.¹⁸⁷ It is this unspoken erotic valence that makes this scene an especially effective recruitment tool for abolitionist campaigners. White female readers were supposed to take this

¹⁸⁶ Hartman 105-7; for alternative interpretations, see Cooper 201; Sharpe 2002, 140; Thomas 2014, 133.

¹⁸⁷ See Altink 82, for abolitionists accusing planters of incest and abuse of their white or mixed-race offspring.

scene personally, to project Darrell's violence onto themselves, and to remember their own civilizing responsibility vis-à-vis English men.¹⁸⁸ The message is that slavery not only degrades slaves but, far worse, corrupts Englishmen's attitude towards their female kin, producing undutiful fathers (see Midgley 98). The shared victimization ("bruises") establishes social allegiance between black and white women on the corporeal level, the rhetorical mainstay of female abolitionist writing. Prince's loyalty to her white mistress allows her moral triumph over Darrell while leaving power hierarchies intact; the passage suggests that abolitionist anti-violent action occurs on behalf of defenseless (white) women with the slave having the last word.¹⁸⁹

Prince's verbal resistance to Darrell's violence—she reminds him that the excesses of Turk's Island are socially unacceptable in Bermuda, where the family has returned—invokes the abolitionist's fantasy that "morally upright speech" is sufficient to stop male violence (Sharpe 2002, 134). While this episode is probably unrealistic, it caters to female abolitionists' belief in their project's political efficacy and assures them that words, printed matter and speech, will bring about an end to British slavery (which they did). However, it negates the effectiveness of other less respectable or ennobling forms of slave resistance, such as fighting or yelling back (see Sharpe 2002, 134). It is clever strategy to place Prince's rescue of Darrell's daughter at this point in the narrative as the *History* will test readers' allegiance right away. The subsequent 'washing' disclosure likely anticipates readers' reflexive censure regardless of Prince's assurances that she habitually refused to obey Darrell's commands and later negotiates with her "indecent master" to be sold to the Woods (*MP* 78).

¹⁸⁸ Pouchet Paquet optimistically reads this scene as indicative of "an incipient motherhood and cross-class, cross-racial sisterhood that suggests an organic unity of interests in the deviant agency of the slave" (2002, 301). Also see Aljoe 77-8; Cooper 201.

¹⁸⁹ See *MP* 70, for another instance of Prince's talking back at her owner (Mr. Ingham in this case).

When There Is No Opting Out

After the *History*'s first two editions had circulated for a few weeks, coinciding with a surge in passionate anti-slavery campaigning spearheaded by women's organizations, Pringle received "inquiries ... from various quarters respecting the existence of marks of severe punishment on Mary Prince's body" and added to the *History*'s third edition a letter written by his wife and addressed to Mrs. Townsend, "benevolent" secretary of the Birmingham Ladies' Society for Relief of Negro Slaves, dated March 28, 1831.¹⁹⁰ Although the narrative argues repeatedly that Prince's experiences, her 'character,' and her Christian soul endow her with the authority to speak (and entitle her to be believed), that authority crumbles pitifully in light of Prince's black female corporality. Put bluntly, the Birmingham Ladies suspect that Prince is a liar asking for welfare handouts.¹⁹¹ The visual spectacle of flesh, for the abolitionists, was far more trustworthy than 'voice' or corroborated historical details.

In order to prove that she had actually undergone the torture depicted in the *History*, Prince—either voluntarily or under pressure—exposed her body to a group of women comprised of Strickland; Pringle's wife, Margaret; her sister, Susan Brown; and their acquaintance, Martha

¹⁹⁰ *MP* 130. Pringle regularly corresponded with women's committees, including the Birmingham Ladies' Society, regarding manumission of individual enslaved persons. For instance, with their assistance, he bought the freedom of a slave woman from St. Vincent, Nancy Morgan, along with that of her son (who had remained in Tobago with Morgan's husband, a free black) sometime between April 1831 and April 1832. Morgan's case reads eerily like Prince's. She had been brought to England by her owners, realized that she was free on English soil, and applied to the Anti-Slavery Society for help, stating that "she would almost rather die than go back into Slavery" (*Seventh Report* 38). Although her owners initially demanded £120 for her manumission, they eventually agreed to £60. Pringle had raised this sum on his own, £20 of which had been a contribution from the Birmingham Ladies. According to the Birmingham Ladies' Society report, Morgan boarded a ship to Tobago to be reunited with her husband and son before the report went into print in the spring of 1832 (*Seventh Report* 39, 59; see Midgley 88; Vigne 2012, 204).

¹⁹¹ See Ferguson 1992, 294-5; Rauwerda 406; Whitlock 1995, 253. The baring of the slave's scars is a generic performance by 1831; after Emancipation in 1834, American fugitive slaves such as Frederick Douglass would continue the public spectacle of lacerated skin (see Colligan 68). English audiences demanded to see fugitive American slaves' back scars until the American Civil War (Fisch 53).

A. Browne. Strickland's name, as those of the other women, is included to identify her as "authoritative spectator" (Whitlock 1995, 253). While Margaret Pringle doubtless wished to corroborate Prince's account, her and her friends' voyeuristic inspections of Prince's body—this was the second—suggests a degree of mistrust and disregard for Prince's "modesty or decency"¹⁹² that would have been unthinkable if her body had been white:

the whole of the back part of her body is distinctly scarred, and, as it were, *chequered*, with the vestiges of severe floggings. Besides this, there are many large scars on other parts of her person, exhibiting an appearance as if the flesh had been deeply cut, or lacerated with *gashes*, by some instrument wielded by most unmerciful hands. (*MP* 130)

The white English ladies, enacting the common rape law procedure that required the examination of the raped woman's body by a female witness, confirmed the veracity of Prince's story by reading the scars on her back.¹⁹³ In order to convince the Birmingham Ladies' Society to send five pounds for Prince's support and to recommend the *History* to the Ladies' Society's members, Mrs. Pringle and her friends investigated and interpreted the grotesque bodily 'text' Prince supplied and passed a final judgment upon Prince's credibility as witness and her story's authenticity.

Although the abolitionists believed themselves to be acting with best intentions, the racial condescension that permeates this procedure, as it permeates the *History's* entire Supplement, is structured by tacit opinions concerning Prince's racial inferiority, unreliability, and distance from proper British acculturation. The systematic inspection of Prince's naked body conducted by the four white women invokes associations with the appraisal of black bodies for sale upon the

¹⁹² Prince's narrator had explained earlier that slaves experience shame and humiliation when flogged and forced to strip in public: "There is no modesty or decency shown by the owner to his slaves; men, women, and children are exposed alike" (*MP* 93).

¹⁹³ Harrington 16; see Schroeder 269-70; Whitlock 1995, 253.

colonies' auction blocks, processes accommodating buyers' sexual exploitation of slaves and optimizing the organized prostitution. Both settings frame black bodies as readable surfaces without regard for consent or humiliation.

Gillian Whitlock reads this scene as “the obverse of this public spectacle in terms of the male gaze” since “the context here is private and benevolent, for only women view the scars.”¹⁹⁴ She cites Ferguson’s suggestion that Prince could have well avoided exposing her back because the group of evangelical women would have withdrawn had Prince modestly refused to undress (see Ferguson 1992, 295). Ferguson further argues that Prince “not only permits but probably desires her body to be used in this way, as a space of inscription, for it offers a rare opportunity to speak her history ... corporeally to the world.”¹⁹⁵ I find this assessment as well as its particular formulation risky on two grounds. First, the scopic inspection by Margaret Pringle and her friends is problematic in light of Prince’s employment in the Pringles’ home and her status as beneficiary of the Birmingham Ladies’ Society generosity. Given her penury and failing health, Prince could hardly refuse to show her body to Mrs. Pringle and her friends. Second, Prince’s scarred back—“her space of inscription ... to the world”—immediately exits the private space of a spectacle meant for sympathetic female eyes and enters the realm of public consumption when Margaret Pringle’s letter reaches her husband, the Birmingham Ladies, and eventually all readers of the third edition. Whitlock forgets that not everyone in this audience is female—as if all women are automatically immune from assuming the male gaze or from perceiving Prince’s

¹⁹⁴ Whitlock 2000, 23. To be fair, Whitlock also comments on the inspections’ “disturbing features” (2000, 23-4).

¹⁹⁵ Ferguson 1992, 295. Also see Ferguson’s similar assertion: “She responded by claiming a silent subjectivity, by presenting her body as a text of the ‘truth’ of her history; this body could not lie” (1992, 294). Baumgartner (264) and Haynes (24) agree with Ferguson; for Thomas (2014, 152), the inspection is a return to the experiences of objectifying “butchery.”

scars as arousing—or benevolent, or has agreed to honor Prince’s exposure as a private and safe event.¹⁹⁶ If Prince can expect to receive money for exhibiting her scars, and if some participants in this textual spectacle can be expected to be titillated, her vulnerable nakedness turns into something else entirely.

Prince, having “her body ... used in this way,” as Ferguson rather infelicitously puts it, is prostituted again—possibly voluntarily, probably coercively. Mary Favret cautions that many feminist scholars mistakenly expect abolitionist women to be exempt from participating in the visual politics of arousal caused by slavery’s pornotopias. Such scenarios “offered a fantasy scene to white women ... an opportunity to participate vicariously in sexual excesses otherwise denied to proper gentlewomen,” even if they were placed in these settings to “filter” pornographic content (Favret 41, 40). The staging of white women as agents within the pornographic scenario not only emphasizes their racial difference by infusing the potentially prurient scene with chastity, it allows Pringle to guard himself against accusations of distributing pornography using his own wife’s name as guarantee.¹⁹⁷ If Strickland’s presence as the virginal “Miss S—” in the *History* assures readers of the text’s overall propriety, it requires four respectable women, among them Strickland and the editor’s wife, to legitimize the inclusion of the letter in Pringle’s Supplement. The short letter reenacts nothing but the “ritualistic, private eroticism at the heart of domination” (Miller-Young 32). It reveals (and revels in) slavery’s

¹⁹⁶ See Colligan 94n15, for a note on early nineteenth-century women vendors and consumers of pornography and the under-researched possibility of prurient female gaze. Some abolitionist writers pointed to white mistresses’ lack of compassion and suggested that their inaction was due to sexual arousal during scenes of flogging, especially when women slaves were punished (Altink 137). Why should abolitionist women themselves be safe from similar prurience?

¹⁹⁷ Pringle identifies the slippage between female compassion and cruelty elsewhere: “I have even known ladies, born and educated in England, charitable and benevolent in their general character, yet capable of standing over their female slaves while they were flogged, and afterwards ordering salt and pepper to be rubbed into their lacerated flesh!” (Pringle 1827, 292).

continued non-optional corporeal intimacy as well as the locked-in power differential between black and white bodies, anchored in an institutional gaze that believes in its own neutrality.

The ritualized inspections of Mary Prince's back, then, follow a standard pornographic script and speak as much to Prince's abuse as to the female abolitionists' desires. Prince, partially dressed, turns her bare back to the four white women, her facial expressions or words unrecorded. Contemporary pornographic composition relied on depicting states of half-undress and the fragmenting objectification of the body by excising the head or face (M. Wood 2013, 3). If the *History* defends its protagonist's agency by virtue of the first-person narrator, Margaret Pringle's letter strips Prince of all vestiges of liberal selfhood, her "degree of sentience" is zero (Hartman 93). As Marcus Wood notes, the exposed back is vulnerable in a way different from any other area of the human body: "Uncovered backs somehow look more naked than other naked body parts; maybe it is the fact that [...] we cannot see our own backs, and that they consequently essentialize defenselessness, and even an unknown, unseen part of our own bodies" (2013, 178). Perhaps Prince never had the opportunity to look at her back in a mirror. The four women and the reader enjoy the dubious privilege of observing Prince's "*chequered*" skin, the macabre blazon of martyrdom, a view from which Prince herself is excluded. In this scene, as in the *History* at large, the presence of white respectable femininity allows for the illusion that violence may be represented without committing further violence.

CHAPTER THREE

WHAT'S NOT IN THE *HISTORY*

Obeah and Rebellion

As I have argued, the *History*'s narrow emplotment in the service of abolitionism's tenets not only delimits the narrator's agency, but enfolds whatever agency is left within the strictures of evangelical emancipation and enlightenment. Prince accuses her owners of mistreating her, repeats her wish to achieve freedom, and, displaying admirable newly-Protestant work ethic, exploits her small economic independence to save up for manumission. As such, she acts within the confines of, and towards, Western self-owning subjectivity and Christianity (see Sharpe 2002, 120, 135), while other, non-teleological possibilities of interiority or power are not shown. Although most, if not all, of Mary Prince's ancestors were of African descent, the *History* does not stage Africa as the origin of cultural traditions or customs, nor does it acknowledge West Indian creole culture as constitutive of Prince's sense of self.¹⁹⁸ For instance, despite the *History*'s implication in Western medical discourses—it diagnoses Prince with rheumatism and St. Anthony's fire—important traditions of how slaves conceptualized bodily phenomena remain unrepresented, likely because the editors dismissed them as unimportant, superstitious, and

¹⁹⁸ Cynthia James reads the absence of African markers as an effect of Prince's self-fashioning as Caribbean subject and of her view of slavery as the tradition into which she is born (44). While the latter is certainly correct, I would contend that it is likely that Pringle and Strickland were careful to filter signifiers that were culturally foreign. For Caribbean slaves' creolization, see Aljoe 19-21.

ideologically risky. Scholarship of the past forty years has investigated African-based systems of medical and reproductive knowledge and affirms their indispensable contribution to West Indian slaves' understanding of their existence. This research usefully supplements the *History* by demarcating non-British knowledges that were possibly familiar to Prince and by providing an indicator of the epistemologies Strickland could not hear and Pringle could not print.¹⁹⁹ Such scholarship also enables me to speculate on reasons for Mary Prince's alleged childlessness, keeping in mind that the veneration of motherhood and the conceptualization of "women as the primary guardians and perpetrators of the life cycle" in West African and later Caribbean cultures undergirded black women's cultural identity and fed into kinship patterns, ancestral veneration rites, and larger systems of faith (Dadzie 37).

From a Western view, traditional African medicine is marked by a "complete interpenetration of 'magico-spiritual' and 'rational' elements," the former having been ignored or ridiculed for centuries.²⁰⁰ African healers transmitted their knowledge orally, much of which was lost when European systems of medical practice, giving primacy to written language, inserted themselves aggressively into slaves' daily lives in the form of white plantation doctors who were almost universally loathed and feared.²⁰¹ In many African cultures, disease, misfortune, and death were ascribed to specific supernatural causes and agents, such as spirits and sorcery, as

¹⁹⁹ Western methodologies render these knowledges intelligible to scholars today. Jerome Handler remarks that "traditional topical and methodological interests of historians, including a general reluctance to treat African ethnographic materials and apply them to the early West Indian setting," severely limit discussions of slave medicine (57n2).

²⁰⁰ Finch 140; see Handler 159, Sheridan 73. Slave rebellions in Bermuda, Prince's birth place, were rare after 1700—despite a failed plot in 1761—possibly because the island did not experience much influx of new arrivals from Africa, and because it lacked the extremely harsh conditions of other Caribbean islands' large-scale sugar plantations. Punishments for infractions were "somewhat milder" than elsewhere, although they included hangings and two reported burnings at the stake (Bernhard 200; see 199).

²⁰¹ Finch 141; see Sheridan 82.

well as to violations of moral, social, or spiritual rules due to their disruptive effect on group harmony. Treatments of disease were seen to be incomplete without attendant psycho-spiritual cures, often accompanied by ritual dancing or story-telling (Finch 148). Existing evidence indicates that such etiological conceptions continued to exist in the Caribbean (Handler 60).

Colonial observers condemned West Indian slaves' non-European system of beliefs and ritual practices, or 'obeah.' Scholars have difficulties determining how slaves themselves conceptualized obeah because all surviving sources are Eurocentric (Handler 65). It seems clear, however, that obeah encompassed a secret set of practices slaves "employed for both socially positive objectives (e.g., curing illness, finding missing property) and for socially negative ones (e.g., causing death or harm)."²⁰² Obeah also referred to herbal lore and poison preparation, diagnosis of illness, and fetish and charm practices, all of them carefully guarded from white and non-qualified black appropriation.²⁰³ From a white perspective, obeah constituted an illegal cluster of "diabolical superstitions," likely due to its ability to provide slave communities with an effective system of resistance to slavery (Bush 75). Practitioners themselves probably viewed obeah primarily as a practice providing healing and protection, including the diffusion of practical knowledge about everyday circumvention or subversion of white laws. Historical sources indicate the existence of obeah people, usually men, in the 1780s, although their presence in the Caribbean had diminished over the previous two decades (Handler 64). Within slave communities, they were socially powerful and charismatic figures to be respected and feared (Lazarus-Black 42, 44).

²⁰² Handler 65; see Handler and Bilby 87; Mathurin 20. For African, particularly Coromantee, cultural survivals in Antigua, see Lazarus-Black 40-1.

²⁰³ Handler 65, 69; see Sheridan 74, 77-8.

Obeah people are said to have contributed prominently to slave uprisings throughout the West Indies, some of them in Antigua.²⁰⁴ In the 1810s and 20s, during Mary Prince's lifetime, colonial legislatures passed several anti-obeah laws, although, by that time, only a minority of slaves had been born in Africa.²⁰⁵ The practice was still widespread on Barbados by 1830 (Handler 76). By the early nineteenth century, obeah people were likely creoles who used everyday objects or animal products to cure or prevent disease ritualistically. Moreover, they aided in the creolization of West Indian religion, the formation of social hierarchy among people of African descent, provided a politico-legal sensibility with regards to questions of justice, taboo, and retribution, and organized group resistance to slavery (Lazarus-Black 45).

There is little indication in the *History* that the African-descended slave communities of which Prince had been a part “found their identity above all in music,” as Louis James writes (23). However, traces exist. Prince reports that slave owners on Turks Island twice pulled down a structure where slaves could meet and “pray” (the owners were later punished by a “flood”), and the *Times* article on Wood v. Pringle mentions Prince's remarks that Antiguan slaves would dress in white, dance, and have a “stir-up” during Christmas time, a practice forbidden by the ministers.²⁰⁶ It is noteworthy that both examples of independent slave gatherings operate within and against Christian paradigms (including the diluvial reference). Susette Harriet Lloyd's *Sketches of Bermuda* (1835) cautions that former slaves on the island had “embraced the

²⁰⁴ Handler 66, 77n45; see Handler and Bilby 88; Lazarus-Black 41; Sheridan 78, on the role of obeah in aiding rebellion.

²⁰⁵ The Barbados legislature sought to curtail obeah by making it “punishable by death if it caused the death of any slave, or transportation from the island if poison was administered to a slave that did not result in death” (Handler 75). Antigua outlawed obeah in 1809 and continued to pass legislation aimed at eradicating certain practices until after Emancipation (Lazarus-Black 44).

²⁰⁶ MP 76-7; *Times* March 1, 1833, 7.

profession of the gospel, [although] they adopted its name without receiving its influence in their heart.”²⁰⁷ Although the *History* makes no references to the central significance of drumming, body movement, and dramatic musical performance to slave communities, Prince’s participation in forbidden “stir-ups” has both spiritual and political valences. Dances were the primary means by which slave communities regenerated their cohesion ritually, ensured individual and group health, and prepared for rebellion or war.²⁰⁸ The fact that such festivals occurred during Christmas time may speak to the intermixing of African and European cultural practices. Drumming and chanting were outlawed for periods of time in Trinidad and Jamaica for inciting slave rebellions, and Europeans associated these practices with obscenity, excess, and subversive claims to freedom (L. James 2014, 23-5).

Demonstrating the same aversion to black signs of independence, Pringle criticizes Prince for her “considerable share of natural pride and self-importance” (*MP* 115), and thereby echoes a major complaint of many West Indian owners with regard to female domestic slaves (see Bush 51, 61). While these are qualities that likely allowed Prince to survive slavery for as long as she did, it must be added that many West Indian slave women were brought up in a culture of self-respect, assertiveness, and other ritualized behaviors running counter to metropolitan ideals of bourgeois femininity. Lucille Mathurin suggests that female confidence was the result of various African cultures’ emphases on “militancy and aggressiveness” as well as the high status of women (and mothers in particular)—despite West African cultures’ unquestionably patriarchal

²⁰⁷ Lloyd 94; see M’Baye 180.

²⁰⁸ On the cultural importance of dance in slave societies, see Dadzie 36; Handler 62; Hartman 67; Lazarus-Black 42; M’Baye 181-2.

structure.²⁰⁹ Many legislators and slave owners rejected abolitionist demands for a limit on the number of lashes to punish female slaves, citing such women's habitual insolence and "Amazonian cast of character" ("Amelioration" 1123). Europeans often remarked that slave women were more difficult to deal with than men, possibly because European gender norms led them to expect men to be more assertive than women, and because women were more likely to be sexually coerced and exploited than men, therefore increasing their opposition to slavery (Dadzie 25).

As the *History* indicates, Mary Prince participated in the common strategy employed by many domestic slave women to assert her "nuisance value" in the local court system as well as in her owners' home. Historians have established that slaves, albeit illiterate, were well aware of their privileges and limited legal entitlements, and female slaves were infamous for voicing official complaints often and insistently.²¹⁰ Along with obeah, black women's litigiousness should be considered part of "a wider system of illegalities that counters hegemony" which is outlined indirectly in the *History* and mobilized for abolitionist purposes (Lazarus-Black 54). The *History* illustrates that Prince had internalized the amendments created by the 1798 Amelioration Acts, affording the slave community very limited, yet occasional protection against mistreatment (Lazarus-Black 49). Prince mentions having gone to court (and won) over a property dispute with another slave woman involving a pig.²¹¹ Nevertheless, on Mrs. Wood's behest, she was flogged and "put in the Cage" for a night, possibly because she had been too

²⁰⁹ Mathurin 2, also 18; see Altink 139; Bernhard 191; Dadzie 24, 34-6; Midgley 103.

²¹⁰ Lazarus-Black 4, 52; Mathurin 16-8.

²¹¹ *MP* 80. Unfortunately, Antigua court records of the time have not survived (Lazarus-Black 51).

successful at harassing her owners and the magistrate (see Mathurin 17). She probably anticipated, and accepted, the possibility of punishment.

It is hard to say how much of the *History*'s emphasis on illness reflects Prince's physical debility or a planned work slow-down as an act of common and extremely effective resistance.²¹² There is no reason to disbelieve Prince's assertions that she worked hard as a 'higgler' or 'huckster' woman to earn money; obviously, making money she could keep for herself appears to have been the most important strategy to gain her manumission besides enabling her to buy clothes, furniture, and goods to be traded.²¹³ Historians understand slave women's limited economic independence, like Prince's, to constitute an important and essential remnant of traditional African mores, and point out that pilfering from owners' stocks often must have laid the groundwork for clandestine assertions of independence.²¹⁴ Three years after Prince landed in London, Antiguan slaves rebelled violently against officials' attempts to ban slave provision trading on Sundays (Lazarus-Black 74). The *History* does not mention, however, that higglering alone was unlikely to yield sufficient money for Prince to buy her freedom.

²¹² See Bush 56-8; Mathurin 10. This is not to say that Prince exaggerates the amount of work she was forced to perform. The *History*'s representation of Mary Prince's workload is likely realistic as female slaves carried out much of the heaviest labor (Dadzie 22; see Baumgartner 258).

²¹³ See Beckles 72. A pro-slavery attack on Pringle and the *History* printed in the *Bermuda Royal Gazette* on November 22, 1831, cites "witness" accounts according to which Prince received three new suits annually, as well as muslin, stockings, shoes, and Irish linen from the Woods, and fattened her pigs using the Woods' resources (3). The article probably overstates the Woods' generosity. Reading across the available sources it can be inferred that Prince looked out for herself economically and materially. Bermudan slaves, more than on other islands, often flaunted expensive dress to announce their owners' incapacity to stymie illegal trade—it is possible that Prince continued that tradition in Antigua (Bernard 212; Morrissey 147).

²¹⁴ Bernard 201; Bush 91; see Morrissey 5, for a critical discussion of the widespread claim that women had control over marketing and provision grounds.

Complicating Christianity: Concubinage, Capitalism, and Conversion

White women were rare in the Caribbean and most white men of authority—overseers, ship captains, bookkeepers—had black or mixed-race mistresses, although some of these men were in fact married to white women who were present on the island as well. As Joseph Phillips had mentioned in his letter to Pringle, sexual relations between white men and women of color were such a fundamental part of the social structure, often accompanied by exploitation and violence, that no one among the plantocracy thought they were particularly noteworthy.²¹⁵

Women who refused to submit were generally subjected to severe violence. If white metropolitan discourse perceived slave women's reputations to be tainted by prostitution, many of them, in fact, sold their bodies, sometimes to one man for an extended period and sometimes in rapid succession and to many men from all social strata at once. Owners often declared that slave women sold themselves voluntarily and, given that slavery legally erased slave women's consent, it is impossible to speculate about the percentage of voluntary forms of prostitution compared to those that were forced. It was obviously convenient to slave owners to suggest that slave women benefited from casual rape.

However, at times feminist scholars, often unwittingly echoing moralistic prescriptions of the nineteenth century, appear to struggle with the historical reality of black women's self-prostitution and, because actual numbers are unknown, minimize the magnitude of interracial intercourse despite the "high incidence of miscegenous unions in the West Indies."²¹⁶ Slave women's motives were manifold and justified, even if they were frowned upon by some segments of the very heterogeneous slave community. Historical evidence suggests that many

²¹⁵ Beckles 142; Bush 11; Sheridan 243.

²¹⁶ Bush 18; A. Davis 116; Morrissey 69; for instances of this continuation of moral discourse, see Bush 17, 94, 117.

non-slave-owning white men came through urban centers, harbors, and non-agrarian trading posts—such as Antigua’s towns—which fostered a formalized system of black prostitution (Morrissey 69). Concubines and sex workers likely sought to improve their own and their children’s living conditions, and hoped for eventual manumission as well as protection from other men’s sexual advances, exploitation, or violence. Sometimes those unions arose from emotional attachment or physical attraction. It was also absolutely normal for a slave owner to “hire out” slave women as “housekeepers” to white acquaintances, guests, or even black slaves in overseer positions for specified periods of time, without consideration of these women’s willingness or preparedness for sexual intercourse. Such trafficking, often much more profitable than the sale of female slaves, likely caused anger and resistance among the slave community in some places while it was unremarkable in others.²¹⁷ Some owners allowed slave women a share or the total of the profits to stymie such resistance. For many slave women, freedom was best attained through intimacy with European men.

Mary Prince’s remarks that she “took in washing” and sold provisions to ships’ captains when her owners were absent—real personal liberties that probably included independent travel and the maintenance of her own social network—should be understood in the context of the general assumption that hired female slave labor, especially domestic tasks, included sexual access as well. The narrator’s assurance that she strove to earn cash “by all honest means” at her disposal is a very obvious disclaimer intended to deny the possibility of self-prostitution, an automatic expectation for any reader who had visited the West Indies.²¹⁸ Labor power and sexual services were conflated in the West Indies (Beckles 42), and most men with whom Prince

²¹⁷ Altink 67-9; Beckles 141-2; Bush 117; Morrissey 69, 157.

²¹⁸ *MP* 81; see Altink 75; Morrissey 4.

interacted likely perceived her with this reality in mind. The many male advocates mentioned by Prince—Captain Abbott; Captain William; the black cooper, Adam White; the freedman, Oyskman; Mr. Burchell—should give readers pause since all of them are reported to have either promised to help Prince with her manumission or to have cohabited with her.²¹⁹ Female slaves, especially in urban areas, earned manumission money by prostitution, and asked their clients to support them in their appeals to their owners.²²⁰ At times, white owners manumitted their own mixed-race children and their children's mothers, which turned sexual relationships into important tools of social mobility for slave women (Morrissey 4).

As in so many feminist histories, scholarship on Prince has struggled to position itself in relation to the possibility of Prince's enforced or voluntary self-prostitution. Jenny Sharpe suggests that Prince might have "undermined her master's right of ownership by asserting her status as property," a complicated power transaction disrupting the *History's* straightforward emplotment of the slave's quest for self-ownership and subjectivity (2002, 150). Antje Rauwerda, on the other hand, cautions that Prince's relationships with white men did not lead to any fundamental improvements of her situation. Such relationships not only demonstrate her "powerlessness and inability to refuse men's sexual advances," according to Rauwerda, but made it more difficult for her to attain her freedom (409n14). Considering the non-optional nature of slave women's sexualization, I agree with Rauwerda, although the dearth of information makes it

²¹⁹ *MP* 81, 85; *Times* March 1, 1833, 7. Mr. Burchell expected Prince to serve him for "a while" after her manumission (*MP* 81).

²²⁰ Beckles 149. Helena Woodard reads Prince's affairs as sexually liberating (143); she understands her to "struggle to maintain sexual and reproductive control" (144). I am doubtful as to the usefulness of the ahistorical category 'sexual liberation' in light of Antigua's system of concubinage before and after emancipation. Jenny Sharpe understands Prince to gain "greater autonomy" through concubinage, even if it is a paradoxical autonomy—controlling exploitation through self-exploitation (2002, 140); see Ferguson 1992, 295; Miller-Young 49; Thomas 2014, 138.

impossible to assess whether Prince's relationships with men resulted in improved material conditions. Accommodation to and within slavery's sexual regimes should not be equated with absolute powerlessness. It should further be noted that not a single record of a Bermudan slave owner ever manumitting black or mulatto children exists (Morrissey 66). Since the extended family that traded Mary Prince among its members was originally based in Bermuda, John Adams Wood's adherence to that culture on non-manumission ought to be considered when speculating on Prince's sexual agency. Manumission on Antigua was similarly rare, although not unheard of. Less than one percent of Antiguan slaves were manumitted annually (with numbers increasing as Emancipation drew closer), and chances improved for urban slaves who were domestics or artisans and had saved up enough money.²²¹ Prince's determination to collect money is understandable, as she was favorably positioned despite her owners' rigid stance and the steady increase of manumission prices before Emancipation.

It is entirely possible that freedman Daniel James and Prince had an arrangement including concubinage that culminated in a marriage encouraged by the Moravians.²²² James, a free carpenter and cooper, was likely unable to find a wife among the freed black population as free women of color tended to prefer affairs with white men due to significant status and income advantages (Lazarus-Black 81). Hence, he was forced to seek a mate among the enslaved, aware that his future children would be born into slavery, and despite legal disincentives to marry.²²³

²²¹ Lazarus-Black 98; see Morrissey 71-2.

²²² For the history of the Moravian church and its spreading throughout the non-Christian world, see Salih 2004, xxi-ii. See Thomas 2014, 123-4, for Moravianism on Antigua. By the time Prince joined the Moravians, they served more than half of the island's slave population (Thomas 2014, 124).

²²³ See Lazarus-Black 81, on the improved living conditions and growing social influence of the free black community on Antigua.

Missionaries on Antigua were eager to regulate black couples' sexual relations or those of congregants who were non-monogamous, although it was illegal for ministers to marry freedpersons and slaves without the owner's consent. What the *History* fails to note is that the Moravians excluded slave women from congregations as well as from church-run schools if they resisted marriage too long or if they had committed adultery.²²⁴ In case Mary Prince saw literacy and Moravianism as possible avenues to freedom—despite the Moravians' preaching of European gender hierarchies and the sexual double standard—her marriage might not have been solely a spiritual matter. Prince probably utilized most strategies towards manumission available to her, including income-generating activities such as prostitution, domestic work, and marketing, as well as increasing her respectability and economic leverage through conversion and marriage. Prince reports that she would only marry James after his conversion to Moravianism.²²⁵

By embracing Christianity, Prince enters the ideological universe of the *History*'s target readers (her tale becomes intelligible to English readers) and makes visible the increasing influence of Western marital models, notions of status and respectability, and civilization in Antigua.²²⁶ Ideologically correct, and perhaps tracing a real change of heart, Prince reports that she only learned of fornication's sinfulness when she joins the Moravians: "I never knew rightly

²²⁴ See Lazarus-Black 68, 91-2; see Altink 86, 92, 95.

²²⁵ *MP* 84; see Cooper 202; Ferguson 1992, 289; Salih xxii. Although execrable in its vicious racist stereotyping, Macqueen's assessment in the *Glasgow Courier* from July 26, 1831, that Pringle "sees nothing but purity in a prostitute, because she knew how and when to utter the name of the Deity, to turn up the whites of her eyes, and to make a perfect mockery of religion" might reflect historical circumstances more accurately than the *History* (Macqueen "Anti-Slavery Society," 1; see Thomas 2014, 135; Thomas 2011, 83).

²²⁶ I am complicating Helena Woodard's interpretation, which sees Prince as achieving "moral healing" by joining the Moravians (144). By the time Prince was born, the Moravians had already established a well-oiled conversion industry. Also see Ferguson 1992, 284; Paquet 2002, 29-30, 37-8; Salih 2004, xxi-ii.

I had much sin till I went there.”²²⁷ Moravian encouragement of monogamy and Christian courtship was probably closely tied to planters’ belief that promiscuity led to infertility as well as to the visibility of respectable, free black women who had joined the Anglican Church after 1816. As the *History* illustrates, by the third decade of the nineteenth-century, the church wedding had become established as a cultural ideal among Antiguan slaves, denoting “civility, education, financial stability, enduring love, and religious salvation.”²²⁸ Many slaves actually followed the model outlined by the *History* in which initial, sometimes decades-long experimentation with multiple partners and occasional polygamy was followed by eventual long-term monogamy, not necessarily accompanied by cohabitation.²²⁹ The *History* hints that Prince and James maintained a visiting relationship because the Woods forbade James to live on their property and perhaps because the couple preferred it that way. Visiting relationships were the most common form of romantic relationships among slaves, and husbands were generally free to take more wives if they could afford it to increase their status.²³⁰

²²⁷ *MP* 83. Jenny Sharpe was the first to point out that the *History*’s chronology—and its smooth conversion narrative—is likely wrong as Prince was already a member of the Moravian society when she started cohabiting with Captain Abbott (2002, 142). Sue Thomas’s spectacular find regarding Captain Samuel Abbott’s conviction of manslaughter in 1827 as well as the 1833 *Times* report, according to which Prince had lived with Abbott “seven years before,” suggest that Prince and Abbott separated sometime in 1826, three or four years after she joined the Moravians and in the same year she married James (Thomas 2014, 208n100; *Times* March 1, 1833, 7). For other takes on Prince’s relationship with Abbott, see Bohls 168; Ferguson 1992, 287; Maddison-MacFadyen 2013, 658, 661n15; Salih 2004, xxix-xxx.

²²⁸ Lazarus-Black 93; see Altink 91; Beckles 131.

²²⁹ Lazarus-Black 85-7; see Beckles 117.

²³⁰ Beckles 121; Bush 97; Morrissey 84. Wood, according to the *Times* report, allowed James to “live with her” (March 1, 1833, 7). Of course, John Wood could have been lying when he wrote to Pringle that Daniel James had taken another wife during Mary Prince’s absence from Antigua (*MP* 101). However, it does not appear entirely unlikely that James in fact remarried as having a wife (or multiple wives) conferred authority and status (Beckles 121; Morrissey 89). ‘Divorce’ was common for slaves (by necessity and as part of African cultural heritage), which induced the plantocracy to argue that black relationships were shallower than whites’ (Altink 93, 117-8; Bush 101). Wood also implies here that James is an ineffectual, emasculated husband, as he has no control over his world-traveling wife. Pringle notes that he has a letter from James accusing Wood of directing “his friend Mr. Darrel”—undoubtedly either Prince’s former owner or a member of the same family—to tell James that Prince has already

Considering that Captain Abbott was in charge of one of John Wood's vessels, it is further possible that Wood actually encouraged Prince's cohabitation with the former.²³¹ In urban coastal areas it was common for masters to "lease" female slaves out to nautical crews. This would also account for the Woods' anger about Prince's unapproved marriage to James and for Prince's keeping it a secret for three or four months—Prince reports she was whipped by Wood when he found out—since, in case Prince actually began to live monogamously, the Woods would not only have lost an important source of profit but incurred financial obligations due to Prince's marriage.²³² Furthermore, white men risked fines of up to one hundred pounds if they raped a 'married' slave woman, although owners often 'broke' slave marriages at will (Lazarus-Black 69-70). Social pressure on proprietors to encourage their slaves' morality as well as concern for Prince's morale might have prevented Wood from flat-out denying Prince the right to stay married. Owners believed they were entitled to full sexual access to domestic slaves and housekeepers. Even if it is unlikely, it cannot be ruled out that Prince and John Adams Wood's domestic intimacy had at times—or always—included a sexual dimension that was stymied or complicated by Prince's marriage.²³³ In fact, a past of shared sexual intimacy implicating John Wood would help explain both Prince's refusal to respect Wood's authority as

been unfaithful and to evict James from Wood's property while the family is in England (*MP* 106; see Thomas 2005, 127).

²³¹ According to the cross-examination report printed by the *Times*, Prince "slept with" Abbott "in another hut she had, in addition to her room in [Wood's] yard" (March 1, 1833, 7; see Cooper 202-3). The hut might have been provided by John Wood who perhaps wanted to avoid that Prince's sexual transactions occurred on his property (his letter to Pringle Wood claims that he "induced" Prince "to take a husband," *MP* 100). Wood might have also encouraged Prince to end her pregnancies, as they would have been an inconvenience to the household and interruptions to "business." According to Wood's slave registrations, no child was born on his property between 1817 and 1832, although he owned (and sold) a few female slaves of childbearing age (T 71/244, 247-50).

²³² *MP* 80; see *Times* March 1, 1833, 7.

²³³ See Altink 94; Beckles 143.

well as Wood's refusal to sell Prince.²³⁴ Even if Wood had never been intimate with Prince, the circumstances under which she had helped raise Wood's children²³⁵ and become a confidante of the family for more than fifteen years, helps explain her ambivalent position²³⁶ and Wood's stubbornness.

Creole Obstetrics

There is great archival evidence that African and creole slaves used plant medicines and that white medical professionals adopted this knowledge. However, there is insufficient evidence to trace the systematic use of plant medicine over time.²³⁷ It is clear, however, that African societies availed themselves of hundreds of plant, mineral, and animal substances to treat illness, that some of that knowledge survived and evolved in the colonies, and that it co-existed, sometimes uncomfortably, with European medical practice (Handler 61). Medical care of slaves, as described in the *History*, is primarily concerned with re-establishing Prince's economic productivity. The *History* claims that the Woods were not interested in Prince during the lengthy periods of her incapacitation and that Prince received care from an old slave woman owned by Mrs. Greene, the Woods' neighbor. Most African cultures allocated pediatrics, obstetrics, and

²³⁴ I would wager that John Wood, as a member of the Antiguan elite, was unlikely to have had sexual relations with his slaves. Nevertheless, concubinage was normative for middle and low-ranking white men (Lazarus-Black 81-3; see Ferguson 1992, 290; Rauwerda 402).

²³⁵ Prince probably did not serve as wet-nurse for Wood's daughters—they were too old when Wood purchased Prince around 1815.

²³⁶ The *Times* report suggests that at one point, several years after Wood purchased her, Prince begged him not to sell her, a fact she did not disclose to Strickland. Since it is unknown whether Wood intended to sell her into worse conditions, her plea is not necessarily proof of Prince's comfortable life with the Woods (March 1, 1833, 7; see Sharpe 2002, 150-1).

²³⁷ Handler 62; see Sheridan 95.

general complains to older women, while surgery and special diagnostic and therapeutic challenges were men's domains.²³⁸ Mary Prince's rheumatism would have been treated with willow bark among Bantu-speaking people (Finch 154); the *History* suggests that the old woman boiled "the bark of some bush" against the pain and prepared hot baths for Prince.²³⁹ The water baths were prescribed by a doctor, possibly Dr. Weston or Dr. Coull, hired by the Woods ("Anti-Slavery Society" 3). In any case, Prince's physical complaints were extremely common among slaves (Sheridan 200).

As a result of slaves' general debility, low fertility and premature deaths characterized almost all of the West Indian islands. Apart from the Bahamas and Barbados, no island reported positive natural increase in the period between 1816 and 1834 (Sheridan 196). Most slaves died in their fourth decade of life. After the ban of the slave trade in 1808, island governments encouraged slave owners to adopt pro-natalist policies to ensure the natural reproduction of their work force—to no avail. Conditions never improved significantly. Contemporaries, including anti-slavery writers, tended to blame black women's promiscuity—associated with infertility, venereal disease, and possibly self-induced abortion—as well as neglect of their children, and their ignorance regarding 'proper' medical care for the low birth rate (Altink 83). Depictions of black women as licentious probably owed much to white masters' wishful thinking, which allowed them to suspend bourgeois sexual norms without guilt and blame slaves themselves for that suspension.²⁴⁰ These depictions are likely false and, especially when repeated by historians,

²³⁸ Finch 148; see Morrissey 68-9.

²³⁹ *MP* 79; see Sheridan 74, on the importance of old female practitioners in slave medicine. On aromatic baths as a staple of slave medicine, see Sheridan 81.

²⁴⁰ Altink 65; see Morrissey 113.

evinced a profound disregard for slave women's living conditions, nutritional status, likely psychosexual circumstances, and culturally variable patterns of forming and maintaining sexual relationships.²⁴¹ In an effort to reduce such bias, recent scholars have pointed at African customs governing sexual and child-rearing practices, widespread disease and debility (especially tuberculosis which can cause infertility), unhealthy living and working conditions, as well as the psychological effects of slavery to help explain the extremely low birthrate in the West Indies.²⁴² It appears that slave owners' insistence that women perform hard labor throughout the pregnancy (which led to extremely high numbers of miscarriage) as well as dangerous conditions during childbirth contributed to the decrease among the slave population (Sheridan 224). As Hetty's example makes clear, no concessions were made for pregnancy when a slave woman was punished. Regardless of pregnancy, women and men were punished equally harshly.²⁴³ As Barbara Bush, Jennifer Morgan, and others have shown, racist myths about African women's ability to give birth quickly, painlessly, and often were used to defend the disregard for pregnant women's need for rest.²⁴⁴ Further, recent research suggests that slaves' use of fertility control techniques must be added as a plausible contributing factor to slave women's low fertility.

Although contemporary writers did not differentiate between contraception and sterility or between spontaneous miscarriage and intentional abortion, slaves in Antigua and the wider Caribbean very likely used Obeah-informed techniques to prevent conception and bring about abortion in a struggle to preserve their health and to avoid increasing slaveowners' economic and

²⁴¹ Collins 155; see Altink 16-7; Bush 125; Grainger 15-6; Higman 548; Morrissey 6-7; Sheridan 224.

²⁴² Sheridan 222; see Dadzie 27; Morgan 134.

²⁴³ Dadzie 24; see Altink 11; M. Lewis 389; Mathurin 7; Morrissey 5-6.

²⁴⁴ Bush 133; see Morgan 8, 47.

personal powers.²⁴⁵ In 1746, Edward Trelawny, the Jamaican Governor, complained that abortion prevented the slave community from reproducing itself (Dadzie 30). On the same island, in 1816, “Monk” Gregory Matthew Lewis wrote of the slave women on his plantation that they “can produce children at pleasure, and where they are barren it is just as hens will frequently not lay eggs ... because they do not like their situation” (82). When British colonial governments changed their policies to encourage pregnancy during slavery’s final decades, enslaved women, long accustomed to being considered “work units” rather than “breeders” (Bush 128), had already fostered a century-old culture of reproductive accommodation to the circumstances of slavery. This likely took the form of surreptitiously self-induced miscarriages and abortions as well as extended periods of weaning during which sex was taboo.²⁴⁶ In Lewis’s words, “the children do not come” (M. Lewis 381). Barbara Bush lists the wide variety of herbs, shrubs, roots, and barks that female West Indian slaves employed to end a pregnancy, stimulate the onset of menstruation, or aid in the expulsion of the afterbirth, among them yam, mango, papaya, snakeroot, cotton root, and wild cassava.²⁴⁷ Most of these techniques functioned (sometimes fatally and sometimes not at all) by poisoning the body and thus inducing cramping, vomiting, and diarrhea. They could leave a woman permanently disabled and sterile (Bush 140-2). Such knowledge was usually passed down from mother to daughter, and can be traced back to West African practices (Klepp 27). It must be added, however, that feminist scholars risk overestimating the degree to which slave women controlled their fertility and, in an effort to ascribe sexual agency to female slaves, downplay living and work conditions leading to

²⁴⁵ Dadzie 27; Klepp 26; Lazarus-Black 44; Finch 146-7, 154; Sheridan 75.

²⁴⁶ Sheridan 245; Bush 139; Kiple 1983, 109; Morrissey 111.

²⁴⁷ Bush 140; see Dadzie 30; Goodson 198-200; Klepp 26-7; Morgan 114; Morrissey 114-5; Sheridan 243-4.

structural biological ‘subfecundity’ or the strong cultural mandate to have children in opposition to slavery (Morrissey 112-3, 119).

Scholars who understand the *History*’s silences as loud signifiers of Prince’s claims to agency tend to read the absence of pregnancy and motherhood as Prince’s self-conscious mobilization of her body as “a site of resistance” (Baumgartner 260), an interpretation that risks overstating slave women’s political investments. Research appears to prioritize explanations that empower Prince in terms of Western feminist commitment to reproductive control although Prince’s living and working conditions allow for an endless variety of scenarios, including sterility, contraception, miscarriage, self-induced abortion, politically motivated infanticide, forced neglect, and childhood death (see van der Spuy 133). Although Prince, when she arrived on Antigua, was among the most fertile group of female West Indian slaves—between 25 and 34 years old and employed as a domestic servant rather than a field hand—physical abuse, starvation, diseases, decades of stress and psychological trauma, and other factors probably hastened the onset of menopause. If Prince actually had given birth, it seems likely that her pregnancy would have been a difficult one, owing to decades of hard labor, severe malnutrition, inadequate clothing, physical abuse, and likely rape.²⁴⁸ Her child might have been born weakly and suffering from nutrient deficiencies that were virtually universal among West Indian newborns. Many children died from tetanus due to unhygienic conditions and inadequate obstetric knowledge among white and black doctors. Only half of all children born to slave mothers survived the first year. On Antigua the infant mortality ratio within the first year only slightly decreased to thirty per cent after 1834. About a quarter of all cases of infant mortality

²⁴⁸ See Bush 137; A. Davis 108; Higman 548; Kiple 1985, 107-11.

was not recorded if the child had died very young since owners had to register their slaves every four years.²⁴⁹

The Story of a Disappearance

As Thomas Pringle wrote on March 6, 1833, a week after losing the libel suit Wood had brought against him, “[s]lavery will be extinguished throughout the British dominions before January 1835—and Mary Prince shall go back to her husband ... in spite of the spiteful Mr Wood” (Vigne 2011, 23). Archival traces of the legal and very personal conflict between Pringle and Wood end here, and Prince, discursive conduit between two colonial men equally “spitefully” defending their respective ideological and economic interests, disappears from the archive. Pringle’s prophecy about the abolition of slavery having been correct, it only stands to hope that the prediction regarding Prince’s return to Antigua, contingent on her health and ability to raise money for her passage, was realized as well (Thomas 2014, 164). Unlike most parts of the British Caribbean, neither Antigua nor Bermuda transitioned from slavery to a repressive apprenticeship system, and after August 1, 1834, Prince would have set foot on either island as a free woman. In the wake of Emancipation, John Adams Wood returned to England and was awarded £10,575 in compensation monies by the British government.²⁵⁰ He died in London in 1836, fourteen months after Pringle had passed away from tuberculosis.

²⁴⁹ Altink 17; Bush 134; Kiple 1983, 113; Kiple and King 97; Sheridan 194. Prince reported that she had her own two-room house apart from the Woods’ main domicile (*Times* March 1, 1833, 7). According to the Leeward Island Amelioration Acts, masters were encouraged to set aside a two-room house for pregnant slaves (Lazarus-Black 88). However, according to the slave registers, Prince was the most ‘senior’ domestic slave working for the Woods and therefore likely to have her own shack, bug-infested as it may have been. See Thomas 2014, 162.

²⁵⁰ Thomas 2014, 164. About \$1.7 million in 2013 currency.

As I hope to have shown, proslavery and abolitionist writers agreed that slave women's sexual conduct in the colonies—regardless of their consent—disqualified them from discursive participation in the political struggle to end slavery. Abolitionist materials framed sexually exploited slaves as soon-to-be-virtuous prostitutes deserving of affective and pecuniary charity, whereas proslavery accounts took advantage of centuries-old stereotypes of black licentiousness. Regardless of whether Prince was enfolded within abolitionism's visual regime of pornographic melodrama or in pro-slavery's discourse of African barbarity, Prince's possible non-monogamy excludes her from authorial ownership and forestalls her reproductive legacy. Pringle and Strickland's socioethic expectations produced a narrative that precariously maneuvers the paradoxical assumption that an enslaved woman, despite having no mastery over her body, sexually contaminates white men, women, and English civilization at large. The *History* judges Prince's capability to report slavery's atrocities by the impossible standards of liberal selfhood and white female domesticity. For all that is known about Mary Prince, this kind of domestic morality might have been completely alien to her for the majority of her life, even if she might have identified it as a vehicle for attaining increased respectability—which, in the colonies, was accompanied by greater safety from physical violence and, in rare cases, freedom from slavery's legal commodification of humans.

When studying *The History of Mary Prince* and its archival aftermaths, we must remember that we are looking at elite metropolitan writings, penned against an increasingly loud threat of mob activism that began to disturb “the nearly ubiquitous belief that some people are naturally subordinate to others, which is central to maintaining social order through consent” (Wheeler 2000, 254). Pringle, Strickland, Wood, and Macqueen were united in their admiration of social elevation and property, and they all viewed democracy as dangerous to the political

order and as degenerating the attainments of English civilization and culture. Civilization, for them, denoted European social and religious institutions and values, standards of living enabled by the consumption of consumer goods and luxury articles, and a generally expansionist attitude regarding individual and national existence—all of these markers being “the arguable cause and result of a profitable slave trade” (Wheeler 2000, 284). As much as the *History* reveals about slavery’s atrocities, it is hugely indicative of its editors’ professional aspirations, pre-Victorian trends in the literary marketplace, inner-European political tensions about class and gender, English identity and the nation’s moral character, and a move towards specular pornographic entertainment.²⁵¹ It is an historical consequence of slavery that the slave woman’s body functioned as the site onto which all of these personal, material, and political struggles were projected, enabling the formulation of a British moral and economic code for a post-slavery social order.

Most scholarship on Mary Prince overestimates the importance of phenotypical difference in her subjugation and underestimates the role of national xenophobia and hostility towards religious difference in the emergence of nineteenth-century racial ideologies and scientific racism (Wheeler 2000, 240). Writers who had actually lived in the colonies tended to focus more on complexion than their metropolitan contemporaries, contributing to the later association of skin color with essential group identity under scientific guise—but only after British slavery had ended (see Wheeler 2000, 260). Both Pringle and Wood preferred to view Prince as locked into relations of servitude, demanding her humility, labor, and loyalty (see Sharpe 2002, 143). Both sides’ rhetorical strategies shared a commitment to ensuring that slave populations, along with working-class Englishmen (and, obviously, all women) would be forever

²⁵¹ See Fisch 3-4; Schroeder 271.

barred from equitable political and economic participation. Put more sharply, humanitarian abolitionists as well as plantocratic writers weaponized ideologies of sexual morality in a post-revolutionary backlash against demands from below to broaden working-class inclusion in the political process while furthering the commercialization of Britain's colonial assets in Africa, the Caribbean, and, increasingly, India.

As with Saartjie Baartmann, what remains in the Eurocentric archive are Prince's "performative remains" (Ndlovu 29), fragments of body parts and testimonies, re-organized to fit historical as well as recent ideological trajectories of epistemological desire. It is difficult, if not impossible, to locate the historical person's agency in such contexts (see Young 51). In the process of re-writing Prince's history, scholars, the self-proclaimed custodians of her legacy, should be wary of the impulse to identify with her political and social position because such identification will continue to silence, victimize, or sanctify her, perpetuating the idea that Prince's life matters solely because of her sexual and racial alterity. Inattention to the social and material conditions of the *History*'s production risks scholars' involuntary compliance with Pringle and Strickland's original ambitions, and neutralizes, rather than unpacks, the voyeuristic spectacle they created in her name.²⁵² Prince's own experiences of slavery are likely forever closed off to scholarly interest and we should cultivate "a way of knowing that respects the 'opaqueness' of the body, a way of knowing that is comfortable with the unknown, the forgotten, and the silenced: a way of knowing that allows us to realize the limits of the archive" (Ndlovu 27). To describe the historical rape of slave women requires the careful extraction of layers of psychic life, social interaction, and embodied sensation, all of which are mediated and obscured by memory, the historical conventions of literary production, and subsequent scholarship.

²⁵² Ndlovu 19; see Fausto-Sterling 89; Holmes 114; McKoy 96.

PART TWO

**MOTHERHOOD'S BURDENS: ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING, RAPE, AND
THE PLEASURES OF THE SPECTACLE**

Introduction

As a working mother, EBB possessed greater insight into pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood than her male poetic peers (Faulk 43), and her verse offers many instances of surprisingly frank references to women's sexual experiences, positive and negative. She believed that the "light and air" of her poetry would produce the sympathy necessary to bridge the cultural gap between different social classes as well as between the sexes, and her use of erotic imagery was intended to shock readers into clearer thinking on such matters (see Mermin 203). To dampen the impact of explicit sexual allusion, EBB's maternal tropes "slyly intertwine[d]" subjects traditionally associated with women authors—such as philanthropy and motherhood—with the conventionally unspeakable and scandalous topics of prostitution, rape, childbirth, illegitimacy, and female sexual desire.²⁵³ With her densely interlaced metaphors EBB merged mothering and politically contentious writing into the same process of "stringing pretty words that make no sense / [a]nd kissing full sense into empty words," as *Aurora Leigh*'s eponymous

²⁵³ C. Kaplan 15; see Cooper 146. Critics have commented at length on EBB's bizarre and sexualized references to her cultural moment. In *Aurora Leigh*, the poet addresses "this live, throbbing age / [t]hat brawls, cheats, maddens, calculates, aspires" (5.203-4) and "suck[ing]" the "paps" of the "full-veined, heaving, double-breasted Age" (5.219, 216; see Bristow 17; David 1985, 121; Rosenblum 327; O. Taylor 2006, 163).

heroine famously remarks.²⁵⁴ Scholars suggest that EBB's own corporeality lent her poetry irresistible moral force, and that she understood her bodily and spiritual difference from men to constitute "the basis of [her] poetic power" (Brown 195).

EBB walked a fine line with her invention of high feminine aesthetics. While she shared Victorian writers' belief in literature's ability to awaken feelings of mutual cultural belonging and foster gradual political progressivism (Mermin 202), the production of readers' heightened affect through sexually explicit verse posed serious risks to her own reputation—and consequent ability to be taken seriously. Publishing women were suspected of immodestly advertising and circulating the products of their labor in the literary market. The act of publishing invited the conceptual slippage from the circulation of the writer's text to the sale and sexual display of the writer's body. This was especially true for women poets, particularly when verse became more feminized around mid-century and women poets' connection with sentimental altruism, heightened emotional charge, domesticity, and spirituality was naturalized. Over the course of her long career, EBB learned to confront the problem of art-as-prostitution.²⁵⁵ A few months before her death, she wrote to William Thackeray that

I don't like coarse subjects, or the coarse treatment of any subject. But I am deeply convinced, that the corruption of our society requires not shut doors and windows, but light and air: and that it is exactly because pure and prosperous women choose to *ignore* vice, that miserable women suffer wrong by it everywhere.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ AL 1.51-2; C. Kaplan 15.

²⁵⁵ S. Brown 2005, 195; see Gallagher 40; Houston 214, 224-7; Mermin 156. Catherine Gallagher points to the sheer omnipresence of this trope in Victorian public discourse: "Both the woman artist and the prostitute ... are established in the sphere of exchange that excludes 'natural' generation and substitutes for it an exhilaratingly dangerous love affair with a multitude." (Gallagher 55).

²⁵⁶ *LEBB* 2:445; see Cooper 178, 195; David 1985, 120; C. Kaplan 9. Sixteen years prior, in 1845, EBB had conceptualized *Aurora Leigh* as "a sort of novel-poem, . . . running into the midst of our conventions, & rushing into drawing-rooms & the like 'where angels fear to tread'; & so, meeting face to face & without mask the Humanity of the age, & speaking the truth as I conceive of it, out plainly" (*BC* 10:101-4). When *Aurora Leigh* had appeared, EBB, reflecting on hostile reviews, wrote, "I don't habitually dabble in the dirt ... What has given most offense in the book, more than the story of Marian—far more!—has been the reference to the condition of women in our cities,

Reviewers naturally accused EBB of “coarseness,” usually in reference to those verses that implied the existence of independent female sexuality, even if that sexuality was expressed via projection onto mythology, landscape, or art (see C. Kaplan 16).

The following three chapters aim to respond to Marjorie Stone’s call for further feminist investigations into the confluence of aesthetics and ethics by analyzing EBB’s complex moral decisions in some of her most well-known political verse as well as those choices’ contingency on historical circumstance and cultural possibilities of expressing women’s embodied experience (2002, 150). EBB’s political poems challenge contemporary views of poetry as written and received by men, and performs the female poet’s “liberation” from this cultural straightjacket by turning the poet’s coming-into-being into the subject of her verse.²⁵⁷ Analogous to Thomas Pringle and Susanna Strickland’s philanthropic self-creation as members of the liberal cultural elite, EBB uses the figures of enslaved and working-class women in her verse to imagine the poetic subject of liberal feminism. By bringing to light inequities caused by the sexual double standard, the elite’s hypocritical materialism, and the sexual and material exploitation of enslaved and working-class women, EBB constitutes her own identity as spokeswoman for the English soul.

The simultaneous consideration of EBB’s poetic aesthetics and her verses’ ethico-political purpose to make historical suffering intelligible creates difficult questions about the pleasures generated during poetry’s consumption. Moreover, as I will show, the subjectivity of EBB’s abused women is fragile, particularly when her suffering bodies belong to women who

which a woman oughtn’t to refer to, by any manner of means, says the conventional tradition. Now I have thought deeply otherwise. If a woman ignores these wrongs, then may women as a sex continue to suffer them; there is no help for any of us-let us be dumb and die” (*LEBB* 2:254).

²⁵⁷ Cooper 145; see David 1987, 141.

are of lower social status than the author. With its focus on the poet's divinely inspired voice, EBB's verse fails to respond fully to questions raised by that subject's grand plea to end oppression (C. Kaplan 16). The poet's conviction that political injustice primarily originated in the sexes' unequal claim to liberal subjectivity, rather than also from class exploitation or other power relations, allowed EBB to normalize her own and other elite women's presence in the literary marketplace. Yet her self-fashioning as individualistic, anti-collective, and culturally elitist poet weakened her ability to intuit how social ills affected other women's lives.

As scholars have noted, EBB's poetry depends on "a firm identification with male modes of political thought and aesthetic practice,"²⁵⁸ and, similar to other elite writers of her day, she was weary of working-class agitation and slave resistance. She also tended to infantilize subordinate women in her work, and focused on problems that had conventionally appealed to middle-class abolitionist and 'condition-of-England' writers, such as moral degradation and the separation of the nuclear family.²⁵⁹ Although she challenged traditional patterns of philanthropic writing by imagining her oppressed subjects as active speakers and agents of change, her marginalized women benefit from and depend on the poet's maternalistic intervention. EBB's maternalism unites the poems under consideration in the following chapters—the anti-slavery poems "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point," "Hiram Powers' *Greek Slave*," and "A Curse for a Nation," as well as the immensely popular *Aurora Leigh*—and it will be considered as an effective rhetorical yet ethically problematic strategy to shape public discussion and effect political change. Sexual violence is a crucial trope in EBB's maternalist project of aesthetic, moral, and political reform, and, by focusing on its various representations and outcomes in her

²⁵⁸ David 1987, 98; see Forster 220; Brophy 285-6.

²⁵⁹ See Stone 2003, 47; see Wheeler 2013, 154-5, for the history of this trope.

oeuvre, I trace the poet's engagement with the politico-poetic representability of rape and resulting childbirth.

EBB implies in her correspondence and her work that the two processes of liberation—the heroic female intellectual's self-liberation within a hostile marketplace of ideas and the liberatory content of her poetry (the call to end the oppression of prostitutes, slaves, and child-laborers)—work analogously towards greater freedom.²⁶⁰ Historically, this conjunction was never quite as easy. This is not to say that EBB did not imagine female solidarity across class barriers. EBB sides with the fallen working-class woman—the usual, if illogical, scapegoat of various middle-class reformers—when she frames prostitution and Marian's rape in *Aurora Leigh* as the result of men's catastrophic sexual entitlement. *Aurora Leigh* famously celebrates a coming-together across difference that results in mutually beneficial spiritual elevation, even if it happens on the more powerful woman's—the poet's—terms. Marian has to become a “virtuous untouchable” (25), as Cora Kaplan puts it, who remains ineligible to participate in the passionate heterosexual circuit of social reproduction EBB imagined. Although Marian powerfully articulates the origins of her victimization, her political subjectivity is always mediated by *Aurora's* authorship. Marian's unrealistically bourgeois ‘voice’—just like that of the slave woman in “The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point”—is inscribed by the poet and is sublimated into aesthetic form to guarantee the poet's continued speaking.²⁶¹ The isolated fugitive slave

²⁶⁰ David 1987, 141-2; Mermin 96.

²⁶¹ Contemporary reviewers pointed to Marian Erle's impossible dignity and command of standard English dialect and vocabulary. Critics have continued this line of critique, particularly Cora Kaplan who remarks on Marian's “embourgeoisement in terms of language and understanding [that] occurs at embarrassing speed” (11-2; see David 1987, 114; Leighton 148). Dorothy Mermin wonders why EBB should be interested “in a realistic portrayal of uneducated speech.” What matters is that EBB drags the trafficked working-class body into the center of bourgeois attention, out from the cloak of “modesty and shame” (216). This is certainly a worthy riposte; yet, EBB's “embourgeoisement” of Marian elides the historical efforts of working-class reformers and organizers to join the public debate on prostitution.

woman in “The Runaway Slave,” bound by melodramatic genre conventions and racial difference, is excluded from such coming-together of poet and rescued subject, and finds her release in death. In both cases, EBB does not have a very precise understanding of the historical conditions of oppression, but a strong sense that using oppressed women as poetic speakers radically subverts political and genre conventions (see Leighton 1992, 103).

The concept of work, in terms of productive and reproductive labor, will also direct the analysis below. The placement of “The Cry of the Children”²⁶² opposite “The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point” in EBB’s 1850 collection *Poems* suggests a connection in the poet’s mind between working-class exploitation and slavery (Stone 2003, 47). As argued in previous chapters, the abstract concept of slavery was intelligible to elite metropolitan audiences in terms of their own interactions with (overwhelmingly white) servants and laborers. Roxann Wheeler notes that the material, cultural, and literary history of exploited British work—in European factories as well as in the slave colonies—is indeed a shared one. This history interlinks, imbricates, and substitutes racial and class concerns in ways that contemporary Victorian studies have not always successfully formulated. The conventional focus on paradigmatic difference in terms of race and class elides the historical prioritization of socioeconomic hierarchy based on the nature of productive and reproductive work, particularly in the writings of those who do not

²⁶² EBB published “The Cry of the Children” in *Blackwood’s* in 1843 which elicited a lively debate before Lord Shaftesbury’s ‘Ten Hours’ Amendment Bill, introduced in March 1844. The poem, often considered a sentimental and propagandistic “tear-jerk[er],” (Leighton 1992, 94; see B. Taylor 2008, 414), attacked the corrupt system of thought responsible for the exploitation of child labor and appealed to elite readers to push for social reform. As is the case in most of her verse, EBB, in “The Cry of the Children,” frames the socio-economic relationship between the exploited and the larger institutional apparatus system—a soulless, mechanistic world—as a familial relation between children and tyrannical fathers (Leighton 1992, 94-6). Inheriting Romantic idealism, EBB refutes “mechanistic models of selfhood” in favor of affective ones (Gottlieb 65).

perform physical labor.²⁶³ The focus in Victorian studies has been on the study of living conditions, rather than on conditions of labor, producing a sharp and somewhat arbitrary divide between black and white workers who shared in many of the same oppressions, including severely restricted social mobility across generations. While the rhetorical conjunction of the plight of European industrial paupers and slaves has a long and complex history²⁶⁴, in what follows I will point to the inherent instabilities of this conjunction. Ultimately, I argue that scholars are ethically compelled to distrust the reader's identification with the suffering figures in EBB's oeuvre while they must not discount literature's ability—and its imperative—to make historical suffering intelligible.

²⁶³ Wheeler 2013, 153; see Poovey 10. EBB's insistence on the moral and financial necessity of elite women's work, particularly after the 1857 publication of Barbara Bodichon's *Women and Work*, complicates this issue further (see Mermin 202 and below).

²⁶⁴ See S. Brown 1995; Wood 2000, 273-4; Wheeler 2013, 153-67.

CHAPTER FOUR

ABOLITION AND THE VIOLENT EROTICS OF READING

Ambiguity and Abolition: “The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point”

Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s family had acquired a substantial share of their wealth from colonial trade and large sugar plantations in Jamaica that operated using slave labor, a circumstance that EBB deplored.²⁶⁵ She gladly received the news of abolition in 1833, although the Barrett family suffered financially in the Emancipation Act’s aftermath (Battles 93-4).

²⁶⁵ Stone 2002, 39; see Mermin 15. From her grandmother’s Jamaican-born companion, Mary “Treppy” Trepsack, EBB learned “infinite traditions of the great grandfather [Edward Barrett, 1734-98], who flogged his slaves like a divinity—: & upon the beatitude of the slaves as slaves” (*BC* 13:23-5; see Stone 2003, 35). The first thirty years of EBB’s life were informed by Caribbean slavery, her father and brothers taking frequent trips to inspect their Jamaican holdings. Edward Barrett Moulton Barrett, EBB’s father, began to take an active interest in the management of the Jamaica plantation in 1806 (Barrett 52). In 1823, the family “abolished the whip” on Jamaica, and they encouraged monogamy and church attendance among slaves. In 1826, the family owned more than 2,000 slaves; 500 of them belonged to Edward Barrett. EBB was glad when British slavery was abolished in 1834 and even her conservative father held the anti-slavery position. The family lost much of their fortune, including their luxurious estate, Hope End, because of the Jamaican ‘Christmas’ Insurrection of 1831-2, Emancipation, and the drawn-out litigation between seven grandchildren over an initial inheritance of ninety-two slaves and fifty cattle (1801-1837) (Mermin 157-8; see Barrett 47; Forster 4). EBB wrote in May 1833, before the passing of the Emancipation bill,

The West Indians are irreparably ruined if the bill passes. Papa says that in the case of its passing, nobody in his senses would think of even attempting the culture of sugar, & that they had better hang weights to the sides of the island of Jamaica & sink it at once. Dont you think certain heads might be found heavy enough for the purpose? No insinuation I assure you against the administration ... I am almost more sorry for poor Lord Grey [Prime Minister from 1830-34] who is going to ruin us, than for our poor selves who are going to be ruined. (*BC* 3:80-2)

Three months later, EBB wrote to the same correspondent, “the late bill has ruined the West Indians. That is settled. The consternation here is very great. Nevertheless I am glad, and always shall be, that the negroes are—virtually—free!” (*BC* 3:84-7; see Stone 2003, 36). Unlike Antigua, Jamaica introduced the apprentice system after Emancipation which mandated six years of continued service for former field slaves and four years for domestic slaves. Samuel Moulton Barrett, EBB’s uncle, had 1,100 “apprentices” in his employ in August 1834; 387 of them belonged to EBB’s father. When the latter died in 1857, his estate was worth was £63,695,12s. 1d. He had been awarded more than £12,000 in compensation after Emancipation, as did his brother Samuel. These financial interests have survived into the present. Edward Richard Moulton-Barrett, the last of the Barrett landowners in Jamaica, passed away in 1992 (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/18032>; Barrett ix; 137).

Nevertheless, family legacies deriving from slave labor supported this white Victorian lady's artistic endeavors as well as her mostly sheltered and comfortable life.²⁶⁶ One of her biographers, Julia Markus, suggests that EBB believed she was partly descended from African slaves through her maternal grandfather, Charles Moulton. While other scholars have been unable to establish that she had genetic ties to Africans enslaved by her family, other branches of the Barrett clan were certainly biracial and EBB grew up cognizant of her familial ties to the descendants of slaves.²⁶⁷ Her strident and deeply personal opposition to slavery famously manifests in her "rather long ballad, written at request of anti-slavery friends in America" (*BC* 16:197-202), entitled "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" (1848) as well as in two later poems, "Hiram Powers' 'Greek Slave'" (1850) and "A Curse for a Nation" (1860). Verses depicting slaves' plight had long been associated with poetesses as it was assumed that they could safely express cross-racial compassion—an often explicitly universalist maternal sympathy for the enslaved—to the public.

²⁶⁶ See Lootens 2008, 32n1; Mermin 13; Stone 2002, 139.

²⁶⁷ Stone 2002, 140; see Cooper 114-7; Kennedy 22-43; Marks 190. The Barretts are thought to be of Cornish origin, having owned "considerable [landed] property" since at least 1180 (Barrett 6). EBB's ancestor, Hercie Barrett, landed on Jamaica on May 9, 1655, intending to help colonize the island as part of the "Protestant expansion of the world" (Barrett 1). The following is an incomplete sample of the Barrett men's paternity of mixed-race children, most likely resulting from sexual relationships with slave women. In 1722, Hercie's descendant, Hearcey Barritt, stipulated in his will that his son James would inherit "three woman slaves of his house: old Rose, Judith, and Jane, and the three mulatto children of Jane—Katey, Neddy, and Nanny" (Barrett 16). Hearcey purchased Katey's freedom for £67.10s in 1725 and he compensated his son for that amount. By that time, the third generation of Barretts resided on Jamaica and the men served as high-ranking administrators on the island. In 1766, Major George Robert Goodin, Edward Barrett's [of "divinity" fame] brother-in-law, distinguished himself by bringing slave insurrections to an end (24). The will of Edward's brother, Richard, decreed that his parents were to purchase the freedom of "a negro wench named Sibilla and her issue" (Barrett 24). Edward's younger brother, Samuel, also released a slave upon his death—"Madgikan or Migeckan otherwise Ann Molly" (Barrett 24). Edward's youngest son, George, was a slaver who joined the Jamaican House of Assembly in 1787, serving on committees that oversaw the manumission of planters' children with slave women. George had a six "quadroon" children with his "housekeeper," Elissa or Eliza, all of whom were manumitted, in addition to Elissa herself (Barrett 35; see Marks 220).

When the poem of thirty-six stanzas begins, its speaker, a young fugitive slave woman, after fleeing north, has arrived at Pilgrim's Point to "bend [her] knee" where "exile turned to ancestor" (ll. 6, 3). Invoking the souls of the Pilgrim Fathers, she curses the land the pilgrims once "blessed" as the haven of perpetual freedom. Their descendants, the "hunter sons" pursuing her, have perpetuated the same tyranny that initially induced the pilgrims to flee to America, continuing the cycle of oppression over countless generations (ll. 21, 30).²⁶⁸ After reflecting on possessing "dusky features" in a world obviously arranged for the benefit of "white creatures" (l. 27), she tells her story of forbidden love, her lover's murder, flogging, rape by white men, ensuing impregnation, and flight. The poem's center of gravity details the drawn-out killing of the white-faced child she bears following the rape. At the poem's close, the woman curses the men chasing her, they surround her, and she dies, possibly after being stoned to death.²⁶⁹

Scholarship of the past four decades has produced contradictory interpretations that fluctuate between praise for EBB's "antislavery ballad," particularly its radical proto-feminist rhetoric, and criticism of its various conservative and appropriative agendas. This includes the oft-noted suggestion that the poem's politics are merely abstractly aesthetic and moral and do not reflect the circumstances of American slavery.²⁷⁰ Particularly owing to some of its declamatory and melodramatic features, earlier critics dismissed the poem as "unintentionally ludicrous."²⁷¹ Recent scholarly engagements with the poem, much inspired by Marjorie Stone's and Tricia

²⁶⁸ See Avery 108; Brown 1995, 128.

²⁶⁹ She exclaims in stanza XXXI, "Man, drop that stone you dared to lift!" (l. 211); see Cooper 121.

²⁷⁰ EBB quote in *BC* 14:115-21. See Battles 95; Brophy 275-80; Leighton 1986, 40; Miller 639; Stauffer 29; Stone 2002, 150; Stone 2003, 36-7. For critique of appropriation, see Brown 1995, 127.

²⁷¹ EBB quote in *BC* 14:115-21; critical quote in Forster 204; see Cooper 1; Leighton 15, 40-1; Parry 122; Taplin 194, for responses.

Lootens's sustained interest in its transatlantic antislavery contexts, generic instabilities, and critical afterlives, emphasize its radical unconventionality and subversive originality, while also paying attention to the burden of its generic "abolitionist radical national sentimentality."²⁷² The emancipation of British slaves had encouraged women writers' trust in the political potency of feminine sentimental poetry to enact further grand-scale liberations for the betterment of nation and Empire, and EBB's performance of national poet critically depends on the memory of previous abolitionist victories.

Barrett Browning wrote her first abolitionist work during her honeymoon in December 1846, when she was herself a fugitive. Her father had forbidden her union with Robert Browning and disowned his eldest daughter after she defied his wishes to stay single.²⁷³ Although she had not been engaged in antislavery activism prior to composing "The Runaway Slave," EBB conveys explicit "militant abolitionist sentiments" that are surprising in their insistence and iconoclasm.²⁷⁴ EBB penned the poem following an invitation from the editors of the Boston-based anti-slavery gift-book, the *Liberty Bell*, which had called for immediate abolition since 1839 and organized an annual National Anti-Slavery Bazaar to raise funds for the cause. EBB, after having cultivated correspondences with a range of American writers and publishing in

²⁷² Lootens 2008, 29; see also Brown 1995; Krueger; Lootens 2017; Parry.

²⁷³ Stone 2002, 140; see Brophy 279; Cooper 111-5; King 2; Krueger 281; Leighton 1992, 98; Lootens 2017, 160; Mermin 158; Miller 639; Parry 118; Stone 2003, 35. See Stauffer 30-1, on previous scholars' erroneous speculations about a delay in "The Runaway Slave's" publication owing to its politically radical content (Parry 116) and the likely publication timeline. The poem was solicited in late 1845; EBB mailed it to Boston on December 23, 1846; and it appeared in the 1848 issue, sold at the Christmas bazaar of 1847 (see also Stone 2005, 30). EBB was—unknowingly—two months pregnant at the time she sent the poem to America. She suffered a miscarriage "*of five month's date*" in mid-March 1847, after repeatedly denying the possibility of pregnancy. Stone writes that "the poem reflects repressed fears of a miscarriage or still birth, combined with terror of death in childbirth—not an unreasonable mix of fears for a recently married woman of forty with chronically frail health in the nineteenth century" (2002, 140).

²⁷⁴ Stone 2003, 35; see Leighton 40-1.

American periodicals during the early 1840s, famously remarked to Hugh Stuart Boyd that her “anti-slavery poem for America [was] too ferocious, perhaps, for the Americans to publish: but they asked for a poem & shall have it.”²⁷⁵ “[M]aking it bitter,” she meant the poem as a provocation to transatlantic abolitionist audiences (*BC* 14:115-21). Similar to Mary Prince’s *History*, “The Runaway Slave” employs standard abolitionist rhetoric as well as several motifs and topoi commonly found in abolitionist writings, such as the lonely fugitive slave, the doomed slave romance, the enslaved’s religious struggle, and slave mothers giving birth to their owners’ offspring. As I will show below, despite its reliance on tropes typical for the *Liberty Bell* and its peer publications, the poem is extraordinary for its detailed, graphic, and protracted representation of infanticide and its aftermath over the course of thirty-one out of 253 lines (see Battles 96).

The *Liberty Bell*, previously disparaged as a feminine “abolitionist stocking-stuffer” (Stauffer 30), has recently become an important point of departure for EBB critics.²⁷⁶ Scholars concede that her poem’s melodramatic features appear much less objectionable when read in the context of the *Liberty Bell* and other abolitionist works.²⁷⁷ Along with the invitation to publish, EBB had received earlier *Liberty Bell* issues for reference and she had probably read similar publications elsewhere. She was sufficiently immersed in anti-slavery literature to include imagery and affective appeals that were familiar to the Boston abolitionists.²⁷⁸ However, EBB

²⁷⁵ *BC* 14:85-6; see Battles 93; Stauffer 29; Stone 2002, 139; Stone 2003, 34, 42, 50. EBB mentions having sent off her poem directly following the remark that Thomas Carlyle expected Robert Browning’s poetry to work for the benefit of the English people more “than from any living English writer.” EBB tacitly, but decidedly, includes herself in the mission to serve England’s standing in the world.

²⁷⁶ Stone 2003; MacNeill; King.

²⁷⁷ Stone 2003, 45; see Parry 122.

²⁷⁸ See Stone 2003, 45-53, for comparisons of poems and prose printed in the 1844 and 1845 issues of the *Liberty Bell* with “The Runaway Slave.” EBB’s slave-owning cousin Richard Barrett, Speaker of the House of Assembly in

updated the *Liberty Bell*'s generic paradigms by enfolded them within a dense dramatic monologue in which a female slave not only utters wildly insurrectionary ideas, but inhabits the interconnected roles of religious questioner, grieving lover, infanticidal mother, and insurrectionist martyr on behalf of her race.²⁷⁹ Representing the fragmented, non-linear recollections of a consciousness strained by a string of horrific—and, to many metropolitan readers on either side of the Atlantic, 'exotic'—experiences, "The Runaway Slave" condenses the issues of miscegenation, rape, illegitimate motherhood, infanticide, and politically radical cursing into a mere two hundred and fifty lines.

Similar to the publications of the Anti-Slavery Society in Britain, the *Liberty Bell* was among the most important American abolitionist publishing organs, regularly featuring major British and U.S. contributors like Frederick Douglass, Harriet Martineau (very much admired by EBB), and Lydia Maria Child. For its editor, Maria Weston Chapman, the *Liberty Bell* provided

Jamaica, might have also written out a story "about a run away negro" for her when she was a child. See *BC* 5:211-4. For critical opinions, see Battles 93; Cooper 111; Parry 118. Stone refutes this popular scholarly narrative: Richard Barrett's "Jamaican Story" and "The Runaway Slave" actually have little in common (2003, 37; see Stone and Taylor 191). EBB's unpleasant cousin, "an old enemy" who bankrupted her father and who was graced with a "perpetual scowl," visited London to plead before Parliament on Jamaican planters' behalf and against the amelioration of Jamaican slaves' living conditions which had been intensively discussed between 1823 and 1832 (Barrett 83).

²⁷⁹ Stone 2003, 33, 54. Runaway slaves in American antislavery poetry were usually male. Likewise, slave theodicy, as developed in stanzas IV to VIII of "The Runaway Slave," was conventionally associated with male slave speakers. EBB may have taken her cue from Frederick Douglass's slave theodicy in his 1845 *Narrative* (Stone 2005, 9, 30; see Stone 2003, 51; Stone 2002, 145). The setting of the poem at Pilgrim's Point and the female slave's kneeling posture—not in prayer, but in bondage—while cursing the land of slavery, echoes and undermines the *Liberty Bell*'s most frequently employed images of freedom (Stone 2003, 51; see Battles 95). The abolitionist invocation of the Pilgrim Fathers—America's originary patriarchal tradition—in the service of a call to universal manumission was already an established and fairly politically progressive convention. Many *Liberty Bell* contributors considered themselves heirs to the Pilgrims' pursuit of liberty (King 7; see Lootens 2008, 29-30). EBB radicalizes that convention by having her eloquent slave woman utter a curse on white Americans and their children, presumably including abolitionist readers. In stanza XVII, the slave recounts that "white ... ladies" refused to sit next to her in church "but yesterday" (ll. 117-8; see King 13). EBB's jibe at her poem's target audience is diffused by the invocation of another patriarchal system, Christianity, at the poem's close (Miller 641; see Brophy 278). The concentration of power in male hands is not questioned in the poem—rather, it depends on (and upholds) patriarchy's power structures to mount its anti-slavery critique, much to some feminist scholars' chagrin.

an important means to pursue editing and activist work, and helped expand the range of public activities deemed appropriate for middle-class women. Chapman frequently compared the negation of women's rights in marriage to chattel slavery, and linked her anti-slavery campaign to the pursuit of women's legal selfhood.²⁸⁰ The *Liberty Bell* promised liberty in the sense of liberal subjectivity not only to American slaves but to female philanthropists, an analogy taken up by EBB's poetry. Particularly for women writers, the *Liberty Bell* was an important organ to gain widespread public exposure and hone political writing skills, and many of them were among the members of the Seneca Falls convention.²⁸¹

The annual had emerged out of a confrontation among factions within the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society in 1839. The Society, along with the entire American abolitionist movement, had split over women's proper public and political roles. Led by William Lloyd Garrison, the radical wing of the movement stood for immediate abolition and advancement of women's rights, along with non-institutional spirituality and pacifism. The more conservative wing, forming the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society under Lewis Tappan's leadership, favored a gradualist, legislative approach to slavery under the guidance of clerical and evangelical groups. The Boston members who sought affiliation with Garrison went on to found the *Liberty Bell*. They were mostly upper-class and Unitarian women calling themselves

²⁸⁰ Parry 116; see Avery 107; Mermin 157; Stone 2003, 44.

²⁸¹ Joshua King studies *Liberty Bell* writers' penchant for imagining white northern abolitionists as martyrs on a messianic mission rather than reserving that role for black slaves and activists who feared for—and gave—their life during advocacy work. White abolitionists sometimes (and, hopefully, unintentionally) wrote about slavery's beneficial effects on white abolitionists' spiritual and ethical growth (King 18). The widespread trope of a black woman kneeling before a more powerful white woman who "liberated" her was also common in American abolitionist writing, including in the *Liberty Bell* (Stone 2003, 48; see Brown 1995, 132). White readers were invited to experience the pleasure accompanying consciousness of their benevolent power over blacks. Analogous to Mary Prince's metropolitan readers in England, they traded an arousing affective response for the promise that power relations between the races would remain unaffected by abolition.

‘Chapmanites.’ Middle-class evangelical women tended to side with Tappan.²⁸² Public defamations prove that the Garrisonian women risked their reputations to elevate cohorts of female anti-slavery campaigners into the realm of early feminist political agitation.

It is unclear whether EBB was much invested in the Garrisonians’ political commitments. It is probably safe to assume that she sympathized with their message of ecumenical Christianity, racial integration, immediate rather than gradual reform of slavery, and, ultimately, women’s rights.²⁸³ She turned against the official agenda of American Evangelical as well as British abolitionist organizations, although her non-participation in the abolitionist movement indicates that she could enjoy the thrill of publishing a politically daring piece without having to fear consequences in her immediate circle.²⁸⁴ As was usual with her, EBB saw her intervention as an ethically necessary one, although contrary economic concerns never disappeared from her mind. She wrote in an 1860 letter to Julia Martin that she cared little about the continued union between the American North and South since the perpetuation of slavery meant that “the nation perishes morally.” Abolition’s effects on vested interest weighed less heavily for her than its moral consequences: “It is the difference between the death of the soul and of the body ... a

²⁸² Midgley 123-4; see Lootens 2017, 37; Stone 2003, 42-5. The evangelical British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society did align itself with Tappan.

²⁸³ See King 3. EBB, nominally a Congregationalist, held widely ecumenical and Nonconformist views (although these were sometimes troubled), avoiding adherence to creed, proscription, and institutional leadership. Her letters, particularly those of the early 1840, show a deep engagement with the religious questions of her time (Stone 2005, 8; see King 15). See, for example, her letter to Richard Hengist Horne [(December 6, 1843), *BC* 8:75-8], in which she stated that “I hope there is nobody in the world with a stronger will & aspiration to escape from sectarianism in any sort or sense [than myself]”; or her letter to Thomas Westwood [(February 2, 1854), *BC* 20:94-7], which again affirmed, “Sectarianism I do not like—even in the form of a State Church.” Instead, her idea was that of a universal “Truth ... apprehended,—& Love, comprehending” (in aforementioned letter to Horne), available to “every body of men who call on Christ” (*BC* 14:105-10). Notable is the overlap of this spiritual theme with the *Liberty Bell*’s authors’ religious preferences. However, EBB lacks “their triumphantly exclusive identification of Christ’s true body with their messianic cause” (King 14; see Cooper 112; Stone 2005, 11, 16, 31).

²⁸⁴ See Brophy 274; Parry 125; Stone 2003, 46.

compromise of principle would be fatal.”²⁸⁵ Prioritizing moral principle over political procedure, she framed slavery’s complex structures of oppression as amenable to change via an elementary moral choice: “A difficult question yes! All virtue is difficult.”²⁸⁶ Yet, EBB’s reverence for age-old vested interests is apparent in her 1853 comments to Mary Russell Mitford:

I am an abolitionist, not to the fanatical degree, because, I hold, that compensation should be given by the north to the south, as in England. The states should unite in buying off this national disgrace. (*BC* 19:45-9)

She conceded that “[t]here might and ought to be a pecuniary compromise,” but maintained that the moral burden of slavery outweighed financial or nationalistic injuries (*LEBB* 2:417). Overall, her interest in institutional activism was weakened by the prejudices common among her class. After meeting Maria Weston Chapman at an elite social gathering in Paris almost five years after sending off “The Runaway Slave,” she painted the following, and (to scholars of abolitionism) disappointing, scene for her sister:

Then, Mr Thompson, the abolitionist, who is rather a philanthropical bore, it must be confessed—he would insist on talking to me about his flight from Boston from the mob of five thousand, & various circumstances appertaining. I sympathize with him so utterly, you see, that nothing remains to be said—and he is not eloquent in conversation ... for an orator! Then, Mrs Chapman, the female mover of the American abolition-movement .. a pupil of Dr Channing’s—I had had one or two letters from her, years ago. She is a clever woman, & still pretty, though with two grown up daughters. ... People not of the highest interest, but in their degree, interesting enough.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁵ *LEBB* 2:417; see Parry 119.

²⁸⁶ *BC* 19:45-9; see Parry 119.

²⁸⁷ *BC* 17:156-61; see Stone 2003, 55.

Unstable Utterances

By changing the speaker of “The Runaway Slave” into from a man into a woman after the first draft, EBB highlighted the particular violations to which female slaves were vulnerable. This allowed her to claim an obligation to speak on behalf of enslaved women.²⁸⁸ The poet, working within a traditionally male tradition, imagined herself to be in possession of a “privileged vision” (Brophy 275) that made her more sensitive to the enormity of slavery’s moral infractions than her male peers, and consequently more entitled to argue in favor of nations’ choosing the difficult, but morally correct, path. Lest we forget how socially unacceptable this sort of self-framing was, we should keep in mind that Dante Gabriel Rossetti, in 1875, denigrated EBB’s “falsetto muscularity,” and that Alice Meynell wondered as late as 1903 at EBB’s “anxious decisiveness ... a very habit and trick of violence, ... acquired as an assertion of strength.”²⁸⁹

The poem’s most politically incendiary quality is perhaps EBB’s adoption of some of Robert Browning’s techniques for dramatic presentation of an individual consciousness whose race, social caste, and cultural as well as geographic location likely appeared unfathomably foreign to EBB’s middle-class audiences—many of whom had trouble intuiting the subject position of working-class girls in their very midst. EBB’s representation and circulation of a raped slave woman’s subjectivity during a period when politics and literature denied the very existence of such subjectivity is indeed a revolutionary innovation (Brown 1995, 131-4), and constitutes an unusually daring tool to arouse abolitionist sentiment. The dramatic monologue, tracing the complex decision-making process of a mother about to perform infanticide, invited

²⁸⁸ Stone 2005, 31; see Cooper 1; Stone 2003, 43, 46.

²⁸⁹ Rossetti 152; Meynell 353; see Cooper 1, 5, 101; B. Taylor 1992, 7.

readers to identify directly with the fallen slave. The poem's reception, as well as the troubled reception history of "Hiram Powers' *Greek Slave*" and "A Curse for a Nation," indicate that EBB and her audiences did not always agree on the best relationship between such poetic innovation and the representation of historical atrocity.²⁹⁰ The slave woman's death upon ascension into liberal selfhood arguably illustrates the shakiness of EBB's experiment.

The poem's hybrid form partly aligns with the recent invention of the dramatic monologue, although it is also indebted to the eighteenth-century ballad tradition, the monodrama of the Romantic period that emerged from it—with its sympathetic depiction of unwed mothers as pathetic and indigenous deviants—and dramatic first-person verse of the 1830s.²⁹¹ The poem's ellipses, generic instabilities, and ambiguous political investments have caused much recent scholarly discomfort (Lootens 2006, 500). At least part of that uneasiness derives from "The Runaway Slave's" borrowing from the already archaic ballad form, especially the ballad's traditional distance from liberal humanist subjectivity, and the poem's reliance on precisely that model of liberal subjectivity to bridge the alienating divide between white, middle-class metropolitan readers and the poem's speaker, an enslaved black woman. Susan Brown, for example, notes the jarring "disjunction between [the slave] as a speaking subject and herself as constructed in language."²⁹² These contradictory modes of speaking, tied to the melodramatic

²⁹⁰ At the heart of the disagreement was often economic as well as sociopolitical contention (see below and Miller 653-4).

²⁹¹ McDonagh 80-1; see Stone 2002, 139. Wordsworth's "The Thorn" is the most prominent example of Romantic monodrama and an important pre-text for "The Runaway Slave."

²⁹² Brown 1995, 131; see Cooper 10, 120, for the opinion that the poem helped EBB "locate her own consciousness" in rebellion against her father. I agree with Susan Brown that, perhaps apart from EBB's rage at having been disowned by her father, there is "nothing 'authentic'" about the poem's depiction of aggrieved interiority (1995, 134; see Brophy 281; David 1987, 138). Slinn's assessment that "'The Runaway Slave' offers an unmediated account of the slave's experience," despite her language's mediation "by other discursive requirements—lyrical formalism, British literary speech patterns," appears inattentive to EBB's lack of first-hand experience with historical slavery, let alone the fact that she had never personally met an enslaved person (63; see Krueger 281, for

ballad tradition on the one hand, and to liberal, embodied selfhood, on the other, and the dramatic monologue as an intermediary between the two, intermesh and collude throughout the poem. Critics' enthusiasm for the work has been dampened by the many moments in which the speaker's 'solidity' destabilizes.

What appears to be at the core of critics' queasiness is the poem's troubled relationship between the mimetic (or documentary) responsibility of an unequivocally political poem and the threat to mimesis (or "authenticity") by the poem's overt artificiality. Can the poet mobilize a universal ethics, contained within the aesthetic form, to elicit politically resonant sensations among her readers? The poem's subject—the slave woman—conveys artistically stylized, yet historically "true," messages and functions as primary site of identification. As we have seen in the previous chapter, slave women, particularly those who had experienced sexual violence, were not permitted to relay their stories directly, if they were able to share their stories orally or in writing at all. Most slaves were illiterate, of course, and had no access to the publishing circuit. A mediator, a white editor, author, or interrogator, took their place, and, by determining the aesthetic form in which slavery should be portrayed, increased the cultural, social, if not ontological, distance between readers and the historically "real" embodied experience of slavery.²⁹³ Concerns about "how much" subjectivity the slave woman is accorded in "The Runaway Slave," then, warrant a brief look into the poem's indebtedness to the ballad form. According to some critics, this form denies the speaker's utterances mimetic accuracy and prevents ethical identification with the slave woman. I suggest that those concerns, while worth

the same assertion). I would argue with Brown that, by posing as the mimetic, unmediated voice of a slave woman, "The Runaway Slave" is "obviously appropriative" (1995, 127; see Miller 639). However, that posture is attenuated by the poem's very artificiality to which it continuously draws attention.

²⁹³ See Brown 1995, 127; Brophy 275-7.

pondering, are ultimately moot because the supposedly melodramatic, non-mimetic ballad form is itself tied to the history of insurrectionary public speech about rape and infanticide as gendered indicators of systematic oppression. Form, rather than mimesis, is the conveyor of politically rousing information in the “Runaway Slave.”

The Jacobin ballad tradition, running roughly from 1770 to 1790, centered around the complaint of the poor village maiden after her “seduction” by an aristocratic libertine. In the early nineteenth century, low-brow melodrama provided compelling parables for the ways in which the rich took advantage of the poor. The link between patriarchal hierarchy and capitalist property ownership was represented as a sexualized and melodramatically polarized bifurcation of the world.²⁹⁴ The ballad, a traditional medium of orally transmitted knowledge about class conflict, also featured child murder as rural women’s customary response to unwanted pregnancy, committed to avoid public humiliation and loss of honor.²⁹⁵ Mid-Victorian ballads written by elite writers such as EBB modified the genre by lessening its original admonitory function, recasting it as ‘folklore’ to make it palatable to middle-class audiences, adding some “sugary sentiment,” and converting it to high literature.²⁹⁶ Contrary to mid-nineteenth-century appropriations, the street ballads of the late eighteenth century were mostly devoid of the polite register of sentimentalism and, arguably, elite poets’ high lyricism. Instead, they exaggerated and fictionalized pastoral life’s worst-case scenarios, and broadcast gloomy cautionary tales to amuse and instruct mostly illiterate audiences. Moreover, while the traditional ballad represents the

²⁹⁴ Clark 1987 14; see McDonagh 109; Parry 122; Slinn 83.

²⁹⁵ McDonagh 79; see Geyer-Kordesch 104, 109.

²⁹⁶ Geyer-Kordesch 111. EBB’s 1846 ballad, “A Year’s Spinning,” told by a seduced and abandoned village girl who buries both her child and her mother, falls into that category.

speaker's circumstance and actions openly, underlying causes, developments, and motivations have to be intuited or pieced together. The genre does not lay claim to realistic representation of the speaking individual's circumstances; the emphasis is on developing social and political types who respond to the effects of injustice rather than on initiating lasting, heroic social action (see Parry 115-21). Similar to Mary Prince's presentation in the *History*, which also fluctuates between typification and mimetic individualization, the female slave in EBB's poem symbolizes all enslaved women, although she also emerges as "unique and real" when her words evoke situationally concrete scenes and thoughts (see Battles 93). While this is one of the important affordances of the dramatic monologue, the poem's connection to historical precedent is virtually non-existent.

By virtue of its poetic innovations, "The Runaway Slave" caricaturizes sanitized early nineteenth-century works written by men that responded to the ballad tradition, such as Goethe's *Faust* (1808) or Scott's *Heart of Midlothian* (1818). Johanna Geyer-Kordesch summarizes their overall plots thus: "A girl had loved imprudently, had been swept off her feet by a lover, and despair led to child murder ... The seducer now came back remorsefully in the last scene to show the error of men's sexual ways" (110). EBB's slave has indeed loved imprudently, witnesses the murder of her lover, is "swept off" by a gang of "seducers," and murders the resulting child in despair. The "seducers" return at the poem's conclusion to kill her, highlighting "the error" of slaveholders' "sexual ways." EBB presses the familial ramifications of slavery into an abortive pastoral courtship plot, since, I would argue, this plot affords a convenient vehicle through which the poet may address grand-scale economic and political injustice without incurring self-defeating censorship. It allows her to employ language that is much more drastic than that of her male predecessors.

“The Runaway Slave” abides by the ballad’s generic restrictions and faithfully develops the archetypical setting²⁹⁷: the reader encounters the rural, unwed, destitute, and mentally impacted girl in nature after she has been sexually violated by a man who of higher social rank. The poem leaves unexplained the reasons for the murder of the slave’s lover in stanza XIV, the rape in stanza XV—rendered in unconventionally explicit terms as “a deeper wrong”—or the sudden (and startling) appearance of the child on his mother’s breast like an “amulet that hung too slack” in stanza XVI (l. 99).²⁹⁸ The three decisive events in the slave’s immediate psychosexual past are compressed into twenty-one lines and form the rough plot of a nightmarish, yet well-known, story of programmatic sexual exploitation within agrarian and hierarchically organized societies—in this case, the American slave system.

Wrong, followed by a deeper wrong!
 Mere grief’s too good for such as I.
 So the white men brought the shame ere long
 To strangle the sob of my agony.
 They would not leave me for my dull
 Wet eyes!—it was too merciful
 To let me weep pure tears and die.

Stanza XV (ll. 99-105) condenses the ballad’s central catastrophes into seven lines. The first “[w]rong” represents the murder of her lover; the second retaliative gang rape indicated by the allusion to the slave woman’s loss of honor.²⁹⁹ From the slave’s perspective, the institutional

²⁹⁷ See Krueger 281; McDonagh 70.

²⁹⁸ See Stone 2002, 131. EBB added the explicit reference to the rape in stanza XV in her first fair copy (Stone 2003, 50-2; see Cooper 117).

²⁹⁹ Although the *Liberty Bell* proudly addressed taboo issues surrounding slavery, its writers indicate owners’ rape of female slaves using the euphemistic term “pollution” (Stone 2002, 131; see Stone 2003, 38). Stone notes that EBB says “the,” not “her,” shame (2003, 53). The article “the” bears the load of the author’s moral challenge to the conventional view that raped slave women are fallen and somehow to blame for their rape. This subtle grammatical strategy is similar to the different weighing of “indecent” and “shame” in Mary Prince’s *History*, effected by deliberate grammatical choices.

props of slavery, recursive flows of money, goods, bodies, and ideological statements, are invisible and insignificant. The reader is claustrophobically confined to the slave woman's fragmentary perceptions and episodic recollections, "forming a sort of hurricane's eye for the compulsive narration of trauma" for the conversion of American readers into abolitionists and active political reformers.³⁰⁰

When EBB composed "The Runaway Slave," the spectacle of the mother's reluctant infanticide had been a long-standing literary trope and, like the ballad form, had become near-archaic. Infanticide traditionally served as writers' final resort to awaken sympathy among the most hardened readers. In his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1755), Jean-Jacques Rousseau hypothesized that "terrible agitation must be felt by this witness of an event in which [the reader] has no personal interest! What anguish he must suffer in seeing it and being unable to do anything to help the fainting mother or the dying child!"³⁰¹ Nineteenth-century philanthropists, including abolitionists, seized the figure of Rousseau's grieving mother—a figure borrowed from the Christian *Stabat Mater*—to create a triangulated economics of pity and suffering. In the case of "The Runaway Slave," the speaker's monologue, skipping over the period of pregnancy and delivery, lingers upon the infanticide committed under post-partum duress. It provides in agonizing detail the slow death of the child for a full quarter of the poem. Within this spectacle of heightened affect, the mother observes the child's pain, and also suffers on account of her bond with the infant. The reader or spectator views the child along with the

³⁰⁰ Lootens 2006, 500. The structure of the poem mirrors the slave woman's "psychic disorientation." Joshua King notes that the slave experiences "her own black body as a prison and instrument for white people's uses," but he does not remind us that this representation is the effect of white projection (12; see Cooper 116; Sánchez-Eppler 103). Analogous to my analysis of the critical reception of Mary Prince's *History*, EBB scholars also tend to elide that "The Runaway Slave" is a white woman's projection of black female slaves' experiences (see Lootens, 2006, 498).

³⁰¹ Rousseau 46; see McDonagh 34.

mother, then inhabits the child's perspective, or observes the scene as a privileged, distant observer. The plethora of identifications—and the enjoyable passage in and out of those identifications—affords variable and pleasurably heightened emotional responses such as pity, disdain, fear, arousal, outrage (see McDonagh 37). In the case of abolitionist literature, the play of identifications unlocked by the infanticidal scene tested whether the reader was ultimately more invested in human sociality based on familial (or, in critics' parlance, "sentimental") bonds or in economic contract. As I will argue next, identification and pleasurable horror produce politically resonant and potentially prurient affect in "The Runaway Slave's" representation of infanticide.

"My Little Body": Rape and Infanticide in "The Runaway Slave"

The ballad's failed courtship plot in "The Runaway Slave" suggests that familial relations between oppressor and oppressed, while not inconceivable, are unachievable for the present. This plot is complicated by the poem's unusual emphasis on the child, family's future, as the cause of devastating anguish. In light of EBB's biography, this might not be surprising, as Dorothy Mermin writes. EBB, with her slave-owning clan and vengeful father, conceptualized oppression as an intimate, personal relation, both familiar and familial.³⁰² In "The Runway Slave," the child, "*my* fruit ... ha, ha!" (l. 155), materializes slavery's economic incentives as intimate flesh, a contradiction that drives the slave woman "mad."³⁰³ EBB imagines the inner

³⁰² Mermin 13; 158; see Sánchez-Eppler 92, for the generic conflation of slavery and family bonds in abolitionist writings. Stone notes that EBB's brothers joined her father for a while in his condemnation of her elopement with Robert Browning. She suggests that they might make a figurative appearance in the poem as the "hunter sons" (2002, 140).

³⁰³ An early title for the poem was "Mad and Black at Pilgrim's Point" but EBB "wisely" decided to expand the poem's political claims to include issues of captivity and freedom rather than focusing on racialized puerperal

turmoil of a woman whose ‘natural’ maternal instinct is at odds with the sense that her son’s white face represents slavery’s crimes against herself and her people: “the white child wanted his liberty / [h]a, ha! he wanted the master-right” (ll. 125-6).³⁰⁴ The speaker confronts the contradiction that her “heart” (l. 119) urges her to nurture a being who is of her flesh yet, in its imperial “desire for liberty,” is inimical to her very survival.³⁰⁵ Connecting sexual and racial subjection to white fatherhood, the poem interrogates and rejects the mystique of Western patriarchal succession, even if it continues to require men “to steady” the poet’s words.³⁰⁶

And in my unrest, could not rest.
Thus we went moaning, child and mother,
One to another, one to another,
Until all ended for the best. (ll. 109-12)

The conflict between motherhood’s instincts and racial allegiance, the forced contribution to the growth of the Pilgrims’ “race” (see Cooper 119), produces painful restiveness in need of a solution. A black child fathered by the murdered lover would have begun a new succession based on rebellious, intra-racial love.³⁰⁷ Instead, this form of burdened motherhood demands archaic retribution and severance of the maternal bond. Driven to decide between motherhood’s ties and those of race, the slave mother, ominously, announces that infanticide is ‘better’ than subjecting her child to the curse of racialized violence in the future.

insanity alone (Stone 2002, 146; see Ficke 259; Stone 2003, 55; Stone 2005, 29). The slave’s insanity is not the main issue, after all—it is the effect of slavery’s incompatibility with domestic maternity.

³⁰⁴ The speaker incessantly focuses on the child’s unbearable whiteness. For example: “in the single glance I had / [o]f my child’s face, I tell you all, / I saw a look that made me mad!” (ll. 141-2); “the babe who lay on my bosom so, / [w]as far too white for me” (ll. 115-6); “I could not bear / [t]o look in his face, it was so white” (ll. 120-1).

³⁰⁵ Leighton 41; see Slinn 58; Stone 2005, 28

³⁰⁶ Leighton 41, 43; see Cooper 120. The slave’s song, her lover’s name, eventually reconciles her to her child. Likewise, EBB depends on her readership—many of them men—to legitimize her poem (see Leighton 43).

³⁰⁷ Leighton 43; see Lootens 2008, 29-30

Abolitionist authors usually framed slave mothers' infanticide as an act of mercy and defiance which, by breaking the long cycle of dispossession, protected children from growing up enslaved. Such compassionate murder may even have been ethically justifiable to some readers.³⁰⁸ If considered in the context of this tradition, the speaker's exclamation that she "twisted [the child] round in my shawl" because she "wished to save it from my curse" (ll. 146-7)—the curse being her own enslavement—adheres to conventional abolitionist paradigms. The decision to kill the child appears as natural and tender "as wrapping it in a shawl for protection."³⁰⁹ However, the poem ends with the slave woman's half-detracted curse on white men's offspring and the threat of violent uprising and retaliative murder. As she covers the child in the "kerchief there / ... his face in close and tight" (l. 122), her act is not unambiguously nurturing. Rather, she imposes darkness upon him because he is a racialized enemy.³¹⁰ At the moment of greatest race antagonism the slave mother, in an "oddly wooden, didactic pronouncement" (Lootens 2006, 495), proclaims that

A child and mother
Do wrong to look at one another
When one is black and one is fair (ll. 138-44)

³⁰⁸ Also see "Influence of Woman" in the *Liberator* (1837), written by "a woman" abolitionist who calls attention "to the most dreadful scenes ... where the female slave murders her infant in the dark recesses of the grove, that it may never know the horrors of slavery" (152); see also Stone 2003, 55. In addition to the poem's decidedly Caribbean (rather than Massachusettsian) local flavor—such as the mentioning of mango trees (ll. 137, 154) and the cocoa-nut bowl created by the slave's lover during "the roar of the hurricanes" (ll. 76-7)—EBB's understanding of slave inheritance appears to be of the Jamaican, rather than the American kind. In the U.S. any child of one black parent was deemed black and inherited chattel status. In the Jamaican tradition, white owner's children with black slave women were at times sent to England for schooling. This is why the slave woman's fears that the child could claim the "master-right" is not merely figurative (Cooper 118). The six 'quadroon' children of EBB's great uncle, George Barrett, with the slave woman Elissa Peters were manumitted and educated in England (Barrett 36).

³⁰⁹ Leighton 41; see Lootens 2006, 497. The slippage from the mother's caress into the murderous grasp was a traditional trope within abolitionist writings, for instance in Guillaume Thomas Raynal's 1779 *Political History of the Two Indies* which showcases the infanticidal mother's sudden "fury mingled with a spirit of revenge and compassion" (Raynal 105; see McDonagh 54).

³¹⁰ See King 11; Cooper 118.

Throughout these stanzas, the speaker's racial didacticism alternates with sentimental motifs that reinforce the power of the maternal bond.³¹¹ Because she kills the infant to uphold the ideal of racial integrity, her "heart," sentimentalism's central zone, shatters: "He moaned and beat with his head and feet, / ... [h]e struck them out ... / [a]gainst my heart to break it through" (ll. 127-30). Violence, murder, and quickening comele grotesquely in this image of the child's kicking feet against the mother's inner seat of feeling (Lootens 2006, 499).

The poem's already noted "ferocious" quality derives precisely from the speaker's suggestion that, after risking a single look at her newborn, she realizes she hates her child, a foreign and horrific idea to EBB's contemporaries and to the poet herself. The murdered child in abolitionist infanticide narratives is usually a girl, and the slave mother prays to God to take the infant and protect her from the inevitable rape by white men (Stone 2003, 53). As Dorothy Mermin pointedly writes, "male children command maternal attention" (195); they compel the mother's gaze with "the *master's* look, that used to fall / [o]n my soul like his lash .. or worse" (ll. 144-5), as the speaker exclaims. The child's unbearable whiteness, its gaze's triggering of "traumatized fear" scotches the otherwise natural and holy bond between mother and child. The sight of him reenacts past memories of lost love, murder, and, above all, rape.³¹² When the slave mother strangles or "twist[s]" the child, she reenacts the crime that the rapists committed against her: After killing her lover, the white masters stifled her own "sob of agony" (l. 102). Now, she stifles that of her son. The child, want[ing]" his "master-right," "moan[s] and struggle[s]" as she

³¹¹ Sentimental tropes are most apparent when the slave's recollections match those of the ballad tradition. See, for example, the exclamation "hark!" (ll. 113) before she reveals the color dichotomy between herself and the child (see Stone 2002, 144).

³¹² Stone 2002, 145; see Brown 1995, 130-1; Cooper 118; Ficke 258.

kills him to end white men's racial hegemony (l. 124).³¹³ After she has suffocated the child, he is "still and mute" (l. 152), as is she.

For nine out of the poem's thirty-six stanzas, the slave mother spectacularly reenacts rape's violence on her child's body. EBB transfers the scene of the slave woman's violation onto the dying child's white "moan[ing]," and "shiver[ing]" body (l. 149). The scene violently inverts the relationship between master and slave, and turns the slave mother into "the oppressor of a white male infant" (David 1987, 139). The rape, instead of killing her, catalyzes enraged and triumphant retribution.³¹⁴ The slave woman's own body remains largely invisible until stanza thirty-two, although it begins to merge with the infant's corpse soon after his death. The endless, compulsively repeated details of the child murder flesh out the speaker's painful (and "mad") self-division through simultaneous denial and affirmation of her body's continuity with her son's. She refers to the dead child first as "the body," then as "the little body," and finally as "my little body" (ll. 165, 170, 176). Both mother and child seem to "stiffen[]" after the child's death:

And he moaned and trembled from foot to head,
He shivered from head to foot;
Till after a time, he lay instead
Too suddenly still and mute
I felt, beside, a stiffening cold" (ll. 148-52)³¹⁵

³¹³ The language throughout is slippery—she might also wish to prevent her son having to confront the fact that he can never attain his "want[ing]," i.e. absent, "master-right" (Stone 2002, 145).

³¹⁴ See Parry 124. Miller traces the "mediating function" of the "metaphor of penetration" in EBB's slave poems. He suggests that the seized female body emerges "as a transformative pathway between divinity and corporeality" (646). We will encounter another woman writer's framing of rape as aesthetically or psychically generative—even wholesome—in my analysis of marital rape in *Daniel Deronda* in chapter 9.

³¹⁵ Lootens draws attention to the fact that the child—"it" in line 147—turns into a "he" in line 148 (2006, 497). At the precise moment when the slave mother's infanticidal action begins, when she becomes morally culpable, she begins to think of her son as a person rather than injustice's embodiment.

The “moaning” child (the word is repeated four times across seven stanzas) who “lay on my bosom so” now “lay[s] on my heart like a stone . . . as chill” (ll. 115, 167). She does not let go of the body, but, “day and night, / I carried the body to and fro” until “I felt it was tired at last” (ll. 164-5, 178). Since the child is dead, he cannot tire. After carrying the child around her neck like Coleridge’s albatross for a month (she drags him around in penance just as she drags out the narration of the killing), the speaker finally buries the child. By then, the distinction between herself and her son’s body has disappeared.³¹⁶

Once buried, the infant “changed to black earth . . . nothing white . . . / [a] dark child in the dark!” (ll. 185-6). Following the interment, the speaker feels “comfort, and my heart grew young” (l. 187). The sudden change of agony into comfort, along with her “smiling” (l. 188), the two ellipses, and the monomaniac repetition of “dark,” suggest the slave’s woman’s final mental disruption, even when making allowances for melodrama’s low standards for psychological realism.³¹⁷ She imagines that the Pilgrims’ “fine white angels . . . sucked the soul of that child of mine . . . [h]a, ha, for the trick of the angels white! / [t]hey freed the white child’s spirit so” (ll. 157-63). This appeal, although directed at the Pilgrims, must have struck readers of the *Liberty Bell* as overt criticism of their righteous convictions. EBB suggests that, to slaves, abolitionists’ Christianity is part of the ideological apparatus that justifies slavery’s racialized hierarchy and, in the end, is responsible for the murder of white children (see King 3).

³¹⁶ Joshua King has recently drawn attention to EBB’s likely borrowing the image of the “amulet” from Coleridge’s “Ancient Mariner” (9). See Battles 97-8. My reading responds to Sarah Ficke who notes the importance of the child’s soul for the speaker “to the near-exclusion of the child’s body” (257). I suggest instead that the poem is overwhelmingly concerned with the white child’s body.

³¹⁷ My reading contradicts Ann Parry’s (125; see Battles 98). For the poem’s failure to adhere to psychological realism, see Lootens 2006, 499; Stone 2002, 145.

“The Runaway Slave” and the Violent Erotics of Reading

Stories of infanticide usually served as evidence for female abolitionists’ and reformers’ argument that unjust social arrangements intervened in the supposedly natural bond between mothers and children. Infanticide, as a literary trope, indicates a breakdown of the self-regulating social order and encourages the expansion of bourgeois domestic moral values to slaves or working-class women.³¹⁸ In the abolitionist context, it reminded readers that slavery entailed atrocities that had been “forgotten for the perpetuation of the nation” (McDonagh 145). Infanticide ultimately served to imagine alternative nationalisms and liberationist imperial missions that did not depend on atrocity but on benign paternalism (see Brown 1995, 133-4). The poem’s overall political argument—the sanctity of motherhood is critically defiled by slavery’s sexual and racial violence—would be inoperative without the ideal of domestic motherhood as its ideological foil. The spectacle of infanticide in “The Runaway Slave” does not reflect historical family relations under slavery, but articulates a purposefully distorted image of the British family.³¹⁹ EBB’s “deeply liberal and humanist assumptions about the self” enable the telling of the slave mother’s psychic disintegration, and rely on the idea that, by default, liberal subjectivity is white and male (Brown 1995, 129). Moreover, EBB’s confidence that she would get away with her “ferocious” poem depends on the long legal-humanist tradition of absolving infanticidal mothers on account of puerperal insanity.³²⁰ This legal stance upheld the bourgeois

³¹⁸ See Altink 96; Ficke 250; Leighton 40.

³¹⁹ See McDonagh 58-60. In the late 1850s, exacerbated by the Indian Mutiny in 1857, infanticide became “an over-determined sign of oriental danger” (McDonagh 139). It had been associated with foreigners and primitiveness since at least the eighteenth century.

³²⁰ Further, the fact that, in 1850, EBB’s name was on the shortlist for Poet Laureate of Great Britain should be remembered here: after all, “her reputation and race permitted her to take the licenses that she did” (Stone 2002, 144). When EBB drafted *Aurora Leigh*, her contemporaries considered her to be the most prominent female poet of her time.

ideal of maternal love's "biological" or "instinctive" inevitability even when confronted with the evidence of maternal violence and cruelty (see Ficke 257). If EBB designs the "mad and black" slave as the rebellious counterpart to hegemonic white masculinity, the slave woman's authority to speak depends overwhelmingly on male auditors' willingness to listen, for as "The Runaway Slave" demonstrates, the gaze "of masculine dominion ... underpins the degrading relationships of slavery" (McDonagh 59). The psychological simplifications of melodrama always cater to "a male imagination" (Geyer-Kordesch 114). Melodrama, EBB's poem included, erases abused women's reproductive ignorance and the anguish of an unwanted pregnancy. Its insistence on virtue magnifies existing social tendencies and inscribes them as moral imperatives.

In contrast to many recent scholarly accounts pointing to "the contingencies of [EBB's] sympathies with marginalized women" (Brophy 275), I would pivot somewhat and suggest that the poem is meant to have emotional effects for white, male, middle-class metropolitan readers. Through its conflation of metaphorical and literal bodies the poem critically increases the "visceral, physical force of strong sentimentality's half-corporealized metaphors" (Lootens 2006, 498). This holds true despite the fact that the poem's appeals to visceral immediacy (the surest way to communicate the subject position of the oppressed to powerful men) are meant to encourage reform of American masculinity. The drawn-out scenes of the moaning and squirming infant boy under duress figuratively infantilize white male readers who are then, again figuratively, killed by an insane black woman. The point of the poem is to make men *feel* that the current instantiation of white American manhood is non-reproductive, just as it feeds white fears about the long-term demographic outcomes of miscegenation and the inheritance of traits.³²¹

³²¹ See McDonagh 59; Stone 2002, 141. The poem also risks catering to planters' assessment of black women's unsuitability for domestic motherhood. James Adair, estate doctor on Antiguan plantations, wrote in 1790 that slave

Infanticide in “The Runaway Slave,” serves to highlight the primitive economic and social mores at the heart of slavery (particularly in light of the Britain abolition of slavery fifteen years earlier), to awaken humanitarian concern and compassion for the lot of enslaved women, and—an insight critics tend to shun—to create material for sexual titillation (see McDonagh 66-7). If “The Runaway Slave’s” historical valences are to be fully explored, the troubling version of the poem’s representation of infant suffering as pornographic spectacle must be considered.

The “Runaway Slave’s” previously noted violent erotics of reading, its affordance of pleasurably shifting identifications with “violator, victim, and spectator,”³²² potentially produces variable emotional responses to infant suffering, such as horror, disgust, arousal, and desire.³²³ An implied male reader observes how slavery kills white boys, with the dying mother as the message’s articulate but ultimately politically impotent conduit. It would be difficult to arouse men’s pity for an unmarried and black victim of “seduction,” particularly when that pity would likely be tempered by disgust in light of her murderous action. Because pity is necessary for the creation of the pleasures of the spectacle, the poem again and again returns to the violated infant body. This shift of readers’ attention from the violated mother as the initial object of sympathy to

children died due to “the inattention of the mother, whose natural affection for her offspring does not seem in general to be so ardent as that of *white* women” (131; see Altink 16; for a similar observation, see M. Lewis 123).

³²² Josephine McDonagh theorizes the play of identifications of the infanticidal scene under slavery thus: “The mother is both the miserable witness to infant suffering, but also its agent; and the spectator, who is also the real violator—the ... slave owner—is both the man of feeling, but also the violent brute. In this instance, the spectacle becomes something like a mirror, reflecting back to the [white man] the true horror he inflicts. But there is a further inversion, for the mirror will reveal that the sufferings of the Negro are those of the European too: slavery harms ‘their true interests’ ... their own humanity is wounded by their oppression of others. In this moment of refraction and fragmentation, the slave owner is thrust into all three positions at once—as spectator, victim, and the violator; shame, pity, and suffering conjoin, as the slave owner performs the abjection of the slave” (55). Note that, within the poem’s economy of violence, the child and the mother inhabit the three positions as well. This multiplicity of violations and complicities yields cumulative and overlapping substitutive shifts in the reader’s identifications which are further complicated if the reader fantasizes shifts in his or her own gender.

³²³ McDonagh 37; see Lootens 2006, 495; Stone 2002, 144.

the child is, in fact, a longstanding and “clever conceit” within literary representations of infanticide. Its purpose is the revelation that the white, male, infant body (read: the future of the white body politic) is “the real site of suffering” (McDonagh 42).

It was obviously the pious hope of the *Liberty Bell*’s editors that its readers would approach its anti-slavery materials as defenders of moral virtue and integrity. However, as noted in the previous chapter, the “slippage” from morally upright spectator to lascivious voyeur is an “easy” one to make, encouraged by the “play between the pleasures of witnessing what one shouldn’t, and the realm of fantasy” that abolitionist literature unlocks (McDonagh 60, 64). Abolitionist texts always risked sabotaging their reformist message by representing trauma and abjection as titillating spectacle. Tricia Lootens has remarked on students’ tendency to rush through “The Runaway Slave,” for example, “to get over these textual moments as quickly as possible” (2006, 406). I suspect this is because the poem evokes in readers a sense that looking too closely, pondering its images and terms too slowly, might reveal something lewd. There is an anxiety about shifting into—or witnessing—illicit identifications in this text that purports to side with black mothers and highlight the historical atrocities of systematic rape under slavery.

There is ample room for pornographic fantasy in the “Runaway Slave.” The motif of infanticide under slavery provides an opportunity for erotic fantasy as it concerns mothers’ existential threat to men, a masochistic male fantasy with urgent social and political dimensions.³²⁴ The infanticidal mother, the violent, cruel, vengeful, cursing woman, directs her anger at the helpless infant son rather than the adult men who violated her. (When she actually confronts the adult “hunter sons,” standing “five a-breast,” she dies soon after.) Under the male masochistic gaze, the slave woman’s fury reads as horrible sexual lust, and we witness “a

³²⁴ See McDonagh 69; Jarvis 11.

spectacle of degraded and violent female desire” as she commits an assault on her child (McDonagh 63). I argued before that the slave mother’s infanticide reenacts the white men’s rape, merging sex and violence. The terms of the child murder could as well describe the slave woman’s original rape, making visible the slave woman’s physical expressions during the rape while catering to abolitionist men’s arousal.³²⁵ As in other infanticide literature of the period, the murder of the child turns into an unthinkable sexual act.

“The Runaway Slave’s” political ambition therefore “uneasily co-exists with—and . . . is inadvertently undermined by—a quasi-pornographic representation of sexual violence against enslaved women, which has the potential to titillate, as well as move and inform, readers,” as Holly Kent has pointed out about American abolitionist literature generally (par. 24). The poem freezes historically recorded suffering into an aesthetic object for white consumption, which raises the question if formulaic artistic expression, such as the ballad form employed by EBB, can (or should) be expected to do justice to human suffering. Is suffering an ethically suspect topic for verse, particularly when it includes the possibility of the spectator’s pornographic enjoyment of the slave’s debasement (see Stone 2002, 136)—or of his own? EBB was certainly aware of this ethical impasse, for instance when she wondered if “The Runaway Slave” might be too graphic for American audiences.³²⁶ And finally, when does human anguish negate the

³²⁵ The mother moves from a tender embrace to a strangling hold that elicits the following reactions from her son (including the speaker’s perceptions): “moaned” (four instances), “struggled,” “beat,” “struck,” “break,” “pulled,” “fall,” “twisted,” “trembled,” “shivered”—concluding with “suddenly still” (ll. 110-52).

³²⁶ When in her early twenties, EBB posed this question in her reading notebook after perusing the aesthetic works of Hume, Hobbes, and Campbell. She wondered why “does the mind find pleasure in the representation of anguish?” (qtd. in Stone 2002, 136). The black abolitionist Charlotte Forten, aged sixteen in 1854, noted the affective power of “The Runaway Slave”: “How earnestly and touchingly does the writer portray the bitter anguish of the poor fugitive as she thinks over all the wrongs and sufferings that she has endured, and of the sin to which tyrants have driven her but which they alone must answer for! It seems as if no one could read this poem without having his [sic] sympathies roused to the utmost on behalf of the oppressed” (63; see Stone 2002, 144).

possibility of aesthetic expression—are there experiences that are too painful to be articulated and that should perhaps not be turned into aesthetic objects?³²⁷

The spectacle is indispensable for the poem to function as abolitionist propaganda. Saidiya Hartman argues that the slaveholder's violence, acting upon the slave's body, constitutes the "inaugural moment in the formation of the enslaved"; it is the slave's "primal scene" (3). The subjectivity of the slave originates in the unleashing of brutality upon the body and, as Hartman shows, in women's cases, female subjection is often inaugurated in scenes of rape. Hartman warns that "the ease with which such scenes are usually reiterated, the casualness with which they are circulated, and the consequences of this routine display of the slave's ravaged body" can "immure" readers to pain because that pain—this range of world-shattering sensation that is fundamentally unrepresentable, as Elaine Scarry has argued—becomes familiar and banal (3). Black suffering, according to Hartman, has had by convention a "spectacular character"; it needs to be shown to become viscerally apparent and politically "real." The spectator's role in this theatrical setting can be that of a witness "confirm[ing] the truth of what happened" or that of a "voyeur fascinated with and repelled by exhibitions of terror" (3). Empathy is slippery, as Hartman cautions, because it demands that "suffering be materialized and evidenced by the display of the tortured body" and because it is contingent on the audience's ability to understand another's body as capable of experiencing pain in the first place (4). Was it EBB's assumption that her readers could not and would not empathize with a black woman's experience of abuse but that they will be stirred by the death of the white child? We must remember that the pain of slavery-as-infanticide is communicated on the cultural and aesthetic terms of abolitionist audiences.

³²⁷ I will return to these questions in my discussion of EBB's poem "Hiram Powers' *Greek Slave*" below.

EBB's dramatic monologue renders audible black maternal subjectivity where it is usually silenced, although (and perhaps because) the author is a white poet with a long-standing familial complicity in slavery. In terms of feminist and postcolonial critical aims, the poem constitutes "an unpardonable act of literary appropriation" because it mobilizes a fictional, suffering black body to circulate among the white writer and her (mostly) white readers, producing pleasant frisson.³²⁸ On the other hand, it is "an extraordinary act of imaginative identification" that accomplished what it set out to do: it aroused consternation in its target abolitionist audience.³²⁹ Although never openly admitted, the erotic convergence of transatlantic consumerism and abolition that we will encounter again in the discussion of EBB's sonnet, "Hiram Powers' *Greek Slave*," was an important selling point for *Liberty Bell*'s editors. EBB's unusually racy contribution to the *Liberty Bell* helped raise the publication's profile, making it more desirable as a consumer product, and endowing its owners with fresh cultural capital.³³⁰ In the words of Harriet Beecher-Stowe, the Boston Anti-Slavery Christmas Fair had become "decidedly the most fashionable shopping resort" by 1855.³³¹ As Karen Sánchez-Eppler has argued, the *Liberty Bell*, with its gilt edges and embossed leather binding, was able to maintain such a high profile in part because it sold the "allure of bondage," satisfying readers' fascination

³²⁸ For example, when the hunters have caught up with the slave woman, she exclaims, swooning, "I'm floated along, as if I should die / [o]f liberty's exquisite pain" (l. 248-9). Manuscript D802 shows that Robert Browning suggested the use of the much more sensual "exquisite" in place of the earlier "glorious" and "wonderful" (Stone and Taylor 202; King 19). "Exquisite," with its valences of pain and pleasure suggests that the speaker is overpowered by anguished rapture, a specifically sexual and aesthetic experience reminiscent of consummation and orgasm (see Jarvis ix).

³²⁹ Stone 2002, 140, 153; see King 19.

³³⁰ Stone 2003, 43; see King 3; Lootens 2006, 494.

³³¹ Beecher-Stowe 1855, 6; see Lootens 2017, 161-2; Stone 2003, 43.

with and desire for spectacular suffering.³³² Black bodies were commodified, circulated, and exchanged for profit among upwardly mobile white women, and, even if the *Liberty Bell* traded in fictional bodies, domesticated many of its stories to woo less politicized readers, and meant to liberate slaves in earnest moral righteousness, it appears likely that “the valuation of depictions of slavery ... rest[ed] upon the same psychic ground as slaveholding itself” (Sánchez-Eppler 98).

Shaky Redemptions in the “The Runaway Slave”

When the five hunters catch up with the slave woman—or when she believes herself surrounded³³³—she addresses them, apparently at the height of her power (“I see you staring in my face— ... shrinking back,” ll. 219-20). She curses the children of the white men, the future descendants “of the Washington race,” by wishing “[e]ach for his own wife’s joy and gift / [a] little corpse” (ll. 221, 213-5). By extending the retributive logic of her own infanticide to the “hunter sons,” she essentially calls for an end to the white (slave-owning) race. To justify her anger, she presents to them the marks on her wrists (“[I prove what I say] / [r]opes tied me up here to the flogging place,” ll. 223-4), and, analogous to Mary Prince’s inspection, faithfully enacts the conventional trial procedure of abolitionist literature. White men, producing white children with black and white women, reap grotesque fruits hanging by the wrists, “as a gourd hangs in the sun” (l. 226). Slavery will soon come to a violent end, the speaker warns, as “[w]e are too heavy for our cross / [a]nd fall and crush you and your seed” (ll. 243-5). The slave

³³² Eppler-Sánchez 98, 100; Lootens 2006, 494; see Stone 2003, 43-4.

³³³ As this stanza begins with the exclamation, “I am not mad: I am black” (l. 219), it is unclear whether the slave woman’s recollections have been reliable. Stone suggests that the child murder occurs during “a period of temporary madness” but the slave woman “is not mad as she speaks” because she recounts the events retroactively. Lootens (2006) counters that the slave woman’s “madness” destabilizes the speaker’s account across the poem.

expects that slavery will be overthrown in a violent uprising and predicts that slave-owners' murderous rage will be visited upon themselves.³³⁴

At the end of "The Runaway Slave," the poem shifts from narrative monologue to less psychologically antislavery ballad, finally obliterating the spoiled black body as the inescapable outcome of sexual slavery. A doubly fallen mother, the black slave woman is ineligible to serve as an ancestor in the Pilgrims' tradition and her final moments are overwritten by didacticism. The final stanza enacts the slave woman's death as theatrical performance ("I fall, I swoon!" l. 246), followed by dramatic revelry in the martyr's glory.³³⁵ Her hold on life tenuous, the speaker gazes at the sky and realizes that she has achieved the freedom America promises. She will meet her child in the "death-dark" afterlife "where we may kiss and agree" (ll. 251), where differences in skin color are obscured by the eternal absence of light. For the sake of the white child, she drops her curse ("White men, I leave you all curse-free"), but ends her song with the reminder that she passes out of the world full of her "broken heart's disdain" (ll. 252-3). The slave ambiguously reiterates her previously lifted curse, suggesting that either her disdain is more powerful than even her curse, that she defiantly forgives the white men, or that her own curse is broken when she leaves them "curse-free" (see Battles 99). Her disdain affectively burdens the

³³⁴ See Leighton 43; Mermin 158.

³³⁵ "I am floated along, as if I should die / Of liberty's exquisite pain" (ll. 248-9); see Brophy 279; Lootens 2008, 31; Miller 643; Parry 122. Some scholars interpret these lines to suggest that the slave woman throws herself "off the rock to her death" (Avery 111; see David 1987, 139). Others understand the slave's swoon to indicate a "feminine" relinquishment of power that ensures that the slave woman's transgressive words are contained by "conventional discourses of Christian passivity" (Miller 643; see Lootens 2008, 31). Her "fall [and] swoon" could echo the slave's prediction of the coming violent, rather than redemptive, uprising when the burden of slavery, having become "too heavy," allows slaves to "fall" from their unholy crosses to "crush you and your seed" (see King 20-1; Miller 642; Stone 1986, 163). In this case, the divine judge witnesses impassively and silently ("While HE sees gaping everywhere / Our countless wounds that pay no debt," ll. 237-8) as men, white and black, visit endless war upon each other (see Avery 110). The "fall" may also refer to the violated slave woman's (double) fall.

future emotional structure of black citizenship: the slaves' free descendants will remain in the "subjected role of the privatized internal enemy," as Lootens cautions.³³⁶

Freedom and emancipation from slavery, as imagined by EBB, is contingent on the black mother's heroic death. The poet does not offer a solution to slavery's annihilation of personhood on the basis of black female corporeality and instead reinscribes that same annihilation as maternity's glorious victory. There is no room for the slave mother's body in the poem's world after her successful series of defiant acts. The slave mother's resistance consists of refusing to bear (the sight of) white men's fruit, killing the product of her labor, and ending her corporeal existence. EBB does not imagine a form of black subjectivity that can survive in corporeal form. The protracted, gruesome, and potentially titillating spectacle in "The Runaway Slave" catastrophically burdens the poem and forestalls the fugitive's motherhood while the child is alive. The poem's a non-conciliatory end means that the paradoxes caused by the speaker's blackness remain critically unresolved.³³⁷ For EBB, the slave woman's rescue lies in her obliteration.

³³⁶ Lootens 2008, 30; see Battles 9; King 21. That citizenship threatens to "crush" white "seed" forever.

³³⁷ As Stone writes, "although many black things in God's creation are beautiful, [the slave] is not viewed as beautiful; and that, although even the animals take black people 'for men,' [as the slave woman says] they are not granted human status" (2005, 29-30). The nominally discredited connection between pathology and race ("I am not mad / I am black" [l. 218]) is never severed.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE HARD WHITENESS OF “HIRAM POWERS’ *GREEK SLAVE*”

“A Robe, of Purity”

Only relatively recently has it been suggested that “Hiram Powers’ *Greek Slave*,” EBB’s “aesthetic treatise in miniature,” as well as “A Curse for a Nation” complement the poet’s other ‘social problem’ poems, particularly “The Runaway Slave” (Miller 637). This chapter responds to the dearth of “thick” contextualization in EBB scholarship, particularly regarding EBB’s anti-slavery poetry, and draws from art historical accounts to argue that her verse was embedded within—and responsive to—contemporary discussion about the drawbacks of sentimentality as political discursive register, appropriate ways to publically engage racialized nudity in art, the commercialization and fetishization of abolitionist propaganda objects, and the role of the maternal poet to effect political change. I argue that “Hiram Powers’ *Greek Slave*” and “A Curse for a Nation” depend on ethically burdened erotico-aesthetic appeals to establish the female poet’s ability to address injustice and win her audience’s attention. In the process, the poet forecloses the possibility of more sustained challenges to the complex interlocking hierarchical systems of gender and race that her verse addressed.

Hiram Powers’s marble sculpture, *The Greek Slave* (1844), represents a nude young woman posed like a classical Venus on a pedestal. After having been captured by the Turks in the Greek War of Independence (1821-32), this young Greek Christian faces exhibition in

Constantinople's slave market. Her expression is tranquil, if ambiguous, and her face is averted, deferentially avoiding a reciprocation of the observer's gaze. Her left hand incompletely shields her pubis, while her right rests on a phallic column covered—in contrast to the figure—in an ornamentally fringed and carefully draped shawl. Her wrists are shackled and connected by a double chain.³³⁸ Her overall attitude is composed. Two necklaces, a locket symbolizing love and a Christian cross, as well as a Greek liberty cap adorn the post against which she leans (see Hackenberg 32-2), suggesting that the slave has not only been stripped of her garments but of her culture (Kasson 187).

Powers penned a detailed narrative, printed in a thirty-page exhibition guide along with selected reviews and poems, to shape viewers' initial engagement with the statue. The pamphlet drew audiences' attention to the historicizing frame narrative, the statue's finely worked face, and the moral lesson to be gained.³³⁹ The pamphlet explained that the slave, after the loss of her family, stands in dignified, resolute resignation, and contemplates her likely fate of being sold to a Turkish harem. She arrives at the conclusion that she should trust to be liberated in heaven. The slave represents purity's triumph over adversity or, as Powers put it, "a pure abstract human form tempered with chaste expression and attitude ... calculated to awaken the highest emotions of the soul for the pure and beautiful'" (qtd. in Brody 67-8). Powers was aware of his contemporaries' "fastidiousness" with regards to nude sculpture, particularly in the United States (qtd. in Kasson 176), and relied on his narrative to both deflect and draw attention to issues of erotic prurience.

³³⁸ The chain is ahistorical and somewhat illogical, as contemporaries observed—had the slave been undressed before being shackled? Powers argued that the chains were aesthetically appropriate but eventually changed the slave's fetters to historically accurate manacles in his sixth version of the sculpture (Yellin 122; see Kasson 187). As detailed below, this change has crucial implications for the sculpture's associations with American slavery (see C. Nelson 78-9).

³³⁹ See Hackenberg 34; Kasson 178; Miller 647.

Both mitigating and enhancing the statue's sexual allure, Powers also provided contextual information about the gestation of the piece. He assured the public that the live model he used had been a virtuous one, for example.

The narrative, quasi-historical context supplied by Powers obviously served to assuage audiences' uneasiness at the sight of a barely pubescent nude white woman in chains,



Fig. 1. Hiram Powers's *The Greek Slave* at the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut (Wikimedia Commons, 2006).

tantalizingly half-covering her pudendum. The Turkish harem had long been associated with secrecy, sensuality, and voyeurism, newly reinforced after Ingres's 1839 painting, *Odalisque with Slave*, which features a starkly white nude woman in supine position awaiting an erotic visit (Kasson 175). Although the harem is not portrayed in *The Greek Slave*, Powers's narrative relied on audiences' familiarity with its unspeakable cognates: female sexual slavery, erotic bondage, men's fully institutionalized and architecturally realized carnal gratification. The slave's nudity and poised Christian resignation allowed observers to guess how her story would unfold—"her future in the harem is the great unstated drama that gave the sculpture its poignancy" (Kasson 176). Although the figure's pose suggested calm modesty and embodied the Victorian ideal of female sexuality, Powers's narrative hinted that her fate would be one of

terror. Modesty would not be rewarded on earth.

Most cultural commentators did not discuss the sexual frisson generated by Powers's narrative of endangered white female sexuality. When confronted with the sculpture's nudity,

they denied it. Observers lauded her spirit and saw her wearing a “robe, of purity.”³⁴⁰ Such fervent focus on moral purity, spirituality, and ideal form may well have resulted from sublimated eroticism (Kasson 181). A few unfavorable reviewers opposed the enthusiastic reading of the moral purists and complained that the slave’s controlled posture and sedate expression were unrealistic. Given that she anticipated a violent future that many viewers would have considered worse than death, her “air of total unconsciousness” was deemed inappropriate.³⁴¹ The sculpture’s lack of self-awareness, her chaste and aloof resignation instead of visible anxiety about her nakedness or the rape that awaits her, allows Powers to imagine a situation in which a woman, publically exposed and grafted into a sexual scenario, could yet be considered in full possession of her modesty. Audiences were compelled to agree that the slave’s Turkish captors were fundamentally distinct from themselves. To view the slave lecherously would mean to view her like a “barbarian.” Powers’s narrative ensured that the statue was not morally responsible for the sexual gaze directed at her.³⁴² When bourgeois audiences paid for a ticket to see her, what they purchased was a sense of this ethnic and moral distinction, and they learned to control the way they gazed at and thought about nude bodies in public (see Brody 71). The sculpture did not challenge onlookers’ assumption that women’s sexualized exposure in any other scenario would continue to be shameful. Viewers’ urge to protect or pity the figure played into middle-class benevolent sexism, and reinforced the notion that men were expected to purchase or fight for white women’s beauty (see C. Nelson 82). Her resignation was deemed not

³⁴⁰ James Freeman Clarke’s “The Greek Slave,” qtd. in Roberson and Gerdtz 18; see Barret-Ducrocq 18; Hackenberg 34; Stone 2002, 134; Yellin 108. “*The Greek Slave* is clothed all over with sentiment; sheltered, protected by it from every profane eye,” opined the Reverend Orville Dewey in 1847 (160; see Kasson 179).

³⁴¹ Dewey 161; qtd. in Yellin 108.

³⁴² Kasson 178, see C. Nelson 80.

merely a highly appropriate subject, but the ultimate object of didactic art (Kasson 179). To many admirers, the slave's spiritual power in the face of bodily degradation, rather than her nubile form itself, (supposedly) represented her most attractive characteristic.

Accompanying *The Greek Slave*'s American tour—particularly once it moved to the Southern and Western regions—was the question whether the statue should be viewed “promiscuously,” that is by men and women simultaneously, or whether the exhibit should be separated by sex. Some cities prevented women from seeing the statue in the presence of men to protect women's modesty. Obviously, the displacement of viewers' desirous gaze by horrified self-recognition and -correction was not guaranteed. Advocates of mixed-sex viewings posited that separating men and women would be tantamount to acknowledging the exhibit's questionable decency. Commentators who argued for segregated viewings were themselves accused of having “impure and common” minds. Cloaking the nude statue in class-inflected rhetoric of nobility and sexual purity, defenders of Powers's work argued that critics revealed their own lewdness by having brought up the question. Nevertheless, later viewings were, in fact, segregated by sex and many prominent figures, including Powers's friend and patron Nicholas Longworth, refused to attend mixed-sex showings. At least some audiences were aware of the statue's potential to titillate, even if most observers took pains to deny the statue's erotic appeal.³⁴³

Powers created six full-size versions of *The Greek Slave* between 1844 and 1869, in addition to several dozen busts and smaller replicas, all of which were privately sold or publically exhibited. More than a hundred thousand people saw the statue as it traveled through Europe and the United States, allowing Powers to achieve fame and wealth as the first American

³⁴³ Kasson 181; see Hackenberg 34; Miller 650, 654; Yellin 108.

artist to win widespread international acclaim.³⁴⁴ *The Greek Slave* was shown in London starting in 1845, including at the Great Exhibition in 1851, and received near universal accolades (Roberson and Gerdts 12). English reviewers admired it for its adherence to classicist ideals, its celebration of female purity, its soft texture, and its nostalgic evocation of a lost past. It became a ubiquitous cultural image on both sides of the Atlantic, reproduced in engravings and sketches in art journals, guidebooks, and magazines, or sold as affordable miniature figurine.³⁴⁵ Popular articles, poetry, pamphlets, travel guides, and sketches exhaustively described the sculpture itself as well as the experiences of its viewers (Kasson 174). Queen Victoria, for instance, was said to have spent more than thirty minutes gazing at the sculpture before the Great Exhibition opened its doors to the public. According to countless reports, imagining the slave's plight produced psychophysiological reactions like weeping and excitement, particularly in women.³⁴⁶ The statue's ability to produce emotional effects in the observer while disavowing the particularity of the slave's biological body—its colors, textures, secretions, wounds, rhythms, and functions—is the central problem to which I will now turn.

³⁴⁴ Brody 67; Kasson 174, C. Nelson 75, Hackenberg 32.

³⁴⁵ Hackenberg 30; Kasson 174; C. Nelson 78. In 1903, Henry James commented on *The Greek Slave*'s powerful cultural visibility: "so undressed, yet so refined, even so pensive, in sugar-white alabaster, exposed under little domed glass covers in such American homes as could bring themselves to think such things right" (H. James 1903, 114-5; see Hackenberg 30). He remarked that sculpture during the mid-1800s catered to audience's appetites for sentimental romance and nostalgic anecdote—art had to tell a story, either literary, biblical, or historical (Kasson 172). Marjorie Stone writes that the sculpture "epitomize[s] the triumph of safe Victorian sentiment" (2002, 132). I would argue that the "Victorian sentiment" and concomitant physiological reactions were all but "safe."

³⁴⁶ C. Nelson 78-80. Joy Kasson notes the fascinating impact viewing *The Greek Slave* had on some women: E. Anna Lewis apparently sunk into a five-hour trance, while Clara Cushman reported that she experienced "a train of dreamy delicious reverie, in which hours might have passed unnoticed" (29; see Kasson 180). To modern readers, these reminiscences might suggest that Lewis and Cushman found "delicious" sexual abandon in bondage fantasy (see Yellin 111), something surely quite distinct from slave women's experience of being exhibited on the auction block.

Adding Some Color

Many Victorians assumed that sculpture represented the world in an ideologically coherent way (Kasson 172). The marble's self-enclosed, white impenetrability, far from being ancillary to the sculpture's overall aesthetic quality, functioned as indispensable facilitator of audiences' public acts of viewing, which, in turn, helped produce a specific English embodied subjectivity vis-à-vis the shackled female slave.³⁴⁷ John Gibson's *Tinted Venus*, on display at London's International Exhibition in 1862, for example, was received as "a ghastly thing" by a female observer, owing to the statue's faint, yet noticeable, all-body coloration in the tradition of classic Greek sculpture.³⁴⁸ Some viewers clearly found the evocation of a white woman's skin tone offensive because the flesh color materialized the marble body not as an abstract emblem of moral or spiritual principle, but as an all-too-biological object capable of influencing—and inviting—audiences' own, decidedly immoral, bodily responses. *Tinted Venus*'s subtle wax-and-paint layer of pigment shifted observers' attention away from neoclassicism's imperative for transcendent beauty, morality, and timelessness, towards the arousing—or, to many, distressing—possibility of gazing at an actual person or, perhaps, a hyper-realistic pornographic doll.³⁴⁹ Flesh color, I would argue, invalidates the illusion of the marble's self-enclosed hardness and instead invokes the relative weakness conventionally associated with female bodies. It necessitates interpersonal negotiations of power and proximity. The pornographic doll mediates

³⁴⁷ Jennifer DeVere Brody provides an associative chain of synonyms showing that the marble's whiteness "was related to the 'material' in an equation that reads as follows: White = pure = solid = cold = complete = perfect" (69).

³⁴⁸ C. Nelson 60; see Brody 7, 71.

³⁴⁹ Resourceful entrepreneurs profited from the *The Greek Slave*'s pornographic appeal in setting up *poses plastiques* of flesh-and-blood women performing the sculpture's pose at nearby venues. They thus siphoned off viewers from *The Greek Slave* and considerably lowered Powers's earnings in Baltimore and Washington, D.C. (Miller 654; see Wunder 227-9). Clearly, spectators choosing to see the live women instead were less interested in benefitting from the sculpture's potential abolitionist message.

between biological and marble bodies, infusing the spectator's gaze with a seductive sense of total control over the figure on display. Due to these associations, the absence of color in sculpture was thought to shield observers from their own bodies' untoward visceral eroticism and ensure not only the undistracted reception of pure moral and aesthetic ideal, but also the wished-for stimulation of appropriate physiological reactions (such as tears, swooning, or exclamations of awe), historical accuracy or artistic precedent notwithstanding. *The Greek Slave* existed in a conceptual force field between resigned submission (to audiences'/her captors' gaze) and silent, steadfast power (to remain unmoved by shameful public exposure in the museum/slave market), creating sufficient frisson to keep audiences enthralled.

Perhaps not incidentally, Hiram Powers agreed that Gibson's *Tinted Venus* had been done in bad taste and suggested that it was the marble's whiteness that allowed the nude sculpture to transcend the realm of the corporeal, inviting onlookers and artists alike to celebrate the triumph of the spiritual without risking indecency (C. Nelson 65). Exhibit catalogues underlined that *The Greek Slave* was to be encountered in a reverential attitude, encouraging a range of acceptable behaviors for the newly museum-going public, such as the removal of men's hats, subdued conversation, and open, yet self-contained, displays of fascination.³⁵⁰ Gazing at *The Greek Slave* as prescribed was tantamount to assimilating bourgeois codes of propriety, ensuring audiences that the high-minded project of self-cultivation promised by the consumption of art would be successful. As the pamphlet created for the sculpture's American tour grandly proclaimed, *The Greek Slave* "raise[s] above degradation by inward purity and force of character."³⁵¹ Thus given a 'character,' the sculpture trained audiences in the correct ways of looking at nude art.

³⁵⁰ Kasson 188; see C. Nelson 80.

³⁵¹ "Introduction" 4; see Kasson 187.

Compared to Gibson's *Tinted Venus*—whose flesh-like tint was variously dismissed as insignificant, vulgar, or disruptive—the absence of color in *The Greek Slave* as well as the behavioral codes surrounding audiences' visual consumption assured viewers of their own refined taste, heightened social rank, moral correctness, and spiritual power. Lecherous ways of looking were tacitly dismissed as “barbaric” (or Turkish), although the statue very obviously produced pleasurable erotic sensations in some of its viewers.³⁵²

Although Powers had achieved the *The Greek Slave*'s remarkably lifelike finish by using special tools he had invented (Kasson 167), its hard whiteness and “subdued pensiveness” prevented it from being perceived as immediately real or pornographic (Smith 3). Artists preferred marble for its ability to universalize the white body, including its “classic” Caucasian features and proportions. Neoromantic sculptors installed the female body as the apotheosis of aesthetic value and morality just when colonial activity was highly visible in English public life (C. Nelson 62). The *Tinted Venus*'s complexion made visible the abstract fiction of white marble's universal ambition, and brought the question of phenotypical difference and biological particularity immediately before the viewers' eyes. The medium of white marble not only served to control viewers' sexual arousal responses by sublimating erotic sensuality into moral reflection, but conveniently prevented a sustained engagement with the representation of black bodies.³⁵³ Of course, by the mid-nineteenth-century, American and British middle-class audiences strongly associated slavery with racialized bodies. Statues and busts of non-Caucasian subjects had ethnographic and social, rather than aesthetic, connotations, and sculptors took

³⁵² See Kasson 180. *The Greek Slave* was framed by scarlet velvet drapery, creating the arousing illusion of a “rosy tinge flushing the pure marble,” according to Clara Cushman (29; see C. Nelson 69). The distinction between sensual and aesthetic contemplation was clearly quite porous.

³⁵³ See Miller 654; C. Nelson 68.

pains to displace contemporary colonial politics onto white subjects to produce what audiences perceived as a high moral tone, spiritual messaging, and historical instruction (C. Nelson 75, 79). The sanitation and aestheticization of slavery via marble Caucasians was deemed necessary because, in the words of Harriet Beecher-Stowe, “slavery ... is too dreadful for the purposes of



Fig. 2. “The Virginian Slave, Intended as a Companion to Power’s ‘Greek Slave’” by John Tenniel (*Punch* 20, 7 June, 1851, p. 236).

art.”³⁵⁴ The power of abstract allegory proved to be tenuous, however, when *Punch* published a conservatively satirical illustration in response to Powers’s successful showing of *The Greek Slave* during the Great Exhibition. Entitled “The Virginian Slave, Intended as a Companion to Power’s [sic] ‘Greek Slave,’” the cartoon lampoons the English frenzy for Powers’s high-minded idealization by purposefully depicting a dark-skinned American slave woman in the most hackneyed attitude. Hands clasped imploringly, melodramatically lifting her eyes, “The Virginian Slave” not only minstrelized *The Greek Slave*, but branded as hypocritical Powers’s attempt to dissociate his statue from the slave system his native country upheld. Since she is not clothed in the “robe, of purity,” she is vulgarly naked (even though she wears a draped cloth). The phrase “e pluribus unum” on the pedestal as well as the

³⁵⁴ Beecher-Stowe 1852, 10; see C. Nelson 80; Sánchez-Eppler 100. Beecher-Stowe further: “A work which should represent [slavery] strictly as it is, would be a work which could not be read.”

American flag draped around the post yank slavery from occasion for pleasant reflection on transcendent and universal questions to the mundane realm of contemporary geopolitics.³⁵⁵

Punch was not the only outlet to point out Powers's and his admirers' hypocrisy. On the day of the Queen's viewing of *The Greek Slave*, black American abolitionist and fugitive slave William Wells Brown placed the *Punch* cartoon at the feet of Powers's sculpture and publicly praised "The Virginian Slave" as its rightful companion, fueling the controversy.³⁵⁶ This striking challenge to the royal entourage's participation in the sentimental cult surrounding *The Greek Slave* was mirrored in some American publications. A writer for the abolitionist weekly *National Era*, for instance, noted that

in the midst of the pleasing emotions excited by this admirable work of art, there came sad thoughts of the wondrous hardness of that nature which can weep at sight of an insensate piece of marble ... and yet listens unmoved to the awful story of the American slave! There were fair breasts, that heaved with genuine sympathy beneath the magic power of the great artist, that have never yet breathed a sigh for the sable sisterhood of the South!³⁵⁷

The image of the white slave was undoubtedly an effective, if problematic, strategy in that viewers were encouraged to identify as slaves and imagine themselves to be pruriently observed as slaves (see Hackenberg 39). Abolitionists regularly compared the Ottoman enslavement of Greek Christian women to that of African women by Christian Americans.³⁵⁸ The supplicant naked slave woman in chains—most often shown in a kneeling position—had already proliferated as the emblem of women's antislavery agitation in the North of the United States

³⁵⁵ Brody 69-70; see Yellin 120-2.

³⁵⁶ Yellin 122; see Stone 2002, 134; Kasson 184-5; Miller 653.

³⁵⁷ Smith 3; see C. Nelson 94.

³⁵⁸ See Hackenberg 4; Yellin 100.

(Yellin 99). Powers's indebtedness to such abolitionist iconography in fact occasioned much commentary on *The Greek Slave*'s connection to American slavery. Particularly the *Punch* cartoon drove home the realization that *The Greek Slave* stood as an emblem against white, black, or mixed-race slavery, its exhibition creating contradictory overlapping vectors of power and complicity (Hackenberg 35). Some viewers realized, for instance, that *The Greek Slave*'s pedestal was an uncomfortable analogue to the auction block, implicating white viewers (or buyers) of *The Greek Slave* and its various miniatures in a trafficking of naked, shackled bodies that had its real-life equivalent in the United States.³⁵⁹ White abolitionist women in America particularly identified with the chained figure and felt called upon to move into the public sphere to end slavery and challenge the sexual double standard.³⁶⁰ While Frederick Douglass, in a letter to *The North Star*, explicitly tied Powers's sculpture to the political goals of American abolitionism (Yellin 110), some reviewers were hostile to female abolitionist agitators and understood the statue to convey Christian resignation, quiet suffering, and ultimate martyrdom as proper responses to oppression.³⁶¹

In hindsight, much of the buzz created around *The Greek Slave* relates to its ambivalent "relationship to the exercise of power," as Kasson notes (187). Simultaneously sexually vulnerable and spiritually triumphant—owing to her ability to transcend suffering—the sculpture

³⁵⁹ Hackenberg 34, 39; see Kasson 184-5; B. Taylor 2008, 419; Yellin 109.

³⁶⁰ As Sara Hackenberg notes, *The Greek Slave* is an instance of the American abolitionist "tragic mulatta" or "octoroon" trope in which mid-nineteenth-century feminism and abolitionism intersect. It allowed white abolitionist women to recognize slavery as a mirror for their own condition, mobilizing harem and auction block alike as spatial metaphors that helped them articulate their legal disenfranchisement (Hackenberg 40). The tendency to read "black as white" can be found in both minstrel performance as well as abolitionist imagery and writing. Although pursuing different ends, they tapped into similar representational repertoires (see Brody 81).

³⁶¹ Yellin 100-2; see Miller 648. The 1848 introduction to the pamphlet accompanying exhibits of *The Greek Slave* proclaims that it "is an emblem of all trial to which humanity is subject, and may be regarded as a type of resignation, uncompromising virtue, or sublime patience" (3; see Kasson 187).

materializes, aestheticizes, and eroticizes a mid-century bourgeois sense of high Christian morality. Obviously, to do so, its cold solidity also freezes slavery's regime of rape in perpetuity. Having long refused to link *The Greek Slave* to the contemporary American context, Powers finally acknowledged that it should be read as an abolitionist emblem and even prided himself on the correctness of his views—but only after emancipation had been gained (Miller 648). After the Civil War, he cast a final full-sized version of *The Greek Slave* wearing manacles rather than chains (Hackenberg 46-7). Explaining why he had chosen a female figure for his larger-than-life statue, *America* (1848-50), Powers wrote that,

Perhaps by associating the beauties and advantages of our government with the form and attributes ... of woman, the hearts of our woman-loving and women-respecting people might be inspired with ... love for our institutions, and the wisest and finest government upon the earth. (qtd. in Yellin 113).

Apparently ambivalent, but ultimately supportive, of American feminists and their involvement in abolitionism, Powers tied American patriarchy's benevolent sexism to the public's "love" for the American political system.³⁶² For my purposes, it is crucial to isolate the connection Powers drew between the nude female form, offered for aesthetic visual consumption, and viewers' intimate affective ties for American institutions. I suggest that EBB's sonnet, written in admiration of Powers's work, operates precisely in the same way by imagining the sculpture's "passionless perfection" (l. 5) as a vehicle of political change.

Visual, Textual, and Imaginative Crossings

EBB's "Hiram Powers' *Greek Slave*" appeared in Dickens's *Household Words* in October 1850, before the Great Exhibition, and was part of the rich poetic canon created in the

³⁶² For the abolitionist iconography Powers used for *America*—in particular the statue's crushing of chains of despotism with her left foot—see Yellin 112-9.

wake of the sculpture's exhibition tour. In May 1847, the Brownings had met Powers in Florence where he showed them a version of the sculpture in his studio.³⁶³ The poem responds to thematic concerns many other poets and reviewers had raised about the statue as well as the Greek Revolution, while it also investigates the political implications of this poetic corpus itself. Most scholars, in their consideration of "Hiram Powers' *Greek Slave*," focus on the poem's investigation of whether resignation or rebellion should be considered the correct response to enslavement.³⁶⁴

The sonnet ponders the meaning of Powers's controversial decision to deploy a neoclassical female nude to raise awareness about the realities of slavery and the sexual double standard, while operating fully within neoclassical and Romantic aesthetic paradigms also shared by Powers.³⁶⁵ The sonnet's octave sets up the implications of the initial conceptual contradiction between "ideal beauty" and "the house of anguish" (ll. 1-2), inviting readers to ponder the sonnet's various conceptual "thresholds" (Stone 2002, 132). The sestet resolves the conflict by suggesting that moral power, the result of art's passion and communicated by feminine beauty, is mighty enough to end oppression. The speaker suggests that "Art's fiery finger" (l. 9), materialized in the shape of the marble sculpture, confronts and ultimately demolishes the institution of slavery: "The serfdom of this world! appeal, fair stone, / [f]rom God's pure heights of beauty against man's wrong!" (ll. 10-11).³⁶⁶ By emphasizing moral activity—even its political

³⁶³ BC 14:203-11, 214-23.

³⁶⁴ See Brophy 282; Mermin 150; Yellin 123-4. Michele Martinez argues that sculpture was one of EBB's "governing metaphors," particularly in *Aurora Leigh*, due to EBB's close friendship with the sculptor Harriet Hosmer (215).

³⁶⁵ See Martinez 214; Miller 637.

³⁶⁶ See C. Nelson 94; Avery 111.

manifestation, progressive activism—as art’s ultimate purpose, the poem challenges commentators who praised *The Greek Slave* for representing women’s Christian resignation. EBB’s utopian hope is that power reversals be effected through high art’s revolutionary might.³⁶⁷

Echoing Jennifer De Vere Brody, I would suggest that EBB’s reverence for the sculpture’s “[i]deal beauty”—in her “passionless perfection” of “fair stone” with a “divine face” (ll. 10, 12)—simultaneously invokes a racialized kind of beauty that is not without some nationalistic undertones (see Brody 69). At the same time, the speaker’s first reference to the sculpture, “[a]lien image,” establishes the slave’s distance from the poet in appearance, experience, and her relationship to spoken and written language (l. 3). The sonnet’s speaker imagines herself as fundamentally dissimilar to the sculpture (perhaps to acknowledge and remove herself from the controversy surrounding it), and thus performs crucial rhetorical work to fashion the appropriate subject position for the female British poet (see Miller 638). The statue—“shadowed not darkened where the sill expands” (l. 6)—resists racialization as black, but takes on non-white hues as the light (or the inquiring gaze) falls on her undulating curves, allowing the observer to pass the “sill” and “enter” (if ever so tentatively, protected by the marble’s hardness) the “house of anguish,” the “shadowed” experiential realm of institutional rape under slavery, hitherto (and forever) foreclosed to the white bourgeois woman poet (ll. 1, 2). Here, EBB faces the challenges posed by what Marjorie Stone has called the “interlocking aesthetic and ethical regimes that writers have had to negotiate in representing the experience of slave women” (2002, 132). EBB can only refer to Powers’s orientalist narrative “obliquely” since the poet’s words are entirely policed by the “faceless arbiters of art” (Stone 2002, 132, 134) who have the “say” as to which facets of human experience poetry can or “cannot” describe (l. 1). “They,” the sonnet’s

³⁶⁷ See Kasson 187; Miller 652; Yellin 124.

very first word, constrains each of the 108 subsequent words and ensure the poet's adherence to publically admissible ways of articulating female slaves' "anguish." The sonnet thus exists within and contiguous to the social order. While EBB assures suspicious readers that her poem honors Powers's adherence to the representational rules of high art, to "strike and shame the strong" is to produce politically revolutionary affect against the American (and former British) "wrong," the legality of "serfdom" (ll. 13, 11, 10). She also claims to speak only for herself and not for Powers by including the conditional "as if the artist meant her" in line 4—the sonnet's subsequent political charge is EBB's alone.³⁶⁸ The notion of "shame," produced by the sculpture's exposed vulnerability that causes oxymoronic "thunders of white silence," also enters the mind of the reader, who, in turn, is 'struck' and 'shamed' by *The Greek Slave*'s ability to remain politically steadfast in the face of overwhelming economic incentive to perpetuate chattel slavery (ll. 13, 14).³⁶⁹ The sculpture is thus imagined as powerful enough to "overthrow[]" elite resistance to change, including the readers' (l. 14). The observer, unable to break away from the overwhelming influence of her perfection (arguably without needing to read EBB's poem in the first place), the "ideal sense" of erotically tinged sensation communicated by her form, become chained to her "divine face"—they are themselves subdued and mastered by her "appeal" (ll. 8, 12, 10).

The sonnet's final six and a half lines contain six imperative verbs ("Pierce," "break up," "Appeal," "Catch up," "strike and shame" [ll. 8, 9, 10, 12, 13]), infusing the statue with the newly gendered force of poet's political arousal. Her global ambition to end enslavement—that is

³⁶⁸ See Brophy 282, for the opposite reading.

³⁶⁹ Dorothy Mermin notes that the sonnet's stylistically complex final image, the synesthetic and oxymoronic "thunders of white silence," challenges poetic conventions that expected female poets to produce to clear and simple verse (159).

“man’s crimes in different lands,” “serfdom of this world,” “man’s wrong,” “not alone / [e]ast grief but west” (ll. 7, 10, 11, 12-13)—derives from the statue’s erotico-aesthetic appeal, channeled into both divine ethical commandment and support for real-world legislative change.³⁷⁰ When exhibit visitors purchased small replicas of the statue to take home, the figure indeed “[p]ierce[d] to the centre,” of the American and English capitalist order, the domestic household (l. 8). There, it “bodie[d] forth” (Mermin 159) a reminder of the uncomfortable fact that the political and economic might of the West, helping create millions of cozy bourgeois parlors on both sides of the Atlantic, had been achieved through four centuries of large-scale slave productive and reproductive labor.³⁷¹ *The Greek Slave* thus invaded Western homes, at least those of politically conscious consumers who, as Henry James put it, “could bring themselves to think such things right.” It was a fetish object designed to simultaneously spark and mollify a guilty white conscience and to make that process as aesthetically and somatically pleasurable as possible. The sculpture and EBB’s sonnet abstract and aestheticize sexual violence to a degree modern feminists tend to find intolerable but for which we can at least account when considering Powers and EBB’s (likely) theoretical knowledge of the matter. Similar to the ethically suspect promise of the self-contradictory “thunders of white silence” to wipe out slavery without incurring some form of collateral damage—as if white people’s passive refusal to speak in favor of slavery would necessarily create the “thunder” of abolition—the

³⁷⁰ See Hackenberg 41; Mermin 160; Miller 646.

³⁷¹ Sara Hackenberg draws attention to the statue’s multiply overlapping and mutually reinforcing oppositional energies that account for its long-standing cultural visibility: “Powers’s image, literally taken into the bosom of English and American domestic spaces, figured a woman simultaneously chaste and exposed, naked and clothed, pure and sullied, fallen and raised, ancient and modern, beautiful and awful, white and black, Eastern and Western, abstract and particular, idealized and problematic, unique and relentlessly reproduced, alien and deeply familiar. Its uncanny impact makes it central to an imaginary Eastern ‘Turkish bazaar’ that traded in flesh as well as to the project of the antislavery ‘charity bazaars’ that, run by female abolitionists, bought and sold objects for the amelioration of trading in flesh on the South’s auction block” (45).

statue, after all, paradoxically objectifies a white female slave's body to achieve black slaves' emancipation. Abolitionists produced, circulated, and celebrated representations that were mired in the same ethically suspect politics of sexual spectatorship that had colluded in the rise of slavery in the first place.

The sonnet itself enacts a translation of the statue's pleasantly visual message (supported by Powers's narrative and reception history) into an equally pleasurable textual one, switching from Powers's scopic and deeply conservative economy to one that is both more textually than visually imaginative and, overall, respectably progressive. EBB understood that *The Greek Slave* owed its success to "the sculptor's manipulation of ... female passivity and the idealization of white womanhood" (Miller 648), and, emulating Powers's own aesthetic strategies, the sonnet installs the poet as the one who chooses the target "Art's fiery finger" is supposed to penetrate—erotic connotation included. The sculpture itself, of course, remains "a puppet" (Brophy 282), or a "transformative conduit[]" (Miller 645), exposed to audiences' visual consumption that vacillates between high-minded aesthetic concerns and exploitative pornotroping. Male viewers who wished to "pierce" the sculpture had to shatter the fetters that shielded her sex. The end to slavery, embodied by the sculpture, visually and literarily promised sexual access to the previous beneficiaries of slavery. If Powers's and EBB's works are thus read together, the slave's bondage defers the viewer's erotic fulfillment (see Miller 646), forecasting the (continued) sexual availability of slave women after they had thrown off slavery's shackles. The transformation of libidinal arousal into its political form virtually guaranteed that existing sexual hierarchies would remain intact indefinitely. This is *The Greek Slave*'s essential promise, hard and durable as marble.

Whatever form viewers' and readers' desires took, EBB suggests the possibility that they might be harnessed to enact change. Crossing between the visual and aural/vocal, the statue's nudity (or, to the lecherous observer, nakedness) is 'clothed' in ever more poetic discourse, helping nudity to attain respectability (see Mermin 160). Drawing from bare skin's potential to offend and arouse, it helped energize a revolutionary movement against slavery that would culminate in the American Civil War. EBB's sonnet is indeed 'complicit' in Powers's neoclassic and "genteel pornography" (Mermin 160), and it harnesses the body's affective response to foster audiences' anticipatory "love" (Powers's word) for a post-slavery America that was yet fifteen years in the future and which EBB did not live to see herself.

"A Curse for a Nation" and the Poet's Maternal Martyrdom

EBB's slave poems, "The Runaway Slave," "Hiram Powers' *Greek Slave*," and "A Curse for a Nation" are centrally concerned with the morality of institutionalized slavery, women's ability to speak out against that institution, and the risks that accompany such public self-exposure (see Mermin 233). Marjorie Stone has also suggested that EBB's three slave poems express her guilty conscience with regards to her slave-owning kin (Stone 2002, 140). Writing to John Ruskin in 1855, EBB noted that "I belong to a family of West Indian slaveholders, and if I believed in curses, I should be afraid."³⁷² After her elopement with Robert Browning, EBB was entitled to family legacies that were unconnected to income derived from her family's slave plantations. Living on untainted income, EBB began to explore the business of cursing more fully (see Stone 202, 140).

³⁷² BC 21:343-7; see Donaldson 139; Lootens 2017, 159; Stone 2002, 140. The sentiment is repeated in EBB's letter to Robert Browning: "I would give ten towns in Norfolk (if I had them) to own some purer lineage than that of the blood of the slave!—Cursed we are from generation to generation!" (BC 11:251).

When *The Liberty Bell* requested of EBB another anti-slavery poem, she sent them “A Curse for a Nation,” published in 1856. Thereafter, EBB revised the poem, added a new seventh stanza, and published it as the concluding poem of her 1860 collection, *Poems before Congress*. The volume was not well received; in fact, it caused a near-universal and fierce reaction among English reviewers.³⁷³ Reviewers found fault with the collection’s overt political focus, considered unseemly for a “poetess” (a term EBB rejected), and were appalled at what they perceived to be EBB’s critique of British imperial politics, particularly the country’s complicity in U.S. slavery. William E. Aytoun’s review in *Blackwood’s*, “Poetic Aberrations,” was a particularly hostile rejection of female meddling in politics, a forceful backlash against women’s leadership in the abolition of British slavery. Aytoun’s 1860 review erases all memory of antislavery writing by women that had swayed (and morally benefited) the nation three decades earlier, complete with the speculation that EBB’s reclamation of female political cursing was the result of “a fit of insanity.”³⁷⁴ According to Aytoun, the personal language of “A Curse for a Nation” strongly suggests that its speaker is unbecomingly aroused when testing women’s ability to wield linguistic and representational power over global and domestic politics. Aroused she is: the three short stanzas in the poem’s second part do not comprise twenty lines, but include such

³⁷³ Stone 1986, 169; see Brophy 282; Montwieler 312. Also see Donaldson 139, for the *Atlas*’s positive review of *Poems before Congress* which lauded EBB’s “passion and prophecy” and deemed her cursing a “little indiscretion.” Overall, the collection has not fared well over time either, as feminist scholars tend to find it insufficiently politically explicit and aesthetically engaging. Brophy deems “A Curse for a Nation” “powerful in its affective dimension, but ... also entirely derivative.” She argues that “the female poet’s writing does not threaten the status quo regarding gender relations, because it amounts to a form of non-speech” because EBB frames her verse as the result of “weep[ing]” (ll. 43, 46; Brophy 283). Brophy’s critique that EBB’s verse lacks revolutionary ambitions ignores how overwhelmingly gendered poetic speech still was during mid-century. As I argue below, EBB cannot write politically without claiming to be overwhelmed by grief. EBB was aware that women wept and cursed “night and day”—“And no one marvels” (l. 44). Leaving her private couch to publically send a curse to a nation for its policy on slavery was a serious breach of gendered poetic protocols (see Stone 1986, 157).

³⁷⁴ Aytoun 492; see Lootens 2017, 161; Montwieler 291; Donaldson 139-40.

violent images as a “broken ... chain,” “brand and thong,” “writhing bond-slaves,” “strangling martyrs,” and, eventually, and appearance of “the fiend” himself (ll. 53, 56, 63, 69, 68).³⁷⁵ The actual subject of the poem, however, is not the rather “abstracted” issue of slavery, especially when read in its context of *Poems before Congress*, but EBB’s condemnation of mid-century British self-aggrandizing patriotism (Lootens 2017, 164).

The spectacle of women’s transgressive poetry was so profitable that *Poems before Congress* saw a second edition within EBB’s lifetime. The American newspaper *The Independent* offered EBB one hundred dollars for every pre-published poem, “though as short as a sonnet.”³⁷⁶ EBB was overall sanguine about the reception of the volume, writing that “I have had that deep satisfaction of ‘speaking though I died for it,’ which we are all apt to aspire to now and then.”³⁷⁷ At the same time, EBB felt she was obliged to fend off friends’ suspicions that she lacked patriotism. She reasoned—rather fuzzily—that the poem’s central curse “was involved in the action of slave-holding” rather than emanating from her pen against Britain.³⁷⁸ While she claimed both privately and publically that “Curse for a Nation” exclusively addressed American slavery, its presence in *Poems before Congress*, a collection dedicated to the success of the Italian Risorgimento, and her revisions, particularly the addition of a stanza which included the ambiguous geographic marker “Straits” (l. 26), traditionally employed for the Strait of Gibraltar, have led critics to view EBB’s assurances with skepticism and make it difficult to situate the

³⁷⁵ See Mermin 234; Stone 1986, 157.

³⁷⁶ *LEBB* 2:387; see Donaldson 141.

³⁷⁷ *LEBB* 2:387. The phrase “speaking ... though I died for it” also appears, for instance, in Anna Eliza Bray’s immensely popular romance *Courtenay of Walreddon* from 1844 (336) and was a staple in melodramatic prose fiction of the period. EBB is cracking a joke here, both making light of the blow to her reputation and mocking *Blackwood’s* overly vituperative reviewer.

³⁷⁸ *LEBB* 2:367; Stone 1986, 169.

poem in global politics and within generic histories. EBB appeared to be unsure herself, famously confessing to Isa Bladgen in April 1860 that “between you and me, Isa, certain of those stanzas do ‘fit’ England ‘as if they were made for her,’ which they were *not*, though.”³⁷⁹

EBB was aware and proud of the backlash her aggressive political speech in *Poems before Congress* elicited, and, anticipating that certain female friends in her circle might censure her daring, invited them to side with her. She asked her friend Fanny Haworth, “Did you see how I was treated in ‘Blackwood’? In fact, you and all women, though you hated me, should be vexed on your own accounts.”³⁸⁰ As is the case in her correspondence, *Poems before Congress*, EBB’s aesthetic exploration of women’s ability and duty to address systematic injustice on an international scale, anticipates the backlash against such meddling, ponders the possible psychological effects of hostile reproach upon the poet, and, most crucially, tests rhetorical strategies meant to minimize negative feedback.³⁸¹ EBB felt entitled to insert herself in such conversations, as her famous letter to Mitford indicates:

is it possible that you think a woman has no business with questions like the question of slavery? Then she had better use a pen no more. She had better subside into slavery & concubinage herself, I think, as in the times of old,—shut herself up ... in the “women’s apartment,” & take no rank among thinkers & speakers³⁸²

Here, EBB slides effortlessly from chattel slavery in America to women’s sexual slavery in Britain. “A Curse for a Nation” similarly evokes the history of British abolition to call for

³⁷⁹ *LEBB* 2:375. See Donaldson 140-1; Montwieler 309-10; Lootens 2017, 158, 163; Stone and Taylor 280; Stone 1986, 157; B. Taylor 2007, 59-60.

³⁸⁰ *LEBB* 2:387. EBB’s echo of Pringle’s question in the previous chapter—“Do you see how MacQueen is abusing me in Blackwood?” (n20)—in the same context of criticizing slavery is uncanny.

³⁸¹ See Montwieler 294; Miller 651.

³⁸² *BC* 19:45-9; see *LEBB* 2:110-1; Brown 1995, 127-8; Mermin 234.

bourgeois women poets' intellectual emancipation, capitalizing on American slavery's political urgency and re-writing the fading memory of British abolition as ineffectively sentimental and feminine.

The poem is divided into three parts. In the "Prologue" of thirteen stanzas, the female poet-narrator³⁸³ reports her conversation with a visiting angel who urges her to send his curse "over the Western Sea" (l. 4). The speaker (in obvious contrast to EBB) remains reluctant to write the curse due to her familial and emotional allegiance to the land across the sea, her own country's moral failings, and her gender.³⁸⁴ Yet, this supposedly demure female speaker not only dares to contradict her male supernatural visitor thrice ("Not so, my lord!"), but possesses sufficient courage, clarity of moral vision, and political literacy to observe and challenge her own nation's miserly welfare system, elite vested interest, and corrupt "oligarchic parliament" (l. 29; see Montiweler 10). Her feminine self-effacement and mournful lack of patriotism combine into a rhetorical strategy meant to convince skeptical audiences of her entitlement to authoritative speech by borrowing "the authority of patriarchal Christianity."³⁸⁵ Her own social subordination grants her the moral advantage: women's writerly authority is powered precisely (and paradoxically) by the conventional performance of feminine modesty in speaking. It remains unclear whether the speaker merely writes the angel's curse or whether, in writing it, the curse becomes her own contribution, authorized by the divine envoy. The latter possibility would

³⁸³ EBB's reviewers made clear that mid-century conventions of reading verse dictated the conflation of female narrators with their author (Lootens 2017, 167).

³⁸⁴ Lootens writes that the histrionics of self-effacement in the Prologue, the self-presentation of the narrator as "shamed and silenced," suggests a critique by EBB that the project of British expansion has rested on its post-1834 moral high ground for too long without renewing its global liberationist commitments (2017, 164). Expansion is the ultimate drive, of course, but patriotism must be renewed by domestic critique and global righteousness (Lootens 2017, 170).

³⁸⁵ Stone 1986, 167; see Lootens 2017, 172.

imply that to be a writer is a curse in itself, as her perspicacity and conscience—figured as the male angel (or God)—coerce our unwilling heroine to expose herself before a rabidly hostile world.³⁸⁶ Her response to the angel, in any case, constitutes a culturally explosive “response of appalling, even terrifying, arrogance” (Lootens 2017, 168). Convinced by the angel to write, she proceeds by instituting the sentimental register of weeping, aware of her own compromised position as British narrator (“So thus I wrote, and mourned indeed” [l. 49]).

EBB’s speaker proceeds to justify the angel’s curse in “The Curse, Part I,” based on the monumental hypocrisy of enlightened nations’ countenancing of “writhing bond-slaves,” including Britain’s (l. 63). Each of the three stanzas creates a causal relationship between the nation’s action and the curse. Similar to “The Runaway Slave,” the curse censures liberal political systems for celebrating the moral achievement of democratic freedom while refusing to grant the same to others in their very midst. Part II consists of the curse itself, addressed to the reader who represents the nation at large. It is a six-stanza sequence of worldly successes, three of them visual and three aural, spoiled by conscience: When praise or power is gained, “you” will be aware of your complicity, yet remain painfully mute. Because dignity and integrity are unobtainable when “you” support injustice, “your” life will be one of continuous, silent self-flagellation. In the end the reader realizes that “consciousness of the curse is finally the curse.”³⁸⁷

Each stanza of Part II ends with the paratactical command “This is the curse. Write.” The speaker still appears to be under the angel’s influence, repeating the divine injunction like a painful, mechanic, self-reflexive “rite.” Whether or not the angel—and, by extension, God—

³⁸⁶ Donaldson argues that EBB ensures that both interpretations remain operative throughout the poem (143).

³⁸⁷ Stone 1986, 168; see Mermin 234; Montiweler 311.

speaks through the poet, the nation actively contributes³⁸⁸ to its own curse and must work to lift it. EBB imagines that, in order to clear the nation's guilty conscience, active writing must "right" things. Where writing/righting does not occur, the burden of complicity in injustice dooms sinful nations to paralysis and Empire's expansion stops. Whether the speaker commands the reader or herself, EBB imagines political work as a divinely ordained task of self-aware writing/righting, tying the poet's activism to producing written language for the transatlantic publishing circuit in the service of a morally rejuvenated, if permanently painfully burdened, imperial program. The poem, similar to the volume as a whole, ends by addressing (and cursing) its readers, commanding them to become active writers/righters—or to go under in never-ending carnage.³⁸⁹ By unwillingly yielding to the overwhelming power of the male angel—the impersonation of the moral imperative, replete with possible sexual³⁹⁰ innuendo—the speaker martyrs herself in her writerly quest for justice. Similar to the runaway slave, the Greek slave, and Marian Erle (see below), the speaker of "A Curse for a Nation" inhabits the subject position of the coerced, if not (sexually) violated, but still well-meaning woman striving for serene propriety but chosen by a male-identified power to act as conduit for the divine will in a fallen world. She must expose herself and sacrifice her proper silence to maintain internal moral coherence, as ordained by a

³⁸⁸ The phonetic similarity to "wright," archaic form of "work," is surely also intentional. "Write" functions as a threefold homophonic pun with "rite," "right," and "wright."

³⁸⁹ See Montwieler 312; Lootens 2017, 176. EBB leaves unexplored the question how exactly activist writing will "right" global political and economic exploitation because writing-as-witnessing-and-addressing-men is the woman poet's single way of political participation. EBB announces her membership within the progressive ideological tradition that considers the act of writing as revolutionary in itself while likely concealing mechanisms of policy-making that have the opposite intended effect (see Lefebvre 28-9).

³⁹⁰ Miller reads the refrain of "A Curse on a Nation" as a rhythmic instantiation of labor pains. The poem's speaker is cursed to bear her moral burden as non-optional maternal suffering that parallels the bondage of slavery. The poem's addressees are powerful men, invited "to release the submissive poetess from her labor ... by releasing American slaves from theirs" (Miller 651).

greater, relentless moral force. “A Curse for a Nation” develops the internal logic of “The Runaway Slave” and “Hiram Powers’ *Greek Slave*” further by articulating more sharply the political stakes of EBB’s overall progressive message while mostly dispensing with her previous poems’ overtly sexual connotations.

In all her abolitionist verse, then, EBB utilizes traditionally feminine figures who are formally or informally bound to (or by) a masculine-coded sexual power, as stand-ins for herself. She depicts women who unwillingly depart from their traditional roles on necessary and radical quests of liberty which will return them to the Victorian ideal of sexual and moral purity that political adversity has put out of immediate reach. The speaker in “A Curse for a Nation” styles herself as the angel’s amanuensis, rather than as the curse’s originator. This representational strategy of mobilizing conservative gender scripts for progressive ends is intended to make it difficult for progressive and conservative audiences to find fault with the message: EBB’s speaker neither assumes inappropriate male prerogatives nor does she display a lack of political radicality (Miller 651). EBB’s call for the emancipation of slaves—and the emancipation of female political poets of international celebrity—promises a future that is without slaves, but not without gendered hierarchies. EBB’s progressive “program” is a gradualist and, with regards to women’s political emancipation, a fundamentally individualistic one. As she proclaims the need for America’s slaves to be relieved of their shackles, she claims freedom from the rhetorical restraints on the poet, but not for every bourgeois domestic woman. Scholars’ assessment of EBB’s progressivism must thus be tempered, as progressive politics are likely futile without the promise of eventual democracy.

CHAPTER SIX

WELCOME TO AURORA'S HOME FOR FALLEN WOMEN:

AURORA LEIGH AS REFORM MANUAL

The human race
To you means, such a child, or such a man,
You saw one morning waiting in the cold,
Beside that gate, perhaps. You gather up
A few such cases, and, when strong, sometimes
Will write of factories and of slaves, as if
Your father were a negro, and your son
A spinner in the mills. All's yours and you,—
All, coloured with your blood, or otherwise
Just nothing to you. Why, I call you hard
To general suffering. (*AL* 2.189-99)³⁹¹

The Liberal Woman Poet and the Impossibility of Collective Action

Over the past four decades, feminist scholars have commented at length on the relationship between Marian—*Aurora Leigh*'s lone working-class character—and Aurora, the novel-poem's eponymous heroine. Some critics of the 1980s commend Marian's elevation into liberal subjectivity which, in their estimation, creates "radical" cross-class feminist sisterhood and a "truly democratic" union of the working and middle classes.³⁹² More recently, scholars

³⁹¹ This epigraph was chosen for its neat summation of this chapter's main argument. Spoken by Romney, these lines accuse Aurora of willfully refusing to reflect on the structural dimensions of social injustice. Instead she approaches the alleviation of suffering as a duty based on intimate, familial relations. He insults her by implying her youthful verse's proximity to sentimental philanthropic poetry which reveals EBB's ironic detachment from the history of British anti-slavery campaigns and working-class agitation to stabilize the Poetess as national hero (see Lootens 2017, 46). Nevertheless, Romney has a point.

³⁹² Zonana 55; Armstrong 1993, 369.

counter that the poet's success—the sustained self-analysis over the course of *Aurora Leigh's* nine books and her ultimate status as “triumphant goddess,” complete with a millennial vision of the New Jerusalem³⁹³—comes at a cost. Marian's “meek” and “doglike” disposition, her incapacity to “wonder of herself / [f]or being so sad a creature” (*AL* 4.281; 3.849-50), energize Aurora's trajectory towards liberal subjectivity, and teach the poet political responsibility. Having sprung up “like a nettle” (*AL* 3.854), Marian, the essentially natural woman, remains unaffected by society's condescension towards women's professional ambition. Instead, after undergoing rape, abandonment, and rescue, she is reclaimed from the “gutter” and ascends into divine motherhood (*AL* 6.672). Saving Marian allows Aurora to realize that physical love must animate her vision, as opposed to men's soul-less “diagrams” and “formal universals” (*AL* 3.744, 747). This realization allows her to unify the contradictory roles of prophetic poet and conventionally love-starved woman.³⁹⁴ EBB's “new aesthetic”³⁹⁵ marries Aurora's erotically charged idealism and lofty artistic goals with a sustained critique of mid-Victorian social crises—women's subordination, economic exploitation, urban poverty, and the sexual double standard. Aurora erects her poetic legacy on subordinated women “to effect her own

³⁹³ For interpretations of that New Jerusalem, see Cooper 187; David 1985, 119; Houston 231; Hudd 80; Stone 1987, 122; B. Taylor 1992, 25; Thorne-Murphy 242; Zonana 242, 259.

³⁹⁴ Cooper 186; see Brophy 273-4, 283; David 1987, 104, 115; Gottlieb 57-9; Hickok 131; Houston 214; Leighton 147; Mermin 204; Reynolds 11, 41. See Case 17-30, for the generic balancing act EBB's *Küstlerroman*-as-love-story has to perform to merge the two narrative modes. Reynolds has wondered at EBB's depiction of Marian's physical attributes which seem to be the poet's own (see *AL* 3.809-26, 6.399-401, 9.277-8): “That Marian should be depicted as her author's physical self, while the character of Aurora portrayed her intellectual self-construction in writing, suggests again the inevitable duality which Barrett Browning conceived as necessary to the writing woman” (Reynolds 45).

³⁹⁵ B. Taylor 1992, 24; see S. Brown 2005, 193. For the long-standing tradition of reading *Aurora Leigh's* speaker as proximate to and sometimes indistinguishable from EBB, see Armstrong 1993, 369-70; David 1985, 133.

transformation into subjectivity,” and to showcase the poet’s daring political vision and aesthetic innovation.³⁹⁶

After reading reviews of *Aurora Leigh* ranking the work among the most important contributions to the ‘Woman Question,’ EBB wrote to Julia Martin in 1858 that she “did not fancy that this poem would be so identified as it has been, with that question, which was only a collateral object with my intentions in writing.”³⁹⁷ Although EBB had aligned herself openly with liberal feminists, collecting signatures for the married women’s property reform petition, she rejected the movement’s collectivist impulses.³⁹⁸ Campaigns for the expansion of women’s rights of the 1850s focused on property law and waged labor, and preceded early demands for suffrage in the 1860s. EBB supported women’s economic autonomy because, in liberal societies, individuality and citizenship derive from property ownership (see Dalley 527). Feminism and, to a lesser extent, socialism, wielders of the totalizing gaze EBB abhorred, remain “collateral” to the poet’s private individual liberty and expression. The truly politically radical element in *Aurora Leigh* is the free expression of Aurora’s erotic desire, her ecstatic expression of feminine selfhood. Yet, as critics have noted, that selfhood depends on *men’s* recognition and approval of her poetic mastery and originality as well as on Marian’s abjected body.³⁹⁹ To many feminist scholars’ frustration, EBB’s liberal feminist poetics pursue individual freedom for the widely-

³⁹⁶ Cooper 178; see Brophy 284.

³⁹⁷ Qtd. in Reynolds 18; see Cooper 195.

³⁹⁸ S. Brown 2005, 195; see Dalley 525-7. The petition was known among contemporaries as “as the petition of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Anna Jameson, Mary Howitt, Mrs. Gaskell” (Leighton 1992, 103). In 1856, she, “& the rest of us militant, foam with rage” over Coventry Patmore’s sentimental refutation of feminist claims to economic independence in “The Angel in the House” (*BC* 23:103-5).

³⁹⁹ Reynolds 17; see Dalley 536; C. Kaplan 34.

circulated poet rather than a collective feminist future.⁴⁰⁰ Although Aurora “co-opt[s] the ideological power” of the male artist to reconcile the previously incompatible roles of “woman” and “artist,”⁴⁰¹ that reconciliation is shaky: *Aurora Leigh* expresses an elite woman’s “fantasy of power” (Case 18, 30). The model Aurora suggests for women’s self-recognition and artistic work is hardly applicable to anyone else but herself, the exceptional subject of the female epic, even if her poetics claim an obligation to and responsibility for other women’s plight.⁴⁰²

Analogous to EBB’s treatment of feminism, scholars have also studied the representation of class difference and economic critique in *Aurora Leigh*. Isobel Armstrong notes that *Aurora Leigh*’s investigation of class relations is “far from adequate” because her political radicalism is “suffused with the affective life of poetic insight, [providing] a vision rather than a theory” (1993, 368-9). In imagining a sentimentally charged and “‘fixed’ vision of justice” rather than concrete steps to reform society EBB perpetuates conventional bourgeois stereotypes of the masses “which her private needs dictate as if they were absolute,” Margaret Reynolds warns.⁴⁰³ Angela Leighton points to the uneasy juxtaposition of EBB’s reverence for individualism and her concern for the greater good of society (1992, 109). Likewise, Cora Kaplan notes that EBB’s “answer to the misery of the poor” lies in “her own brand of Christian love—and poetry,” a

⁴⁰⁰ EBB wrote to Mitford that she was “not ... a very strong partizan on the Rights-of-woman-side of the argument—at least I have not been, since I was twelve years old. I believe that, considering men & women in the mass, there is an inequality of intellect, and that it is proved by the very state of things of which gifted women complain,— & more than proved by the manner in which their complaint is received by their own sisterhood” (*BC* 10:83-5). EBB claimed that women’s inferior education was to blame for this intellectual disparity, and expressed support for women reformers, particularly writers (C. Kaplan 6-7; see David 1985, 115).

⁴⁰¹ Case 18; see Hudd 68.

⁴⁰² Borrowing from Carlyle, Aurora considers writing poetry an “epic action” leading to a new social order (Mermin 183; see Gottlieb 80). Of course, the size and breadth of EBB’s oeuvre as well as critics’ veneration of her set the standard for women poets afterwards.

⁴⁰³ Reynolds 41; see Brophy 285; Hudd 80; Lawson and Shakinovsky 107; Thorne-Murphy 242.

response to class conflict that appears even less materially satisfactory to present-day critics than solutions proposed by nineteenth-century socialists (C. Kaplan 12). Although critics concede that EBB's artistic project takes a socially radical stance with its powerful proclamations of women's shared experience of sexualized oppression, they also caution that, overall, EBB fails to imagine that the psychological response to that oppression differs depending on social class.⁴⁰⁴ Marian's transformation from 'pure body' to sanctification suggests that her rescue is contingent on the absence of self-generated desire because such desire would raise the specter of working-class sexual dissolution. With this in mind, Cora Kaplan argues that EBB's "theory of art and politics" is largely divorced from "material reality and deeply elitist" (12). This latter insight is far from new: John Nichol, writing for the *Westminster Review* in 1857, had already sharply criticized EBB's figuring of heroic verse as reformist action. Nichol writes that

Art and the perfection of the poetic sentiments follow, or are contemporaneous with an age of prosperity. They do not constitute, nor can they supply the place of material comforts and free institutions. Artistic culture, far from standing in the place of philanthropic effort, depends upon the success of that effort for its own permanence. (412)

I would like to build on such suggestive critique and flesh out *Aurora Leigh*'s anti-collectivist politics further. I suggest that, in addition to borrowing male poets' ideological power to justify her status as social prophet, EBB employs the strategies of middle-class social reformers and female philanthropists to write the female poet into liberal—and professional—subjectivity. Instead of relinquishing the socialist methods advocated by Aurora's cousin

⁴⁰⁴ It warrants highlighting as just how daring and transgressive EBB's portrayal of Marian was received in the conservative press. The *Spectator* noted that

in the story of Marian Erle she has joined together the central incident of Clarissa Harlowe with the leading sentiment of Ruth—that healing and reconciling influence of the maternal passion for a child whose birth is, according to common worldly feeling, the mother's disgrace. The combination is striking and original, not to say courageous in a lady. We mention it to disavow any feeling of repugnance to the moral, though we certainly do question the propriety and good taste of introducing the Clarissa Harlowe calamity under any amount of reserve, or for any emotional effect, in poem or novel. The bar of the Old Bailey is the only place where we wish to hear of such things. ("Mrs. Browning's *Aurora Leigh*" 1240).

Romney wholesale, EBB reimagines the relationship between elite and poor women as an individualistic reform project carried out by the working maternal philanthropist. The exceptional woman poet opens her own home to the fallen woman and establishes her verse as the institution in charge of social healing.

“All Your Social Labor Come to Nought”: EBB Writes the British Dystopia

Although the early nineteenth-century Christian socialists Robert Owen and Charles Fourier famously advocated for the relief of the oppressed, they are not treated generously in *Aurora Leigh*. EBB had some knowledge of their theories and distrusted them (Leighton 1992, 108). She had gleaned information about Fourierism—and French socialism generally—in an article of the *North British Review* in 1849 that covered the reception of Fourier’s theories by German socialist writers (*BC* 16: 228-9). The British reviewer pointedly noted that Fourier held “singularly liberal views on the emancipation of women,” a reference to the socialist’s famous correlation of women’s emancipation and society’s claim to civilization.⁴⁰⁵ Although she agreed that women should be safe from sexual assault—an idea central to Fourier’s conception of utopian community, the Phalanx—EBB was worried about socialism’s cost to individual freedom. In 1848, she wrote to Mary Russell Mitford

But make a government-scheme of even so much, & you seem to trench on the individual liberty— All such patriarchal planning in a government, issues naturally into absolutism ... Liberty & civilization when married together lawfully, rather evolve Individuality than tend to generalization. Is this not true? I fear, I fear that mad theories promising the impossible, may in turn make the people mad. (*BC* 15:48-52)

Dismissing socialism’s “impossible” promise to upend class distinctions, EBB evinces the fear of the mob that was common in her circle. Writing to Isa Blagden in 1850, she opined that if

⁴⁰⁵ “Art. IV. German Socialism 424”; see Thorne Murphy 248.

Fourierism could be realised, which it surely cannot ... the destinies of our race would shrivel up under the unnatural heat, & human nature would, in my mind, be desecrated & dishonored. Because I do not [believe] in purification without suffering, in progress without struggle, in virtue without temptation—Least of all, do I consider happiness the end of man's life. We look to higher things—have nobler ambitions. Also, in every advancement of the world hitherto, the individual has led the masses. Thus, to elicit individuality, has been the object of the best political institutions & governments. Now, in these new theories, the individual is ground down into the multitude ... Genius is *always individual*.⁴⁰⁶

Two years later, EBB referred again to socialist maxims' threat to individualism, saying that she "would rather ... live under the absolutism of Nicolas of Russia, than in a Fourier-machine, with my individuality sucked out of me by a social air-pump" (*BC* 16:136-40). Feudal class distinctions appear more palatable to EBB than the equalizing technologies invented by socialism. EBB's moralizing stance in these letters—her privileged dismissal of "happiness," her virtuous normalization of mass "suffering" and "struggle," her reverence for "noble" individual leaders—must grate feminist scholars' sensibilities, despite their integral contribution to *Aurora Leigh*'s theory of poetics. Although she liked to style herself as a "democrat" in her correspondence, EBB understood the concept to signify the people's will to instate powerful heads of state, such as Louis Napoléon, who promised to protect traditional hierarchies and social order. EBB's "veneer of democracy was easily scratched," writes Cora Kaplan, especially when her writing addressed mass popular movements.⁴⁰⁷

In *Aurora Leigh*, Aurora rejects socialist methodology for its totalizing, materialist grasp of society in the form of "aggregates," "systems," and "statistics" (*AL* 8.801-2), leaving little

⁴⁰⁶ *BC* 16: 228-9; emphasis EBB's. EBB echoes Mill in her assertion that the individual under socialism would be "ground down" (see Dalley 529).

⁴⁰⁷ C. Kaplan 32-3; see Mermin 204; B. Taylor 2008, 410. For one of the dozen claims to being a "democrat," see, for example, *BC* 17:208-15. In *Aurora Leigh*, EBB more often than not associates herself with the landed classes whose power continued to shrink (David 1987, 113).

room for the female will.⁴⁰⁸ Throughout the poem, Aurora counters socialist theory with an assertion of idealism's superior capacity to work social change: "Fouriers failed, / [b]ecause not poets enough to understand / [t]hat life develops from within" (AL 2.484-5). Her theory of political progress requires the "poet's individualism / [t]o work your universal" as well as "a high-souled man, / [t]o move the masses ... [i]t takes the ideal, to blow an inch inside / [t]he dust of the actual" (AL 2.478-83). Aurora mocks Romney's marriage proposal by accusing him of already being wed to "social theory" (AL 2.409-10). Imagined as a sexual competitor, Romney's Fourierism—particularly his experimental Phalanstery that welcomes everyone, including fallen women—impedes Aurora's capacity to develop her own political vision and become a subject under the auspices of liberal capitalism.

Romney's loss of sight at the poem's conclusion literalizes his initial blindness with regards to Aurora's promise as a poet, and punishes him for his political myopia, aggressive declaration of masculine superiority, and his plans to marry Marian (see C. Kaplan 24). After an angry mob burns down his Phalanstery, Romney realizes that the poor are constitutionally unfit to embrace the order that his Utopian socialism promises. This insight and the destruction of his

⁴⁰⁸ See Reynolds 17; Dalley 533-4. EBB is echoing Carlyle here—she was "an adorer" of his writings (BC 5:276-84). In his essays, Thomas Carlyle posited that poetry would serve as a counterweight and antidote to the English obsession with "*Mechanics*," that is, statistical data, "external circumstances," and their political manifestation in legislation such as the 1832 Reform Bill ("Sign of the Times" 472-3; see Bristow 14). In "Signs of the Times" (1829), for instance, Carlyle invokes the quasi-divine "primary, unmodified forces and energies of man, the mysterious springs of Love, and Fear, and Wonder, of Enthusiasm, Poetry, Religion" (474). In "Characteristics," Carlyle bemoaned the separation of "Opinion and Action" in English society, imagining that the Roman Republic owed its vigor to that fact that "individual man was in himself a whole, or complete union." For Carlyle, "the Poet" personifies the simultaneity of prophetic opinion and action, indicator of an age's "vigour and well-being" and of the nation's "true health and oneness" ("Characteristics" 357-8). Throughout, Carlyle imagined the Poet to be male. He mentioned in his notebook that "there are female geniuses too, minds that admire and receive, but can hardly create. I have observed that in these also the taste for religion and poetry go together" (Froude 98). EBB challenged Carlyle's notion of an essential male poetic genius in *Aurora Leigh*, appropriating his insistence on work and that on work as independent from the calculations of political economy, even if her pronouncements are less sure-footed than Carlyle's. She reworks his hero by adding to it women's sympathy and sexual/spiritual love (Bristow 16; see Cooper 162; Dalley 537; Gottlieb 79-80).

ancestral estate (read: the poor will eradicate old wealth without using it productively) produces a shock that blinds him.⁴⁰⁹ EBB framed the blindness as a positive spiritual awakening for Romney, telling Sarianna Browning that Romney “had to be blinded, observe, to be made to see,” similarly to Marian who “had to be dragged through the uttermost debasement of circumstances, to arrive at the sentiment of personal dignity.”⁴¹⁰ Romney, after his “violent reconfiguration,” if not castration, considers himself “[t]urned out of nature, / mulcted as a man” and, accordingly, asks Aurora to speak for both of them.⁴¹¹ He also finally accepts that art and poetry are more beneficial to society than socialism’s political instruments, abandons his work, and promises to support Aurora’s.⁴¹² Aurora may thus pursue her ambition to cure the nation’s ills through poetry while receiving sexual gratification. She slips into the masculine role vis-à-vis Romney but yet secures the respectability of a married woman, and, as an added bonus, keeps her aristocratic family’s wealth together. This ending establishes Aurora as a working wife, incidentally free from the threat of rape, birthing ever more poetry to influence other men’s perception of the world and founding “new dynasties in the race of men” (*AL* 9.945).⁴¹³ On a less exalted level, Aurora binds an infantilized and dependent Romney to herself, as she does Marian.

⁴⁰⁹ See David 1987, 136. Much has been made of Romney’s similarity to *Jane Eyre*’s Rochester, an analogy that EBB steadfastly denied, claiming in a letter to Anna Jameson that she had forgotten the particulars of the novel’s ending (*BC* 23:163-6). George Eliot reviewed *Aurora Leigh* in the *Westminster Review* and pointed out the similarity, complaining that “the lavish mutilation of heroes’ bodies, which has become the habit of novelists, while it happily does not represent probabilities in the present state of things, weakens instead of strengthening tragic effect” (408). EBB had Milton rather than Rochester in mind, as she told Jameson. See also Armstrong 1993, 368; Carpenter 52-5; C. Kaplan 24, 32; Rosenblum 335; Zonana 258.

⁴¹⁰ *BC* 23:148-50; see Reynolds 43-4. The only main character in the poem who is not materially degraded or physically injured is Aurora herself (Hudd 67).

⁴¹¹ *AL* 9.564; S. Brown 2005, 195; see David 1985, 124; Faulk 51; C. Kaplan 24.

⁴¹² C. Kaplan 8; see Mermin 202-4.

⁴¹³ Cooper 187; see Armstrong 1993, 368; Mermin 183.

Marriage to Romney gives life to Aurora's poetry, and allows her to claim the role of "literary 'grandmother' of future generations" of women writers.⁴¹⁴

Just as she considered Romney as figuratively married to his "social theory," Aurora frames the social conflict between elite and pauper social strata—and her involuntary spectatorship of and competition with this conflict ("What a sight!" *AL* 4.550)—as a specifically spectacular and sexual problem. Romney's *idée fixe* of marrying Marian serves his larger goal to unite the classes both figuratively and literally by creating a new line of biologically mixed-class people. On the day of Romney's abortive wedding, Aurora paints a "vicious picture" of the poor entering St. James who breathe the "unaccustomed air / [w]ith hideous interfusion."⁴¹⁵ EBB's grotesque descriptions provide visual evidence as to why Romney can never marry 'down.' As Aurora notes from her elevated place by the altar, the "people," attending the service "uncompelled," are composed of the "[l]ame, blind, and worse-sick, sorrowful, and worse" (*AL* 4.543-4). Romney's wish to heal "the peccant social wound" by marrying Marian seems laughable to Aurora when she gazes upon the sheer mass of the "miserable" poor, the walking personifications of the social wound's "humours," as society's pus is being "pressed out, poured down upon Pimlico," the fashionable residential district in London's West End (*AL* 4.544-51). They are already dead, Aurora speculates; she sees a "finished generation, dead of the plague / [s]wept outward from their graves" with the "moil of death upon them" (*AL* 4.548-50). The

⁴¹⁴ B. Taylor 1992, 25; see O. Taylor 2006, 153. This is a function that EBB certainly performed, historically speaking. *Aurora Leigh* was read by "everybody in polite society," including the Queen, and the text became a "universal" text modeling the economic liberation of women (C. Kaplan 14). EBB was delighted when she learned that parents prohibited their daughters from reading the poem and that it changed the minds of elderly matrons. This should serve as a reminder that, under the right circumstances, women poets did have enormous cultural impact on economic thought and that the poet's lone vision in fact realized its "revolutionary potential" (Dalley 539).

⁴¹⁵ First quote from C. Kaplan 11; *AL* 4.546-7; see Bristow 17; Brophy 273; Carpenter 64; Cooper 165; David 1985, 128; Faulk 50; Hudd 66.

poor's politicized presence in the privileged space of St. James, rendered as a contagion, threatens "the very life of the middle-class body" (Levy 37-8). EBB, borrowing from social science writing of her time, represents social and economic relations as moral or hygienic information since morality allows for the atomized focus on society that she prefers. With the individual as the sole relevant category of social observation, she neutralizes the visual evidence of increasing poverty that threatens Aurora's and her peers' complacency (see Levy 26). As if these observations—made over fifteen lines—were not enough, Aurora continues the drawn-out descriptions of urban misery, and the spectacle's reception by the rich, for another fifty lines, immersing her middle-class audience in the horrific spectacle of the mob.

I would like to linger on this scene a while longer because I take seriously critics' caution that EBB "literally had no experience of the society she set out to represent"; her depiction of society's ills is neither "very clear-sighted [nor] informed."⁴¹⁶ Sheltered for most of her life, EBB's knowledge of the poor came from printed sources. She famously considered herself to be a member in an aesthetic elite, "mythologizing herself as a member of that clerisy of poets" and advancing a high poetic vision of an improved society (David 1987, 105-6, 101). Her advantageous viewpoint depended almost entirely on the representations of society she found in materials written by mostly middle-class male writers such as newspapers, journals, novels, and parliamentary reports. Starting in the 1830s, for example, the *Times* ran detailed crime and court reports as well as Parliamentary briefs on social ills in England's cities. Next to immersing herself in the complete *Report of the Royal Commission on the Employment of Children and Young Persons in Mines and Manufactories*⁴¹⁷ in February 1843—her correspondent R. H. Home

⁴¹⁶ David 1987, 105; Leighton 150.

⁴¹⁷ See Kidd 85-6. This reading gave rise to "The Cry of the Children," published in August 1843 in *Blackwood's*.

was one of the report's authors—EBB likely read journalistic commentary on labor conditions in factories, mines, and on living conditions in slums and working-class neighborhoods on a weekly, if not daily, basis.⁴¹⁸ The working-class world described in these writings mirrors the one EBB employs in *Aurora Leigh*. That world is imagined as assaulting the senses with its

stench, squalor, and disease, of open privies, of prostitutes and beggars living in dens which resembled animal lairs rather than human dwellings: it is a world consistently rendered in the language of the inferno where bodies tumble together in crowded hovels, dunghills dominate the landscape, and all is festering and pestilential. (David 1985, 127).

The widening cultural gap between rich and poor in mid-Victorian England led bourgeois observers to articulate a “loss of personal knowledge about the poor and loss of influence over their behavior in an increasingly impersonal social order” (Kidd 74). Since nineteenth-century newspapers and periodicals often utilized literary registers to convey the living condition of the working classes, particularly gothic images and melodramatic affect, literariness itself becomes an agent intervening in the elite's understanding of poverty.⁴¹⁹ Working-class neighborhoods turn into gothic landscapes, and their inhabitants are imagined as demonic and grotesque warren-dwellers (D'Cruze 1998, 173, 185).

Observers like Henry Mayhew stipulated that large mixed-sex congregations of people led to moral deterioration and imagined working-class people as “disordered space[s] lacking appropriate boundaries,” “ooz[ing]” into places not meant for them and threatening to roll back civilization's achievements.⁴²⁰ EBB's depiction is directly based on such early sociological

⁴¹⁸ David 1985, 127; see Armstrong 1993, 368; D'Cruze 1998, 176-7; C. Kaplan 32-3; Mermin 187. EBB ventured into working class “slums” only once in 1846 to deliver ransom money for the release of her abducted dog Flush (Mermin 187).

⁴¹⁹ The gothic was fashionable throughout the nineteenth century and permeated both elite and popular culture. Sublimated from traditional folk beliefs, the gothic energized artists' and scholars' interest in folklore—in EBB's case, the traditional ballad (see McDonagh 119).

⁴²⁰ Levy 31; see Barret-Ducrocq 7, 19-20.

accounts. She imagines the mob as a “crammed mass,” that “clogged the streets, ... oozed into the church / [i]n a dark slow stream, like blood.” The multitude of people “[c]rawled slowly toward the altar from the street, / [a]s bruised snakes crawl and hiss out of a hole,” and the “noble ladies stood up in their pews, / [s]ome pale for fear, a few as red for hate” to “watch the “ugly crest / [o]f faces,”⁴²¹ never seen “in the open day: / [t]hey hide in cellars, not to make you mad” (*AL* 4.554-73). Elite spectators are driven mad by the fearful sight of the social body’s hostile multiplicity, a reminder of the elite’s inferiority in numbers and the fragility of individual selfhood. These descriptions, with their “heightened emotion, stylized presentation, ... use of the grotesque or the fantastic, ... solicitation of some sort of cathartic effect of either fear or pity in the audience” are quintessential Victorian social melodrama (D’Cruze 1998, 185).

Aurora, as privileged observer, is convinced that outer appearance, grotesquely exaggerated, reflects the mind’s essence; that ugliness indicates and results from inner moral degradation. This convenient shortcut between aesthetics and virtue enables Aurora to deduce that, with their “worn-out” “countenances” and “garments,” the people are disposed to sin: “the will dissolute as the acts, / [t]he passions loose and draggling in the dirt”; “[f]aces . . phew, / [w]e’ll call them vices festering to despairs, / [o]r sorrows petrifying to vices.” Above all, the mob contains bad mothers with

babies, hanging like a rag
 Forgotten on their mother’s neck,—poor mouths.
 Wiped clean of mother’s milk by mother’s blow
 Before they are taught her cursing. (*AL* 4.576-85)

⁴²¹ Stott notes that working-class crowds were often figured in terms of rising waves, composed of indistinguishable parts (191). At the end of the poem, Romney describes his own similarly grotesque view of the poor: “I beheld the world / [a]s one great famishing carnivorous mouth,— / [a] huge, deserted, callow, black, bird Thing, / [w]ith piteous open beak that hurt my heart, / [t]ill down upon the filthy ground I dropped, / [a]nd tore the violets up to get the worms” (*AL* 8.395-400).

The images employed—flowing blood and mother’s milk—are connected to the female body and interweave EBB’s vision of urban poverty with the condition of England’s mothers.⁴²² In this scene, EBB deploys the old organicist notion of society that projects class distinctions as “inevitable, indeed, divinely ordained” (Kidd 74). Hence, in Aurora’s view, the social body, mobilized in unnatural uproar against itself, bleeds and festers; the reproduction of the unruly masses is imagined as a cancerous growth attacking the body’s virtuous, stabilizing center. Aurora blames the mob, struggling against its duty to be subservient, industrious, and, above all, invisible, for bringing about its own misery. Her focus on the women in the crowd suggests that she identifies England’s poor women as both cause of and solution to the problem, deflecting the threat of working-class men’s agitation and growing political influence. The women in the mob are vicious, hard, and utterly degraded. Their cousin, as we will see below, is the helpless, miserable mother, modest, submissive, and beautiful. Both are exaggerated types, filtered through the unshakeable bourgeois entitlement to deference and subservience. As the direct distribution of cash relief to poor unmarried mothers was politically unpopular at the time, middle-class reformers founded institutions, such as schools, hospitals, and reform homes to relieve misery and discipline women’s minds and bodies (see Kidd 68, 84). EBB resists her contemporaries’ grand-scale institutional reflexes, selecting a single victimized working-class mother as the deserving applicant for charity.

Poor mothers “haunt the poem with the demonic vitality of nightmare” (Mermin 203).

Striking in Aurora’s mob scene are the absence of compassion for people’s “sorrows” that have

⁴²² See David 1987, 103; Hudd 66; C. Kaplan 11; L. Lewis 57. Although Marian’s working-class body is the unstable site of progressive sexual politics, as I will show below, the social body represented here suggests irremediable social conflict. The maternal images associated with the mob—flood of blood and, in other passages, of milk (4.633)—redirect a potential critique of mass poverty to a liberal feminist program based on exceptional women’s reproductive capacity (Hudd 66).

“petrif[ied] to vices” and the inability to causally link the poverty of the mob to the “broidered hems of perfumed handkerchiefs” and “moiré silk” of elite female spectators (*AL* 4.561-3). Poverty, to Aurora and members of her station, is primarily aesthetically unpleasant and psychologically frightening. Aurora’s lines, meant to educate readers “in superior cultural values” (David 1987, 106), naturalize extreme class differences and lament the mob’s distance from the imagined, mythical cultural unity to which her poetry aspires. When Aurora later describes the pre-industrial Eden of Italy, its pastoral beauty is heightened by the earlier extended discourse on London’s urban ugliness.

Rape, Metaphorical and Actual: Aurora as Danae and Marian as Martyr

Aurora Leigh, with its sustained references to rape and prostitution, has been rightly read as a forceful appeal to end “man’s violence” (*AL* 6.1226) and, integral to that violence, women’s financial dependence on men. EBB’s public appeal against rape as social problem is complicated—and politically troubled—by EBB’s invocation of metaphorical rape by a deity, borrowed from Greek mythology, to describe the gestation and birth of the poet’s inspiration.⁴²³ Since *Aurora Leigh*’s plot is that of Aurora’s progress towards acceptance of her sexual passion, and because Marian’s rape constitutes this plot’s critical turning point, the figurative and literal manifestations of rape in the poem coexist uneasily.⁴²⁴ When the poet eventually integrates body and soul, she creates her artistic legacy, the manuscript of *Aurora Leigh*. Marian, on the other hand, experiences sexual violence as the inverse of Aurora’s life-giving poetry. Rape irrevocably harms the integrity of the imagined working-class body (Thorne-Murphy 246), although Marian

⁴²³ Thorne-Murphy 241; see Houston 232.

⁴²⁴ See Mermin 211; Faulk 49.

achieves redemption through her son—"God's triumph" (AL 7.331)—and moves from "the uttermost debasement of circumstances" to spiritual elevation.⁴²⁵ She inverts Aurora's trajectory who, initially denying her body, 'sinks' to hear the pulse of her own, passionate blood. Aurora's poetics are based on her ambition to speak as England's healing prophet-mother, uniting the spiritual and physical realms because their cultural division prefigures and enables Marian's rape (see Zonana 256).

As scholars have cautioned, the multiple, interlocking rape motifs in *Aurora Leigh*, especially rape's proximity to women's poetic inspiration, risk trivializing the experience of sexual violence (L. Lewis 65). Aurora, the privileged receptacle of divine truth, variously takes on the role of Ganymede, Danae⁴²⁶, and Io⁴²⁷, and, imagining herself to be pregnant with poetry,

⁴²⁵ See David 1985, 133; B. Taylor 1992, 25; O. Taylor 2006, 158-60; Zonana 256. EBB's conservative readers, for instance Nichol in the *Westminster Review*, certainly appreciated Marian's transformation into the Stabat Mater: "There is nothing more exquisite in the poem than some of the lines which refer to this infant ... a picture of innocence and maternal fondness such as perhaps has never before been realized in verse... Aurora's self-consciousness repels—her speculations do not much interest us ... There is something about Marian, on the other hand, that is especially attractive. All the little incidents of her early life, ... the way she tells her tale, with the exception of one or two misplaced scientific phrases, so artless and natural,—the shrinking, clinging, half reverence, half love she feels for Romney, combine to exhibit a winning beauty and grace. But nothing in the book is so grand as the revelation to Aurora of her dreadful secret—how... lured into a home of horror in France, she "fell unaware, and came to butchery" (Nichol 409-10). *Blackwood's* reviewer, ridiculing Marian's diction but finding her otherwise "very beautifully drawn and well sustained," did not care much for Aurora's "extreme independence" either because it "detracts from the feminine charm, and mars the interest which we otherwise might have felt in so intellectual a heroine" ("Mrs. Barrett Browning—*Aurora Leigh*" 33).

⁴²⁶ Zeus desired the shepherd boy Ganymede, transformed into an eagle, and took the boy to Mount Olympus. Aurora, in her "masculine stage as a young poet" imagines herself to be carried away by "poetry, my life / [m]y eagle ... who has ravished me / [a]way from all the shepherds, sheep, and dogs, / [a]nd set me in the Olympian roar and round ... [a]nd swoon back to the earth,—and find ourselves / [f]ace-down among the pine-cones, cold with dew" (AL 1.918-31; see L. Lewis 65). In the classical myth, Danae is the daughter of King Acrisius. Her father has been warned by the oracle that Danae's child will murder him and he imprisons her for his safety. Danae is visited in her brass tower cell by Zeus, disguised as a shower of gold, and is impregnated. Her son Perseus kills Acrisius and the Medusa, among others. The Medusa's blood, in turn, is transformed into Pegasus whose hoof-prints create Hippocrene, the Muses' springs (see Zonana 255). The shower of gold, via the virgin's body, becomes the spring that sustains poetry. See Thorne-Murphy 244; see Faulk 50

⁴²⁷ Zeus "seduced" Io, then turned her into a heifer, and condemned her to wander the world aimlessly, continuously stung by a gadfly. Writing "embryo[nic]" verses as a younger woman, she "felt ... in me where it burnt, / [I]ike those hot fire-seeds of creation held / [i]n Jove's clenched palm before the worlds were sown." Aurora's ambiguously genital pain is immature since she has not yet identified with her essential feminine eroticism; she is aware of—but unable to alter—her hysterical ineffectiveness marked by "weak convulsion, woman's ill" (AL 3.247;

incompletely shields the reader from the rape's terrors. Aurora theorizes the process of poetic inspiration when she reflects on two sketches drawn by her painter-friend, Vincent Carrington. The sketches represent Danae in "[t]wo states of the recipient artist-soul" (*AL* 3.139). The first one depicts

A tiptoe Danae, overbold and hot:
Both arms a-flame to meet her wishing Jove
Halfway, and burn him faster down; the face
And breasts upturned and straining, the loose locks
All glowing with the anticipated gold. (*AL* 3.122-6)

Aurora rejects this first version of the eager and hungry Danae because it represents the artist as she puts herself "forward, personal, wanting reverence, / because aspiring only" (*AL* 3.140-1).

Aurora, valuing inspiration over ambition, prefers the second sketch in which Danae

lies here—flat upon her prison-floor,
The long hair swathed about her to the heel,
Like wet sea-weed. You dimly see her through
The glittering haze of that prodigious rain,
Half blotted out of nature by a love
As heavy as fate. (*AL* 3.128-33)

Looking at the prostrate woman about to be ravished by Zeus, Aurora notes that Danae's "[s]elf is put away, / [a]nd calm with abdication" (*AL* 3.135-6). The poet's communion with the ever-concupiscent god, the convergence of the spiritual and material, are figured as sexual communion (Thorne-Murphy 246). Aurora notes that, at the moment of rapture, the woman in her cell "is Jove / [a]nd no more Danae—greater thus" (*AL* 3.136-7). She tells herself to "be

251-3; 255; see L. Lewis 54-5; B. Taylor 1992, 20). In Book 7, the mature Aurora muses that "[w]hen Jove's hand meets us with composing touch, / [a]nd when, at last, we are hushed and satisfied,— / [t]hen, Io does not call it truth, but love?" (*AL* 7.895-7). The body's post-coital stillness implied here inspires Aurora's poetry. Beverly Taylor suggests that over the course of *Aurora Leigh*, Aurora replaces Danae with Io as the exemplary female artist, combining intellectual, spiritual, passionate, and physical domains (1992, 23-4). Aurora, practicing her stillness (but "still" struggling), feels "hound[ed] ... through the wastes of life / [a]s Jove did Io; and, until that Hand / [s]hall overtake me wholly, and, on my head, / [l]ay down its large, unfluctuating peace, / [t]he feverish gad-fly pricks me up and down" (*AL* 7.828-35; see Faulk 51; Zonana 256).

calm, / [a]nd know that, when indeed our Joves come down, / [w]e all turn stiller than we have ever been” (*AL* 3.141-3), becoming entirely subsumed by the deity’s presence—“complete, consummate, undivided,” like her ideal of poetical work (*AL* 7.839). Aurora’s image equates the process of poetic inspiration with penetration by an omniscient male muse. Defying the poetical tradition of the female muse, the virgin poet’s “self is annihilated in passionate receptivity” (Mermin 211), and during the insemination by the “glittering haze,” her body transforms into the agent of divine poetic truth. In Aurora’s imagination, female body and male divinity merge, and considerations of sex disappear when confronted with the truth of bodily and spiritual love that marks the presence of the divine in the poet’s body.⁴²⁸ Aurora imagines that the differences between prostitute and prophet, female and male corporeality, are moot when held up against the principle of an “idealized male potency” that naturally seeks to fill a “passive female vessel” with divine ejaculate.⁴²⁹ Aurora’s artistic ambition and desire are framed in terms of private fantasy of erotic abandonment and submission, to be realized in her physical union with Romney at the end of the poem (L. Lewis 65). Since references to Greek mythology functioned as class and gender markers in Victorian writing—one had to be classically trained at the university to comprehend *Aurora Leigh*’s dense web of allusions⁴³⁰—the poet’s fantasy of being raped by Zeus/Jove reproduces high-minded art—not a mundane bastard child. EBB participates here in a long-standing tradition of indicating the sexual act in respectable literature without subjecting it

⁴²⁸ See Armstrong 1993, 369-70; L. Lewis 65; Faulk 51; Houston 231; Mermin 210-11; B. Taylor 1992, 22; O. Taylor 2006, 154; Thorne-Murphy 244-6; Zonana 253-6. Deirdre David warns that Aurora continues the Victorian notion that women lack a strong sense of individualism; Aurora says, for example, that women “yearn to lose ourselves / [a]nd melt like white pearls in another’s wine” (5.1078-9; David 1985, 130).

⁴²⁹ See Houston 231; Stone 1987, 103-4.

⁴³⁰ EBB had herself been tutored by Classicists. See Stone 1987, 115-6.

to realistic parameters. The “[d]escriptive haze” produced by references to streams, waves, oceans, rays or showers of light, or opening blossoms invites the reader to “experience sex’s capacity to dislocate personal experience” while yet absolving the writer from committing an infraction of obscenity laws (Jarvis vii).

Still, the image of Danae, lying “flat upon her prison-floor”⁴³¹ beneath a “love / [a]s heavy as fate” adds unsettling physical descriptions of ravishment, particularly when considering that Danae’s rape and Marian’s exist in a shared symbolic domain. The image of Danae’s reception of Zeus, with her “long hair swathed about to her heel / [l]ike wet seaweed,” is later doubled by Marian, who, realizing that her mother intends to sell her body, stands “drenched and passive” with her “waterfall” of hair, “blinded” by her “stream / [o]f tresses (*AL* 3.1046-50). Zeus’s “prodigious rain” of gold reappears in Marian’s sale to the squire (see Mermin 211). While rape by a god brings Aurora’s poetry to life, aesthetically and spiritually, the rape of Marian separates the virgin’s body and spirit, figuratively murdering her. Aurora’s risky downward movement and Marian’s upward rise from the “gutter” both begin at the crucial narrative juncture of Aurora’s radical realization a raped woman may be chaste.⁴³²

⁴³¹ Aurora reenacts the scene at the very end of Book 7 when she lies down on the floor of the Tuscan church, listening only to the “run and beat” of her own blood which, in turn, is figured as the rhythm of her verse (*AL* 7.1270; see O. Taylor 2006, 154-5; Zonana 255). The result of this new-found passivity is that Aurora, at the beginning of Book 8, has learned to register her body’s autonomous and divine physical desire and writes out a steamy fantasy sequence that is a thinly-veiled masturbatory dream of sexual union with a “sea-king” and his “slippery locks,” followed by the evacuation of the poet’s womb—poetry is born (*AL* 8.32-48).

⁴³² Despite its sometimes flowery language, Acton’s 1857 tome on prostitution directly challenged the melodramatic plot popular literature—like *Aurora Leigh*—disseminated. He listed “three vulgar errors” in the public perception of prostitution: “1. That once a harlot, always a harlot. 2. That there is no possible advance, moral or physical, in the condition of the actual prostitute, 3. That the harlot’s progress is short and rapid” (52; see Walkowitz 45).

Marian is betrayed twice by mother figures, leading to her two social “deaths.” Marian’s mother sells her daughter’s virginity to the squire who threatens to destroy the family’s hut “like any other anthill.”⁴³³ Marian explains that “one day” her mother,

snatching in a sort of breathless rage
Her daughter’s headgear comb, let down the hair
Upon her like a sudden waterfall,
Then drew her drenched and passive by the arm
Outside the hut they lived in. (*AL* 3.1044-8)

Her mother’s release of Marian’s hair initiates the girl’s long fall. Newly enveloped by this prime cultural marker of erotic appeal, Marian faces

a man ... with beasts’ eyes
That seemed as they would swallow her alive,
Complete in body and spirit, hair and all,—
With burning stertorous breath that hurt her cheek,
He breathed so near. (*AL* 3.1050-4)

Marian escapes from this horrible earthly “Zeus,” a muse whose breath inspires terror rather than art (*Zonana* 257), faints, and awakens in a wagon transporting her to a hospital where she overhears the chatter of fallen women. Although she is still pure, the hospital, calm and regular, becomes Marian’s first graveyard (see *Faulk* 44). Romney visits Marian at the hospital and provides her with lodgings and a livelihood. Haunted by her mother’s plan, Marian is then “adopted” by Lady Waldemar, whose former servant takes her to a Parisian brothel where she is drugged and violated and “murdered” again. Marian’s mothers bring about the poem’s central catastrophe since, in *EBB*’s moral universe, the dissolution of maternal bonds turns women into procuresses and invites male sexual violence: “When mothers fail us, can we help ourselves?”⁴³⁴

⁴³³ *AL* 3.836; see *Faulk* 48; *Lawson and Shakinovsky* 108; *Steinmetz* 352.

⁴³⁴ *AL* 6.1229; see *Leighton* 1992, 105.

In contrast to the poem's bad or absent mothers—Marian's, Aurora's, Lady Waldemar—Marian behaves like a child herself. Her timidity allows the abstract principle of saintly maternity to annex her identity at the end of the poem. Not even her body claims stable selfhood: her skin is neither "white [nor] brown," her hair "'twixt dark and bright," her neck unable to support her "drooping" yet "small ... head," complete with a child's "dimple" and "milky little teeth."⁴³⁵ Only Marian's profusion of hair—the only "fault" Aurora sees—reminds readers that this is "a full-blown rose" with "large ... mouth" and sunken cheeks. Marian's fate as exchanged, rejected, beaten, violated, and sublimated body appears to be mythically pre-ordained which allows Aurora, once confronted with Marian's maternity, to slip seamlessly into the role of Marian's maternal benefactor.⁴³⁶ Aurora idealizes Marian as a modern version of the "intact" Virgin Mary, victimized rather than polluted by desire (see C. Kaplan 25).

When Aurora initially visits Marian in her room at Oxford Street, she relates Marian's words as she understands rather than hears them. Marian is imagined to speak

with simple, rustic turns,
Strong leaps of meaning in her sudden eyes
That took the gaps of any imperfect phrase
Of the unschooled speaker (*AL* 4.151-4)

Aurora claims to "re-tell" the story "with fuller utterance," "coloured ... in after times" (*AL* 3.827-30). She remarks that Marian showed less passion in telling than becomes evident in the poem; the poet overrides the "dumb creature[']s" "savage spontaneity."⁴³⁷ Announcing that she

⁴³⁵ *AL* 3.810-23; see Faulk 44; Rosenblum 331.

⁴³⁶ See Faulk 49; Lawson and Shakinovsky 116-7.

⁴³⁷ *AL* 4.159, 163. See Lawson and Shakinovsky 122, on Marian's illiteracy and inability to access Romney and Aurora's cultural scripts, despite their shared belief that Marian, "poor at writing, at the best,—and yet / [trying] to make my gs the way you showed" (*AL* 4.983-4), should try to marry herself out of her chaotic world. Walkowitz notes that working-class girls were usually socialized to display diffidence in the home and at work. Daughters, already culturally devalued, were expected to support themselves or their family as soon as they were physically

does not quote Marian verbatim but records her own interpretation of Marian's words, Aurora slips into the simultaneous roles of amanuensis and magistrate—inquiring, recording, editing, and correcting. The problem of mediation of Marian's (already fictional) story is compounded by the fact that, until the third book, Aurora writes retrospectively, inhabiting a previous dogmatic stance with regards to the working classes. Aurora's voice controls the poem, unifying the multitude's voices into a single—if sometimes unreliable—poetic narrator. Even when other characters' speech is directly reported, they are “refracted through Aurora's sensibility” (Hudd 79). At the time Aurora emerges mature at the end of the poem, her imaginative perception of the poor is (potentially) altered by Marian's individual example, although her conservative social theories about the mob persist.⁴³⁸

No Subject without Rape

Walking through a Parisian flower market, Aurora muses on the possibility of creating a “completer poetry” via a “larger metaphysics” that would be more responsive to the people's needs than Romney's utopian socialist schemes. As she asserts the “word's” superiority to “phalansteries,” she freezes mid-sentence, having spotted the answer to her “completer poetry”: “What face is that?” (*AL* 6.231-40). Aurora has seen Marian, a child on her arm, an image emerging like a “dead face” arising from the bottom of a stagnant pond, “[s]o old, so new” (*AL* 6.239-40). At first Aurora does not report that she saw Marian holding a child and, revealing her struggle to comprehend that Marian has become a prostitute, defers the revelation: “The arms of

able—a custom bourgeois observers found distressing. Women who had experience fending for themselves were less likely to have been socialized thus and may have shown their dissatisfaction more readily (16, 20).

⁴³⁸ Armstrong 1993, 369; see Case 28-9.

that same Marian clasped a thing I ... / I cannot nam'e it now for what it was // [a] child" (*AL* 6.344-6). Over the course of the stanza break, Aurora moves from performing horrified silence when confronted with illegitimacy to breaking the representational taboo (Cooper 171).

Aurora's moral growth, intimately tied to Marian's fluid, unstable body, is figured through water imagery.⁴³⁹ Throughout *Aurora Leigh*, water symbolizes unknown possibilities of the future, "the destructive forces of time and fate" (Gottlieb 77). Aurora feels herself "plung[ing]" into the renewed acquaintance with Marian, now a mother, who twice frames her own fall as a "drowning" (*AL* 6.242, 6.1117). Meeting her again, Aurora insists on her ability to direct Marian to "speak such things and names such names / [i]n the open squares of Paris," and it is "[a]s if I led her by a narrow plank / [a]cross devouring waters, step by step" (*AL* 6.776-83). But their walk over roaring gulf of moral and social difference is aimless; Aurora does not yet have words for Marian's situation and, challenged by Marian's silence, remains mute as well. Aurora, far removed from her accustomed "drawing-rooms," cannot imagine life at the bottom of the pond. Marian insists that she must return to her child and

Then she led
The way, and I, as by a narrow plank
Across devouring waters, followed her[.]⁴⁴⁰

Marian's experience of sorrow authorizes her to take the lead across the devouring gulf between the classes, her son being "the silent object around whom the competing ideologies and discourses of Aurora and Marian whirl" (Cooper 186). Aurora and Marian both experience the

⁴³⁹ Marian looks "like a mist that changed" and throughout the poem she is associated with water: She has a soul made of "cataracts," her hair is likened to "a sudden waterfall," her "heart overflowed the world" (*AL* 3.811, 4.184, 3.1046, 3.1086; Lawson and Shakinovsky 106).

⁴⁴⁰ *AL* 6.500-3. See Cooper 173; Gottlieb 78; Lawson and Shakinovsky 112-4; L. Lewis 56-7; Murphy 24; Reynolds 44; Thorne-Murphy 246-7.

moment of linking their existence together as maximally destabilizing: the “devouring waters” indicate that both women’s psychic and cultural integrity is at stake (see Lawson and Shakinovsky 114).

Although she was determined to study humanity's "warts and blains" as subject for her poetry, she cannot approach Marian without prejudice. The scene is burdened by Aurora's angry suspicion that Marian is guilty of a moral crime and undeserving of her child (Steinmetz 357). Aurora follows Marian to her lodgings, "[s]carce larger than a grave" (*AL* 6.552), where Marian, after inner struggle—her "lips move[] in a spasm without a sound" (*AL* 6.495)—tells her story (L. Lewis 56-7). Since Aurora only had recourse to conventional moral law, she begins by reproaching Marian in the language of that law, giving her best "to be cold."⁴⁴¹ Acting as interrogator and magistrate, she rules that

Small business has a cast-away
Like Marian, with that crown of prosperous wives
...
Who'll find an emerald ring
On a beggar's middle finger, and require
More testimony to convict a thief?
A child's too costly for so mere a wretch;
She filched it somewhere; and it means, with her,
Instead of honour, blessing, . . . merely shame. (*AL* 6.347-55)

These lines exemplify Aurora's "instinctive horror of the defiled woman" and suggests how deeply she has internalized the rules of sexual conduct (C. Kaplan 25). When she first sees Marian's baby, Aurora reads Marian as a seduced single mother who deserves pity only when showing herself to be appropriately mortified and regretful. She assumes that Marian left Romney waiting at the altar "to take / [t]he hand of a seducer" who then abandoned her (*AL* 6.746-7). Marian, in this version of events, has "filched" the child by consenting to non-marital

⁴⁴¹ *AL* 6.612. See Lawson and Shakinovsky 117; Thorne-Murphy 251.

sex. As she observes Marian's adoring caresses and exchanges of smiles with her son, Aurora, in a "grave and sad" tone, accuses Marian, "no mother but a kidnapper," of being "complaisant" to "the wrong you've done" for the reward of "certain profits" from the seducer (*AL* 6.631, 637, 742-4). She raises the specter of infanticide when suggesting that Marian metaphorically "kills" her child by touching him with her contaminated body. She says that an impure woman "damps her baby's cheeks by kissing them / [a]s we kill roses."⁴⁴² Marian responds passionately after Aurora's pious evocation of child murder by "turn[ing] her wild sad face from side to side."⁴⁴³

Sharing in Aurora's moral (and deeply patriarchal) rhetoric, she claims she is free of shame and sexual guilt, has never been "fouled in will / [and] paltered with in soul by devil's lust" (*AL* 6.761-2). She says "man's violence, / [n]ot men's seduction, made me what I am" (*AL* 6.1226-7)—she even begged for mercy when "they" brought "their damnable drugged cup"⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴² *AL* 6.735-6. Sarah Ficke points out that the scene of Marian's careful unwrapping of the baby mirrors that of the runaway slave's lifting the strangulating shawl: "You could not peel a fruit you fear to bruise / More calmly and more carefully than so" (6.562-564). While the slave woman's child is cold and still, Marian's is "warm and moist with life" (6.567; Ficke 261). Infanticide, writes Ficke, emerges as "a narrative possibility that is never acted on" (264).

⁴⁴³ *AL* 6.737; see Ficke 261-4; Cooper 174. Marian's tending to her child assumes an eerie, reciprocally vampiric quality: suckling him, she consumes him—"drinking him as wine" (6.599)—to forget about her fallenness in a permanent state of maternal inebriation (see David 1985, 121).

⁴⁴⁴ Lawson and Shakinovsky 120. Marian's body, drugged during the rape, would not show signs of struggle. This, in addition to her poverty, would make it difficult for her story to be believed in court. Marian's fall and impregnation occur when she is unconscious, and therefore outside of what is representable (Stevenson 352; see Lawson and Shakinovsky 115). Barret-Ducrocq notes that working-class women, when asking for middle-class charity, tried to remove suspicion of prostitution by "offer[ing] an explanation which was highly fashionable in Victorian melodrama and trashy novels: they had been induced to surrender by a mysterious potion which robbed them of all willpower and made them easy prey for vice" (106). Marian's "drugged cup" is high melodrama. EBB's use of this trope also implies that EBB leaves intact the notion that female sexuality outside marriage and resulting childbirth is "thievery." She is not interested in holding Marian's rapist individually accountable—he is a mere manifestation of men's culture-wide inability to merge spirit and body. EBB does not represent England's sexual politics under the auspices of realism. All sexuality in the poem, be it passionate or violent, occurs outside of Britain (C. Kaplan 22), while Marian's non-sexual victimizations—the attacks and objectifications performed by nearly everyone she knows (her parents, Romney, Lady Waldemar, and Aurora included)—occur in England. See Howell 17-20, for the ideological work this anachronistic spatial separation of metropolitan and foreign sexuality performs—"the metropolitan and colonial worlds of sexuality helped to constitute each other" (17).

and “told *him* I should be lost,”—and challenges Aurora’s understanding of women’s fall.⁴⁴⁵

Aurora realizes that her previous vision of the world was partial, that she must sympathize with Marian’s anguish, and become reconciled to her own femaleness (Reynolds 44). To achieve the same sympathy in the reader, spectacular moments of suffering are not entirely absent in *Aurora Leigh*.

Marian’s memories of her fall have crystallized into a few elliptical images, moving from outer perspective to inner: “the shameful house, the night, / [t]he feeble blood, the heavy-headed grief” (AL 6.1226, 1210-1). After awakening from her drug-induced unconsciousness⁴⁴⁶ the next day, she lies “caught,” “cheek to cheek / [w]ith him who stinks since Friday!” and ends “[h]alf gibbering and half raving on the floor” (AL 6.1232, 676). The rape turns her “mad / how many weeks, I know not—many weeks” (AL 6.1235-6). Marian continues,

‘I think they let me go, when I was mad,
‘They feared my eyes and loosed me, as boys might
‘A mad dog which they had tortured. (AL 6.1237-9)

Women’s madness is the price of boyish fun. As Angela Leighton shows, throughout the poem, male violence is figured as the trampling of heavy animals upon women’s bodies (1992, 105).

Marian, via Aurora, describes the impact of her rape as “being beaten down / [b]y hoofs of

⁴⁴⁵ See Cooper 176. The moment is crucial in that it creates a fundamental opposition between rape and seduction. The latter term was often used interchangeably—even by violated women themselves—and neutralized any claim to female intention or will (Stevenson 355).

⁴⁴⁶ Chloroform had been discovered in 1847 and produced a long and quiescent period of unconsciousness. It was also suspected to arouse women sexually (D’Cruze 1998, 145). Some applicants to London’s Foundling Hospital claimed that they had been impregnated while chloroformed. This explanation lessened the women’s responsibility and “transport[ed] them at a stroke to the dramatic world of the popular novel” (Barret-Ducrocq 106). The accusation is also regularly found in court testimonies (Bartley 10). EBB’s insistence of the “damnable drugged cup” might indicate that she shared the widespread belief that a healthy woman could not be raped. *Aurora Leigh* perpetuates the rape myth that rapists are deviants and strangers, downplaying rape committed by family members or acquaintances. It works against the myth that women want to be raped and that most rape accusations are false by giving voice to Marian’s pain (press reports massively censored women’s statements) and, crucially, by showing an elite woman believing her (Stevenson 335, 349-50, 354).

maddened oxen into a ditch” and she links that sensation to the perversions of the “common law, by which the poor and weak / [a]re trodden underfoot by vicious men” (*AL* 6.667-8, 678-9). Like Io, she becomes a destitute and madly driven wanderer, “hunted round / [b]y some prodigious Dream-fear at my back” and chased across the French landscape by “some ghastly skeleton Hand.”⁴⁴⁷ The “Dream-fear” is realized when Marian finds, after the shock has passed, “bedded in her flesh, / ... [s]ome coin of price” (*AL* 6.679-81). This formulation starkly links the physical facts of conception to its economic motive (Leighton 1992, 107). Echoing the earlier imagery of Danae and the shower of gold, Marian says that God “dropped the coin there: take it ... / [a]nd keep it,—it shall pay you for the loss” (*AL* 6.683-4). She is taken in by a Miller’s wife in Clichy who finds her a position as servant in Paris.

Her fragmented recollections indicate that Marian cannot quite remember or conceptualize what happened, and that the event itself is devoid of “logical or narrative or social connectedness” (Lawson and Shakinovsky 115). Despite all this, the scene of subjection has created the speaking subject (“made me what I am”). This account of female experience is new to the shocked Aurora who rapidly internalizes the wisdom of her working-class muse, “breathing by her breath” (*AL* 6.503; Cooper 173). When Marian has finished her story, Aurora, the closely observing judge, finds herself convinced of Marian’s innocence owing to the “dark facts to which Marian has confessed” (*AL* 6.791; see Cossins 153). She can dispense with witnesses or physical evidence owing to her intuitive access to divine truth, and she determines

⁴⁴⁷ *AL* 6.266-7, 1243; see David 1985, 123; Zonana 257. Echoing the runaway slave’s maternity that resembles an “amulet that hung too slack,” French Catholic peasants tie “Mary’s image” round Marian’s neck as a symbol of her penance that feels “as heavy as a stone” (*AL* 6.1256-7). Marian says that “woman has been strangled with less weight” (*AL* 6.1258; see Murphy 23).

on the spot that Marian is the worthy object of her charity.⁴⁴⁸ After her story has been told, Aurora invites Marian to move with her to Italy, the land of Aurora's mother, and live with her in her pastoral home.

Through Aurora's mediation, Marian speaks out against "social and literary decorum" (David 1985, 119) while yet cloaking her meaning in "half-words, delicate reserves." Because of her degraded moral and social station, Marian has no right to be heard fully "[w]ithout offence to decent happy folk" (*AL* 6.1221-2), the poem's imagined readership. It is Aurora's maternal mission to "kiss[] full sense" into Marian's allusions and challenge respectable women's silence on working-class men's sexual violence.⁴⁴⁹ Aurora knows of course that her culture will not adopt this view without resistance. Aurora's "passionate" rendition of Marian's story is designed to rouse her intended readers into philanthropic action to ameliorate the trauma of their social inferiors. She appeals to her readers that

If a man could feel,
Not one day, in the artist's ecstasy,
But every day, feast, fast, or working-day,
The spiritual significance burn through
The hieroglyphic of material shows,
Henceforward he would paint the globe with wings,
And reverence fish and fowl, the bull, the tree,
And even his very body as a man,—
Which now he counts so vile, that all the towns
Make offal of their daughters for its use (*AL* 7.858-66)

⁴⁴⁸ Thorne-Murphy 252-3; see Barret-Ducrocq 42; Ficke 261. This contradicts nineteenth-century philanthropic practice. Since "Marian had been raised as a tramp, had lived among the morally degraded, had been known to receive a prostitute friend into her home, had deserted her respectable fiancé, and now had an illegitimate child," the conventional step for Aurora would have been to find corroborating evidence and, despite her pity, continue to remind (and accuse) Marian of her fallenness (Thorne-Murphy 252). Aurora even says that she is "angry that she melted me" (*AL* 6.725). The poet's instinctive grasp of truth overrides the necessity of bureaucratic fact-checking, of course, and Marian has already sufficiently internalized her status as social pariah.

⁴⁴⁹ See David 198, 120. It bears repeating how universal the injunction against 'respectable' women speaking out on sexual matters was—including sexual violence they experienced (see Clark 1983, 25). It is part of Marian's performance of respectability to use "delicate reserves," although she undercuts it by pointing out the hypocritical taboo.

When Aurora first recorded Marian's pathetic tale in London, Aurora was unthreatened by it as it confirmed middle-class stereotypes and engendered feelings of benevolent charity in Aurora, the helpful scribe of Marian's story. Marian's Parisian tale, however, directly challenges Aurora's values. Rather than "scrupulously hint[ing] / [w]ith half-words, delicate reserves, the thing / [w]hich no one scrupled [she] should feel in full" (*AL* 6.1222-3), Aurora reports Marian's words directly. This more egalitarian dialogue where the working-class woman leads the elite poet, "is still suspiciously middle-class" and reminds us that Marian's story is "absorbed" by Aurora's (Cooper 172-3). Aurora's conversion from "priggish and conventional" middle-class values to bourgeois philanthropist occurs in these crucial scenes.⁴⁵⁰

I read these verses as Marian's application interview for admission into Aurora's reform home.⁴⁵¹ In accordance with the conventional protocols of these institutions, Marian has to show that she was impregnated against her will, that she was otherwise chaste and had no other children, that her previous conduct had been flawless, that she has no money, and that her child was under one year of age to ensure that he would grow up morally untainted. Having obtained a chronological testimony of Marian's experiences, Aurora, Marian's confessor, weighs the

⁴⁵⁰ Stone 1995, 164; see Mermin 211; Thorne-Murphy 251.

⁴⁵¹ Reform institutions ranged from large penitentiaries with up to two hundred beds to small-scale, private homes with as few as five lodgers. Since the eighteenth century, London's philanthropic institutions had included homes for adolescent penitent streetwalkers (or women thought to be prostitutes), lock hospitals to cure syphilitic prostitutes, and a host of similar establishments sponsored by philanthropic societies. The first of these asylums was the Whitechapel Magdalen Hospital, founded in 1758. Their mission was to both punish and reform young fallen women by compelling them to repent their past actions; cutting them off from their network of friends and family; regulating their dress, diet, work, movements, and daily habits; and instructing them in religious and moral matters to prepare them for a lifelong career in respectable domestic service. Lock hospitals offered medical treatment to prostitutes, and, to foster an ethos of self-help among working-class women, disciplined them to assume an ever-deferential demeanor towards their social betters, acquire habits of diligence, honesty, reliability, and personal hygiene.

evidence of Marian's overall demeanor and the richness of detail in her story.⁴⁵² Aurora emulates the "objective" methods of the emerging social sciences and investigative journalism, legitimizing her superior position through close observation, privileged access to truth, and record-keeping. The very structure, sequence, and ellipses of Marian's recollections—versified and fictional as they are—position Aurora as edited-out interrogator (see D'Cruze 1998, 155, 163). Marian's tale of tragic economic deprivation and maternal abuse becomes "a project of universal identification," directed at middle-class women and teaches Aurora—and her readership—that the bourgeois subject, particularly in her insistence on sexual purity even in the case of rape, is fallible. The best way the bourgeois reader can make amends is by sponsoring a prostitute.⁴⁵³

Convenient Self-Abnegations

Scholars of the past four decades have critiqued Marian's two-dimensionality at length, particularly her illogical moral immunity to adverse circumstances and hostile environments.⁴⁵⁴ They have not yet considered it in terms of EBB's immersion in the writings of her time's social reformers. It is crucial to keep in mind that prostitutes were considered "public enemies, criminals, and outcasts who had 'abandoned the prerogatives of civil liberty'" (Walkowitz 39).

For Marian to speak at all after her rape, to be intelligible as a subject covered by the

⁴⁵² The confession of sexual activity "is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence ... of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated" (Foucault 1990, 61-2). See Barret-Ducrocq 41, 45; D'Cruze 1998, 155.

⁴⁵³ See Clark 1987, 79; Dalley 539; Thorne-Murphy 253.

⁴⁵⁴ Marian's beauty, unassailable moral righteousness, domesticity, and timidity are conventional characteristics among young rape victims in folk romance. They usually die (see Clark 1983, 24-5).

“prerogatives of civil liberty,” she must keep her ‘character,’ the primary undertaking of *Aurora Leigh*’s sixth and seventh books. Marian’s atypically self-assertive lines at the end of the poem are spoken on borrowed confidence. Taking up narrative space “[a]s one who had authority to speak”—one notes the conditional phrasing—Marian’s suffering culminates in her final proclamation of righteous dignity with Aurora and Romney as auditors, executed in a “thrilling, solemn voice, so passionless, / [s]ustained, yet low, without a rise or fall” (*AL* 9.248-50). This is not “poor Marian” speaking—here, Marian speaks inspired by liberal moral law that, in a striking analogy with Mary Prince’s ‘welfare’ case, requires Marian’s careful (and, to Aurora, very convenient) self-erasure “from the scene of representation.”⁴⁵⁵ Marian speaks as exemplary recipient of elite beneficence, as the “daughter of the people,” not merely as an exceptionally virtuous working-class woman.⁴⁵⁶

Her dramatic rejection of Romney’s socially redemptive offer of marriage proves to the reader that “[s]weet, holy Marian” passes Aurora’s ‘character’ test: she is greedy for the joys of motherhood, not those of inappropriate upward social mobility (*AL* 6.781). Her timidity and maternal feelings naturally counterbalance economic motives. Marian refuses Romney’s renewed proposal because, as she acknowledges, her fallen state causes unsurmountable difficulties for elite patriarchal succession—she would be a “married harlot” (*AL* 9.242). Although she has been cleared of wrong-doing, she is still atoning to earn readers’ continued pity. Wary that, if she married him, Romney might remember that her bastard “child was fathered by some cursed wretch,” indicated by an accidental “look,” “sigh,” or “silence,” Marian protects her benefactor, the “good man,” from the ungenerous and degrading thoughts that must

⁴⁵⁵ Brophy 283; see Hudd 79; L. Lewis 59-60; Steinmetz 366.

⁴⁵⁶ *AL* 3.806; see Leighton 148.

inevitably arise. She is already dead to respectable society: “Once killed, . . . this ghost of Marian loves no more . . . except the child,” she repeats twice.⁴⁵⁷ Should she and Romney have children, her first-born’s siblings could proudly proclaim their ancestry while Marian’s firstborn would remain mute when “asked his name” (AL 9.389-90, 421). Marian, having “room for no more children in my arms,” will tend to her fatherless child as a holy calling until he is grown up enough “to sit with men” (AL 9.428, 435). Thereafter, she promises, she will help in “Romney’s work / [t]o help your outcast orphans of the world,” devoting her life to fallen women like herself. In the meantime, Marian says, Romney should marry “a noble wife” (AL 9.437-8). The aristocratic resonance of the utterance is crucial, as is the elision of the question whether Aurora will pay for Marian’s board and lodging indefinitely.⁴⁵⁸ Having completed her ascension into sainthood, Marian, freshly endowed with a ‘character’ that depends on Aurora’s continued material protection, secures her spot in EBB’s steeply hierarchical universe “in which the virtuous few answer God’s call by striving upward” (Gottlieb 66). This is how Aurora’s (and EBB’s) “messianic rescue fantasy” finds its apotheosis (Steinmetz 360), and it ensures the continued reproduction of the Leigh family name.

⁴⁵⁷ See Murphy 23-5, on *Aurora Leigh*’s sustained symbolic association with the Virgin Mary. Also see Armstrong 1993, 369; Cooper 178; Lawson and Shakinovsky 118; Stone 1987, 121-2. *Aurora Leigh* builds on melodrama’s generic imperative that women die after losing their virginity to a “ravisher” due to the unbearable loss of honor. They always assert that their minds are unpolluted (Clark 1983, 23-4; see D’Cruze 1998, 185). EBB is writing against an old convention that defines women’s purity (and eligibility for continued survival) by their virginity.

⁴⁵⁸ Only Ficke, Steinmetz, and Cooper ever mention that Aurora rescues Marian from poverty (264; 361; 177). I suspect that the poem shirks a discussion of the material aspect of Aurora’s rescue so as not to encourage the conflation of rescue with welfare. Marian’s (implausible) familiarity with bourgeois moral standards renders her dangerously close to actual “sisterhood” with her benefactress. While she requires financial support, Marian already possesses beauty, purity, and righteousness. One anonymous reviewer, presumably having skipped over this passage, complained that “there is an omission, which seems unintentional, and which the interest excited makes unpardonable—an omission of any mention of Marian Erle’s subsequent fortunes” (*New Quarterly Review* 34). Another considers the end of Marian’s story “very beautiful” (*Leader* 1144; see Faulk 46).

Motherhood takes up Marian's entire identity and "kill[s]" any aspect of her being that is not polluted—which is literally everything but her generic self-sacrificial and divinely endorsed maternity.⁴⁵⁹ Analogous to the slave woman in "The Runaway Slave," Marian, after an anonymous conception and birth of a "fatherless" son, is reborn as a featureless Virgin Mary whose existence as a living death is endorsed by the elite writer: "I'll find a niche / [a]nd set thee there, my saint, thy child and thee," Aurora promises. Marian-as-Madonna is denied the passionate consummation of love that the elite couples in *Aurora Leigh* enjoy—Aurora's parents, the Carringtons, and the central romantic pair.⁴⁶⁰ The girl conveniently understands her fallenness to be permanent because, without her continued insistence on already being dead, she would be eligible to marry Romney. Her ghostly-saintly presence at the end of the poem—Aurora calls her an "embodied ghost" at one point (*AL* 5.1100)—not only literalizes death as the "teleological end" of illegitimate motherhood (Faulk 45), but imagines a kind of idealized female working-class existence that does not seem to require degrading physical labor for self-maintenance.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁹ *AL* 9.389; see L. Lewis 62-3; Murphy 24.

⁴⁶⁰ *AL* 7.126-7; Murphy 25. When Marian departs from the poem, Aurora describes her as "still and pallid as a saint, / [d]ilated, like a saint in ecstasy, / [a]s if the floating moonshine interposed / [b]etwixt her foot and the earth, and raised her up / [t]o float upon it" (*AL* 9.187-8). See L. Lewis 60; C. Kaplan 25.

⁴⁶¹ EBB's idealization of motherhood's joys reflects the fact that her own maternal pleasures were enabled by servants' around-the-clock care for her son Pen (Mermin 150; see Calcraft-Rennie 9; B. Taylor 2008, 405). She hardly idealized actual working-class mothers in her employ, her maids Elizabeth Crow and Elizabeth Wilson. Both women became pregnant out of wedlock and failed to inform EBB for fear of being let go. Crow, married by the time EBB found out about her condition, was dismissed. Wilson married and was allowed to stay on, although EBB repeatedly complained about feeling deceived. In 1852, Wilson asked for a raise for her services as lady's maid, housekeeper, seamstress, and nursemaid. EBB's correspondence mentions her refusal to grant the raise and her opinion that she paid Wilson sufficiently in affection. EBB did not accommodate Wilson during the latter's two pregnancies, maternity, and marriage, convincing Wilson to leave her child with a sister in England for seven years while EBB resided in Italy with her staff (Forster 123-4, 272-3 302-3, 311, 325, 351). It appears that EBB, despite of her critique of Marian's unfeeling employer, adhered to her class's *modus operandi*:

The appearance of an illegitimate pregnancy ... brought suddenly into the light things which had lain hidden for years: the unassailable condescension of the upper classes towards their servants ... In the presence of the bastard infant, masks were dropped: compassion for orphans, ... affection born out of years of daily intimacy, could vanish abruptly (Barret-Ducrocq 68).

Marian's "unspeakable," hovering "phantasmagoric presence" cannot actually "exist in a legible, comprehensible world" (Lawson and Shakinovsky 123-4, see 119); she has no room in England, barely touches the ground in Italy, and exists outside conventional moral frameworks and social configurations.⁴⁶² Marian, regulated and supervised, "display[s] an appropriate attitude of humility and repentance" that middle-class philanthropists expected when indigent mothers asked for support (Barret-Ducrocq 150). Aurora desires this permanent posture in her quarantined working-class dependent.⁴⁶³ *Aurora Leigh* models the "'theatre' of charity" in which the recipient of long-term charitable relief "appear[s] at once desperate yet respectable and deserving" (Kidd 69). Marian is socially disciplined and morally regenerated to such a degree that her very being dissolves into impossible, diaphanous virtue, side-stepping the mundane question of whether she also works as Aurora's lady's maid to earn her keep or whether she will tend Romney and Aurora's future children. In a sense, Marian's ghostly transparency at the end is the logical conclusion to the panoptic surveillance of the registered prostitute that the poem institutes.⁴⁶⁴

To the great bafflement of middle-class observers, working-class women seldom showed shame or repented of illegitimate pregnancies when questioned (Barret-Ducrocq 154; see D'Cruze 1999, 40). Marian's self-castigation is (mostly) bourgeois rehabilitative fantasy.

⁴⁶² William Tait identified the prostitute's body as the source of moral and physiological contagion, and demanded that penitents should be forbidden from mingling in public crowds (Tait 195; see Walkowitz 39).

⁴⁶³ Howell 11. Barret-Ducrocq quotes a workhouse report noting fallen women's expected conduct: "'her conduct was uniformly good. . . . She was willing to do the work allotted to her and was civil and obliging. She always expressed a great desire of bettering her condition but from the unfortunate circumstances that has occurred she was prevented doing so'" (Barret-Ducrocq 151-2). The fallen woman must be taken out of the "threateningly opaque milieux of the working classes and installed in strictly monitored locales"—she becomes visible, yet hidden from respectable society (Howell 10).

⁴⁶⁴ The average age of inmates in Magdalen homes was eighteen or nineteen, Marian's age. Older women tended to be less compliant than their younger sisters and not admitted. Sick or pregnant women were rejected. Penitents were given domestic "training" so they would become eligible for respectable work. Reform institutions of all religious affiliations sold laundry services—cleaning-as-absolution served as the guiding metaphor—to keep themselves afloat and enforce social order within. Inmates' permanently free labor allowed the institution to reproduce itself materially while penitents washed away their sins. Everyday life was communal; former prostitutes were watched during work, leisure, meals, sleep, and prayer; noisiness, swearing, and rude conversation were forbidden, as was

In order for Aurora to enjoy the full benefits of respectable upper-class wifedom while putting an end to her sexual rivalry with Marian, Aurora constitutes her new identity on the woman her new status excludes. In short, she needs Marian's impure body—and its material claims on her generosity—to be forgotten. And so, Marian's disembodied saintly "ecstasy" lingers uneasily next to Aurora and Romney's final passionate embrace in the "ecstasy / [o]f darkness" (*AL* 9.815-6). Opening one's home to a working-class woman through enlightened and discriminating charity is one thing—it would be quite another if that woman suddenly claimed equal footing.

Aurora Goes A-Slumming

Aurora rejects Romney's first proposal in Book 2 because she fears Romney would "cut"

My body into coins to give away
 Among his other paupers; change my sons,
 While I stood dumb as Griseld, for black babes
 Or piteous foundlings; might unquestioned set
 My right hand teaching in the Ragged Schools,
 My left hand washing in the Public Baths (*AL* 2.790-6)

As a "dumb ... Griseld," Aurora, deprived of her voice and financial independence, would undergo the trials of Boccaccio's mute Griselda whose cruel husband tested her loyalty by curtailing her maternal role. Aurora's nightmare fantasy of marriage's violent and violating "cutting" imagines Romney's manic philanthropy to commodify her reproductive capacity. It also echoes mid-century feminists' equation of wives with slaves. Aurora is horrified at the

talk during meals and bedtime. For the duration of their rehabilitation—usually two years—they enjoyed no privacy. If an inmate wanted to leave, she was subject to examinations by the managers, which served as effective deterrents. Many working-class inmates resisted such a life, caused disruptions, or fled. Rescue workers frequently lamented prostitutes' independence, impulsiveness, and restlessness. The wages of former penitentiary inmates were below average. After completing rehabilitation, former inmates tended to perform heavy domestic work in lower middle-class homes as wealthy families avoided hiring them (D'Cruze and Jackson 66, 74-5; see Bartley 5, 13, 40, 47-53, 59; Walkowitz 18-20, 39, 60-2).

prospect of turning into the “conduit of patriarchal wealth,”⁴⁶⁵ having her body metaphorically divided up and doled out by her sinister husband, and the fruit of her labor, her sons (the “change” flowing between the stages of patriarchal succession) as well as her own work, committed to philanthropic action in support of African children, founding hospitals, charity schools, or working-class public baths. In each case, Romney and Aurora’s potential child is exchanged for the children of poor and black workers, depriving the poet of her own progeny and establishing familial ties with the racialized lower classes that she is unprepared to accept.⁴⁶⁶

A similar idea occurs again in Book 2. Aurora imagines Romney to say, “Come,

I have some worthy work for thee below.
Come, sweep my barns, and keep my hospitals,—
And I will pay thee with a current coin
Which men give women.” (AL 2.537-41)

The metaphor of the “current coin” emphasizes both marriage as women’s “profession” and marriage’s proximity to prostitution (Dalley 534). Scholars have read these lines as Aurora’s rejection of Romney’s domestic ideology (S. Brown 2005, 194). Aurora is understandably enraged that, according to English law, Romney inherits her father’s wealth. This adds to his proclaimed love for her an incentive to prostitute herself she finds insulting (AL 2.786-90). I would add that the point made here is not only that Aurora would be tethered to the home, but that she would not be in control of the products of her labor, both work and babies. Romney would compel her to spend her energies in the public sphere (where she wishes to work), but not in a line of work that would satiate Aurora’s hunger for heroic individualism. Aurora refuses to have philanthropic work assigned to her and spend her body on a foolish cause. With its

⁴⁶⁵ B. Taylor 1992, 25; see Dalley 535.

⁴⁶⁶ Lootens 2017, 48. Romney is figured as both “metaphoric slaver and brutal antislavery fanatic,” as Lootens writes (2017, 47).

sustained descriptions of Aurora's decidedly unglamorous and cash-strapped existence as a London hack writer for women's annuals, *Aurora Leigh* imagines the possibility of middle-class women's regular employment, a truly revolutionary moment in the poem since all independent economic activity of women, elite and poor alike, carried connotations of selling one's body. Non-domestic labor threatened middle-class women's status and implied a slippery slope towards working-class drudgery and ultimate prostitution. Earning a living as a middle-class woman, Aurora shows, is useful because it helps society, and particularly those who polite society already brands as prostitutes.⁴⁶⁷ Therefore, the bourgeois writer requires the exploited working-class woman, her negative double, to stake out that claim. Finally, whereas Romney offers Aurora the "current coin" of marriage, Marian receives its grotesque fleshly counterpart, the "coin of price." Both marriage and enforced prostitution are framed as monetary exchanges disadvantageous to women and invoke associations with the bodies of slaves. The figure of the coin structures both Aurora's and Marian's stories, connects the rape and romance plots, and determines both women's legacy—poetry and the bastard child (see Leighton 1992, 107). However, in the end, Aurora, as a famous poet, wields more "coin"—in the form of both divine showers and profane money.

Haunted by prostitution, *Aurora Leigh* relies on liberal feminist philanthropists' maxims and protocols for combating women readers' social prejudice against fallen women through poetry. Although Marian safeguards her chastity until lured away to France, EBB, in line with feminists agitating on behalf of prostitutes, invites the respectable female reader to sympathize with Marian's fallen friends. For example, when Marian tells Aurora about her fallen childhood friend Rose—"Poor Rose, ... / I heard her laugh last night in Oxford Street" (AL 3.926-7)—

⁴⁶⁷ See Dalley 532-3; Houston 230.

EBB mitigates the reader's proximity to Rose Bell using several layers of reported narration.⁴⁶⁸

Marian tells Aurora how a woman at the lock hospital complains about her “scandalous neighbours who had dared / [t]o talk about her as already dead” (*AL* 3.1160-1). After she is released from the hospital, Romney finds her a position and sends “her to a famous sempstress-house / [f]ar off in London” (*AL* 3.1231-2), the kind of low-wage labor the bourgeois imagination linked most directly with prostitution (see Ficke 262). There, Marian tells Aurora, she is again surrounded by women who do not adhere to bourgeois sexual law and who freely muse on the dearth of married women among themselves (*AL* 4.10-11). The protagonist herself comes into contact with the worst sort of fallen woman, Marian's close neighbor and dark twin. Visiting Marian's home, this loose character rudely addresses Aurora from a nearby window, “a woman, rouged / [u]pon the angular cheek-bones, kerchief torn, / [t]hin dangling locks, and flat lascivious mouth” (*AL* 3.764-6). The scene is noteworthy since exchange between working-class and middle-class areas was very unequal: “working people came and went, but ... [o]nly an occasional philanthropist or eccentric would venture into this barbarian territory” (Barret-Ducrocq 6). Romney repeatedly mentions the “drabs” who reside at his countryside Phalanstery, incensing the surrounding rural community who resist Romney's prohibition of “let[ting] men call their wives their own / [t]o kick like Britons” (*AL* 8. 920-1). From their well-off perspective, the living quarters of the poor are filthy sources of illness, violence, and crime.

⁴⁶⁸ Mermin 203; see Cooper 164; Hickock 138. Archival research has shown that working-class women in London tended to discuss sexual matters, including rape and abortion, openly (Barret-Ducrocq 180). Evangelical visiting societies already flourished between 1820 and 1850 in London: there were hundreds of such organizations in the 1850s. Visiting working-class homes uninvited to distribute religious, moral, and practical advice could be quite dangerous. Middle-class rescue workers were often ridiculed or antagonized by the very women they wanted to help. Lady philanthropists reported that they had been threatened or attacked by drunks or brothel owners (Kidd 81, 90). Bourgeois women certainly felt the thrill of a quasi-colonial adventure when exploring—or descending into—“savage” streets on the lookout for women to rescue.

Apart from assuring Aurora that she is chaste, Marian does not mention how she earns her bread in Paris after she loses her position as a servant and walks away “shuddering head and foot / [w]ith blind hysteric passion,” nor does she reveal how she managed not to “sleep well beneath the heavy Seine, / [l]ike others of my sort (*AL* 7.80-1). It is her employer who determines that Marian is eight months pregnant. Innocent Marian had thought it inconceivable that “God [makes] mothers out of victims” (*AL* 7.49). Marian’s poverty makes her resorting to needlework likely—and the slippery slope from there into prostitution.⁴⁶⁹ The typical “career” of a prostitute began in her late teens and usually lasted only a few years. In contrast to middle-class stereotypes of streetwalkers, most prostitutes, particular those who only did occasional sex work, were never completely separated from the working-class communities from which they hailed. They disproportionally came from families with abusive, alcoholic, neglectful, or deceased parents or step-parents. Often, they already had some prior (non-commercial) sexual experience with men of their own class. Above all, they were “the unskilled daughters of the unskilled classes” working in domestic service or as seamstresses, dressmakers, milliners, shop girls, agricultural laborers, street vendors, and the like.⁴⁷⁰ The move into (and out of) prostitution was gradual and casual, and reflected the seasonal fluctuations of locally available jobs. Prostitution involved higher pay and shorter hours than most drudge work, although it was a physically dangerous and financially precarious occupation that exposed women to alcoholism, venereal disease, and harassment by police and the courts. Therefore, occasional prostitution was far more common than full-time sex work, and, after a few years on the streets, women tended to settle down with a romantic partner in their twenties. The melodramatic plot of the seduced,

⁴⁶⁹ See Thorne-Murphy 249; Howell 7-9, on Paris as the cradle of modern regulationism of prostitution.

⁴⁷⁰ Walkowitz 15, 18, 36; see Bartley 10; Flexner 64.

impregnated, and abandoned temptress, so appealing to evangelical readers, applied only to a small number of prostitutes.⁴⁷¹

Romney and Aurora use Marian to test their respective approaches to curing this social wound. Romney's plan fails since he cannot prevent a "world ... half brutalised / [w]ith civilization" to invade his Phalanstery. Romney's fallen women are still outcasts, cooped up away from the city in the "pernicious prison of Leigh Hall" (AL 8.937). Since he is only concerned with "the body's satisfaction and no more" (AL 8.416), his social programs must fail.⁴⁷² When Aurora searches for Marian in Paris, she slips herself into the role of the bourgeois rescue worker who approaches prostitutes on the streets to offer them a way into respectable work and practical assistance in addition to spiritual cleansing. Had Marian indeed prostituted herself, Aurora (acting on behalf of EBB's readers) would have demanded an appropriate show of penitence. But Marian is found not guilty of having consented to her "seduction," and helps Aurora understand the ugly enormity of men's sins. The outcome is the same: Aurora rescues Marian from poverty and potential self-prostitution, sets up a private Italian Magdalen home with

⁴⁷¹ Walkowitz 12-4, 21, 31, 18. Marian's story in *Aurora Leigh* is analogous to that of Mercy Merrick in Wilkie Collins's *The New Magdalen*, published in 1873. Collins's example makes clear that the already hackneyed plot employed by EBB had devolved into near-parody seventeen years after *Aurora Leigh*'s publication. Mercy Merrick has been deserted by her father and is raised among traveling acrobats and actors by her morally lax mother. Various earning money as a servant, needlewoman, match girl, errand-runner for gypsies, and beggar, Mercy descends inexorably. After fainting in the street from hunger, she briefly awakens to realize she has been carried to a brothel and drugged with wine, and is finally raped by an unknown, upper-class man. Too ashamed to mingle among honest people afterwards, Mercy resorts to prostitution (see Collins 270-8). Traditional seduction myths such as Collins's had been in circulation for decades, usually disseminated by moral and social reform workers and prominent literati, who had to persuade their readers and sponsors—and probably themselves—that prostitutes were essentially innocent and deserving, while yet fascinating and repellant. The goal was to produce sufficient sympathy for prostitutes' histories so that the taboo surrounding them could be mitigated. Towards the end of the century, as illustrated by *The New Magdalen*, opinion shifted from holding women individually accountable to a more systemic view of male sexual vice and severe economic deprivation (see Barret-Ducrocq 36; Bartley 5). The image of prostitutes as pathetic "miserable creatures, ill-fed, ill-clothed, uncared for, from whose misery the eye recoils, cowering under dark arches and among bye-lanes" remained remarkable unchanged until far into the twentieth century, however (Acton viii; see Bartley 12; Walkowitz 13, 32).

⁴⁷² See Mermin 203; Thorne-Murphy 248-50.

two inmates, and models for her readers the effect of poetry's wholesome effect on the individual and, via literature's diffusive effects, on society at large (Thorne-Murphy 254).

When EBB drafted her female epic, famous feminists, politicians, and reformers as well as private individuals without claims to fame opened Magdalen refuges or invited fallen women into their homes. Josephine Butler, leading liberal feminist, lodged prostitutes in her own house. Charles Dickens; Adeline, Duchess of Bedford; and William Gladstone, Prime Minister, rescued and financially supported prostitutes with much élan. In response to large Magdalen asylums' inhumane treatment of fallen women, the evangelical wing of Anglican reformers developed a less punitive approach to prostitutes' rehabilitation and, starting in 1850, created a flourishing system of refuge homes. They prided themselves on providing comfortable retreats that were indistinguishable from private family residences, offering weary women havens of domesticity and individual care. In such homes, inmates were given new or second-hand clothes, their own room, and, most importantly, humane treatment based on forgiveness, sympathy, gentle firmness, and wisdom rather than punitive discipline.⁴⁷³ Nevertheless, inmates were constantly supervised, although smaller homes had significantly fewer rules than large institutions. Control was gained through personal influence and obligation. Magdalen homes required inmates to submit to a hierarchical social structure that, although clothed in the language of affection, kindness, and love, instituted an unequal power relationship between wise, caring mothers and "feeble, passive and pathetic ... children, incapable of exercising moral judgement" (Bartley 33). Affection and control went together in such homes, creating dependents who tended to be significantly younger than the matrons. Ultimately, they were coercive institutions that legitimized the supremacy of the bourgeois family. It is in this context that Aurora's writing

⁴⁷³ Bartley 25-30, 40, 47; see Kidd 73.

about and reforming prostitutes should be considered. With its focus on the individual rescue, *Aurora Leigh* does not immediately challenge her period's legal and moral frameworks and upholds the patriarchal definition of rape by conceptualizing rape as a moral problem that besmirches Marian more than the anonymous rapist (Stevenson 349). However, the poem establishes exceptional upper-class women like Aurora (herself a virgin) as legitimate discussants of fallen women's anguish and argues for elite women's duty to rescue their less lucky 'sisters.'

If *Aurora Leigh* is further read as a public trial of Marian's rape, Aurora slips into the traditionally male position of the victim's guardian, defending her honor to the public. As the unmarried woman and her illegitimate child cannot be integrated into English community, her conduct must be made public, and the poem, acting as a public courtroom, determines her future claim to respectability, dignity, and 'character.' Marian conducts herself in accordance to the stereotypically innocent victim: she is virtuous, submissive to authority, and remorseful to a fault. As she utters her public remorse and ascends into sainthood, Marian loses her individuality, but is assured of salvation in heaven. Conformity to this behavioral code, particularly the poem's obsession with Marian's virtue, assures her right to public protection by the poet (Stevenson 353-4, 361-2). The performance of the pathetic woman-child is the "coin" Marian pays to secure what appears to be lifelong material support. The model of caring promulgated by *Aurora Leigh* is that of selective charity deriving from an overarching model of patronizing philanthropy, while diluting socialist claims to relief based on human equality.⁴⁷⁴

Melodrama is the mode most directly available to EBB to depict the unmarried mother. Marian is a stock character; she is "the innocent maiden who always faints when ravished"

⁴⁷⁴ See Patriquin 150; Cossins 163.

(Clark 1987, 82), protecting her virtue—and that of her equally unpolluted benefactress—by blissful ignorance of the sexual act. Her final appearance, “white and tranquil as a summer-cloud” (AL 9.298), echoes melodrama’s dying scenes that represent fallen women as “pious converts to chastity and religion” (Geyer-Kordesch 99). Such a revelry of sentimentalized womanhood would not be possible without Marian’s figurative death, her symbolic sacrifice to public morality. Invented by male dramatists and novelists, the figure presses working-class woman into the bourgeois domestic sphere, attenuating her into non-material diaphanousness. Marian’s trial, integral to *Aurora Leigh*’s assumption of moral high ground, reinforces bourgeois sexual norms and imagines the healing of social divisions via elite sympathy and moral regeneration of the poor without a disturbance to the social hierarchy.

PART THREE
ELIOT'S COQUETTES: BURDENED REPRODUCTION
IN *MIDDLEMARCH* AND *DANIEL DERONDA*

Introduction

Although George Eliot's novels deeply engage Victorian social scripts regarding women's emotional needs, social function in life, and intellectual maturation, Eliot did not offer any programmatic prescriptions about them. In her correspondence, she professed long-standing interest in the "Woman Question" and attendant political debates that shaped the gradual extension of women's legal rights during the second half of the nineteenth century. However, in an 1869 letter, Eliot qualified her investment in projects promising to improve women's political position because she felt "too imperfect a sympathy" with feminist agitators of her time (*GEL* 5:58). She recognized that women chafed against social conventions and the pressure to conform to ideological and legal mandates, especially those related to marriage and childbearing. But, with her usual "even-handedness of vision," Eliot saw that "the conditions of an imperfect social state" could only be corrected through slow and diffuse improvement brought about by cooperation.⁴⁷⁵ This might account for her refusal to sign John Stuart Mill's suffrage petition of 1866.⁴⁷⁶ Eliot considered women's public self-display, including that of political campaigners, to

⁴⁷⁵ Flint 179; *M* 784.

⁴⁷⁶ Clark 2008, 64. Lisa Surridge notes that Eliot—still as Marian Evans—signed Barbara Leigh Smith's (later Bodichon) *Petition for Reform of the Married Women's Property Law* (1856). Eliot's trust in women's ability to

be deeply degrading and, despite her own prominence and literary achievements, harbored skepticism about openly agitational approaches to reform (Flint 160). In Eliot's later novels, depictions of power struggles between men and women, and particularly within contemporary models of marriage, markedly gain in prominence. Although marriage and maternity represented sacred social obligations in Eliot's view, the many unsuccessful wives, mothers, and childless women in her oeuvre indicate a concession that marriage and motherhood constitute problematic states. The maternal ideal, for Eliot, was closely related to her lifelong advocacy for sympathy and the need to recognize alterity, yet she did not countenance expressions of female will that ran counter to the greater good.⁴⁷⁷ Maybe because Eliot never had children herself, scholars suspect that Eliot conceptualized maternity mainly in terms of a social role, rather than as a fundamentally physiological process—a suspicion I hope to correct in the following chapters.

The appearance of the word 'dynamic' on the first page of Eliot's final novel, *Daniel Deronda*, to describe Gwendolen's unsettled/unsettling glance famously elicited critique from her publisher John Blackwood as well as from an anonymous reviewer at the *Examiner*, both of whom challenged Eliot's use of scientific jargon that had not yet entered her audience's everyday vocabulary.⁴⁷⁸ In line with this often-cited vignette, critics usually understand Eliot to respond thoughtfully and prophetically to late-nineteenth-century scientific trends. In the words of the *Examiner* reviewer, Eliot's "culture is scientific," probably more so than any other Victorian novelist's (125). Eliot famously hosted a London salon for elite intellectuals along with her life

represent themselves legally or her willingness to support feminist political agitation must have waned in the following decade (2005, 105). Eliot's friend Bessie Parkes asked her to write for the *English Woman's Journal* which Eliot declined, stating that her "vocation lies in other parts" (*GEL* 2:431; see Williams 73).

⁴⁷⁷ Flint 168; see R. Mitchell.

⁴⁷⁸ *GEL* 6:183; "New Novel" 125.

partner, George Henry Lewes, himself a noted philosopher and physiological theorist (Henry 2001, 154). Studies investigating the reciprocal relationship between Eliot's fiction, particularly *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*, and nineteenth-century scientific writing suggest her familiarity with notable works by George Henry Lewes, Alexander Bain, William Carpenter, Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, James Sully, and others.⁴⁷⁹ Scholarship of the past three decades has largely focused on Eliot's application of Victorian theories of epistemology, evolution, and the relationship between mind and body. What has not been achieved, to my knowledge, is a thorough examination of Eliot's application of medical, cultural, and legal understandings of the female body.

The final three chapters of this dissertation focus on two of Eliot's most problematically visible female bodies, that of Rosamond Vincy in *Middlemarch* and Gwendolen Harleth in *Daniel Deronda*, and integrates readings of these bodies with contemporary professional texts Eliot may have accessed or owned, or which overlap culturally and professionally with items in her library. Although I am concerned with the politics of (non)representation of conventionally unmentionable psychosexual and reproductive processes in Eliot's two novels, the non-literary texts I reference are not less obviously connected to Eliot's novel-writing than those used by scholars who have studied Eliot's immersion in scientific texts on the mind-body relationship. The methodological challenge of reading for unspeakable acts as well as scholars' hesitancy to associate Eliot with what is now perceived to be quack science perhaps account for the comparative dearth of studies on Eliot and female embodiment. Although there has been much written about Gwendolen's hysteria, for example, few recent scholars, with the exception of Jane Wood (2001), Louise Penner (2002), David Trotter (2004), and Jill Matus (2008), have actually

⁴⁷⁹ See Beer 2008; M. Davis; Rothfield; Shuttleworth; J. Wood.

read between *Daniel Deronda* and the many works on human physiology and neurology in Eliot's library.⁴⁸⁰

In the following chapters I read Eliot's last two completed novels against the rubrics 'abortion' (*Middlemarch*), 'masturbation,' and 'marital rape' (*Daniel Deronda*). First, I re-interpret Rosamond Vincy's fateful riding excursion in light of Victorian discourses surrounding miscarriage and abortion. Since Rosamond usually receives little scholarly attention—and much of that attention has a distinctly disdainful flavor—I hope to vindicate her character by showing that her successful performance of femininity dangerously threatens the stability of institutional rules about marriage and procreation, and makes visible the set of proscriptions by which Victorian fiction could articulate the end of a pregnancy. The final two chapters are dedicated to exploring Gwendolen's hysteria, and build on the analysis of Rosamond, Gwendolen's prototype. I propose, somewhat in opposition to scholars who read Eliot as intellectually ahead of her time, that Eliot's depiction of Gwendolen's "fits of spiritual dread," usually carefully hidden under her "miraculous power of self-control," relies on formulations of hysteria that are now perceived to be deeply misogynistic and conceptually flawed (*DD* 52, 19). Recent research has yielded interesting possibilities for re-assessment of Eliot's text and, similar to Eve Sedgwick's interpretation of Jane Austen's Marianne Dashwood as "the Masturbating Girl," I show that beneath Gwendolen's often-noted "frigidity" lurks the specter—and arousing spectacle—of maidenly autoerotics. In order to curtail Gwendolen's selfish sexuality, Eliot prescribes her heroine a cure of suffering and moral re-orientation analogous to physicians'

⁴⁸⁰ None of them has read Gwendolen as a hysteric whose excessive sexual energy must be curtailed, as described in the contemporary medical literature. Maybe the connection is too obvious. I suspect, however, that an unwillingness to confront the possibility that Eliot's "conservatism on gender" also reached into her understanding of female physiology might have forestalled previous investigation of the issue, seeing that most scholarly writing on Eliot occurs on explicitly feminist terrain (Flint 160; see Henry 2001, 143).

recommendations for their patients. Side effects include a deeply disturbing marriage to a psychological sadist whose treatment of Gwendolen aids in the legally and socially mandated destruction of her frisky spirit.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MIDDLEMARCH'S HIDDEN ABORTION PLOT

Historicizing Abortion

Due to the absence of a broad and traceable public debate regarding Victorian family limitation practices, abortion and contraception in the nineteenth century remain shadowy, dangerous territories for historians and literary critics to tread. Although the 1911 census demonstrated that the middle classes had begun limiting family size in the 1850s, and that fertility restriction practices must have been so widespread by the 1860s as to drastically reduce the average size of the middle-class family after 1870, the taboo surrounding public discussion of the issue and the medical profession's condemnation of artificial means to prevent or terminate pregnancies make it difficult to prove the extent or the means by which fertility restriction was achieved.⁴⁸¹ Demographers assert, however, that the percentage of terminated pregnancies must have been quite substantial since child mortality went down dramatically by the end of the century and families had fewer children than would be predicted by statistical models.⁴⁸²

⁴⁸¹ Perkin 282; see McLaren 116; Woods 2000, 110-2.

⁴⁸² Keown 47; see Woods 2000, 116, 143. Hera Cook (2005) outlines reasons why middle-class women likely did not use contraceptives and argues that widespread sexual abstinence within marriage accounts for the declining birth rate. While convincing, her findings are obviously not applicable to *Middlemarch*. The British government began to regulate abortion in 1967. It remains difficult to assess the frequency of abortion before that time (Kilday 79).

Modern feminists have long considered family planning strategies women's most important means of controlling the conditions of their lives and regulating the health of their bodies. Most mid- and late-Victorian women's rights activists shunned discussions about abortion and contraception owing to the very real risk that other politically important causes, such as suffrage and access to the professions and universities, would lose public support if these concerns became associated with the morally suspicious issue of women managing their reproductive functions. Nevertheless, in what follows I will argue that the unmentionable question of abortion is present in Victorian fiction. While I am less interested in tracing the historical existence of a "female sub-culture" among Victorian abortionists that Patricia Knight identified more than three decades ago (67), I read George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1870-1) in terms of its depiction—or, rather, non-depiction—of Victorian views on abortion. Operating under the assumption that readers "can augment [their] reading experience by imagining the initial conditions of reading when the work first appeared" (Beer 2006, 16), I will historicize *Middlemarch* in the context of contemporary medical treatises on obstetrics and women's health to make the case that an elaborate discourse on abortion existed during the time of the work's publication. Underlying my project here, as in the dissertation at large, is my goal to articulate a method of reading rigorously in the absence of explicit evidence. How can we detect and write about a practice that was surrounded by an aura of profound silence established by cultural, professional, and editorial pressures, but that, demographers as well as social and medical historians assure us, was fairly wide-spread?

Since abortion, similar to detailed descriptions of sexual practices, pregnancy, childbirth, or rape, was considered unrepresentable in non-pornographic literature of the time, the first part of this chapter maps the question of abortion onto *Middlemarch* and then analyzes the discursive

ramifications of that reading practice. How does the text change politically and structurally if we allow for the possibility that a character decides to end her pregnancy? I am interested in exploring the avenues of possibility that are opened up when abortion, at once a biological, medical, political, moral, and personal category, is introduced to the text. It is also important to note that the synonymous categories “abortion” and “induced miscarriage” I bring to *Middlemarch* are quite dissimilar from the publically debated and widely circulated term “abortion” used in twenty-first-century political and medical discourse. Victorian medical writers sometimes conflated contraception, miscarriage, and abortion because they were ignorant about the physiological processes in question, or because they wished to avoid dissemination of dangerously potent information. Since abortion in the nineteenth century was neither widely debated nor circulated in the press before the very end of the period, its presence remains dubious and its principles nebulous.

The deliberate interpretation of Rosamond’s miscarriage in terms of Victorian abortion discourse changes the previous understanding of the distribution of social or hierarchical power among the *Middlemarch* characters and improves critics’ ability to assess the degree of control that Rosamond’s character assumes over her reproductive system at a time when that control was supposed to be the husband’s prerogative (and when reproduction was also supposed to occur solely within marriage). Most importantly, for Victorians, abortion was a question of the pregnant woman’s moral and, by extension, class standing. As she transgresses the normative lines of conduct for a woman of her station, Rosamond must find a way to avert deleterious social consequences by obscuring—by rendering accidental—what she has done, a point upon which I will elaborate below. How does *Middlemarch* anticipate, affirm, and obfuscate abortion, as well as the consequences of Rosamond’s transgressive assumption of reproductive control?

Abortion in *Middlemarch* emerges at the intersection of the Lydgates' precarious program of social and biological reproduction. Sexual reproduction is not only brought to a crisis because of Rosamond's illicit erotic desires, it is also inextricably interwoven with Rosamond's social ambition, particularly her disastrous fantasies of exiting the sphere to which she is legally, morally, and financially bound. To contextualize what can be read as an intentional termination of Rosamond's pregnancy in *Middlemarch* I will first compile Victorian legal and medical knowledge about abortion.

Invisible Practice

Traditionally, scholars have identified social and cultural developments associated with modernity—industrialization, urbanization, secularization, and women's emancipation—as contributing to the spread of contraceptive knowledge and practices in the nineteenth century.⁴⁸³ Historians such as Angus McLaren and John Riddle caution however, that, rather than attributing the post-1870 dramatic fall in marital fertility to a trickle-down effect of contraceptive knowledge and practices from the upper and middle classes to the working classes, we should allow for the likely possibility that the near-universal restriction of family size by the end in the nineteenth century is a consequence of “old practices being called into play by new social and economic conditions.”⁴⁸⁴ Mostly confined to pharmacology manuals, surgeons' handbooks, and treatises on medical jurisprudence, printed information about abortifacients and contraceptives was available to a narrow group of professionals—virtually all of them men—who, while

⁴⁸³ Perkin 282; see Woods 2000, 144.

⁴⁸⁴ McLaren 19; see Riddle 201-3. Abortion had likely been widely regarded as a backup form of contraception, particularly in the early stages of pregnancy, from the seventeenth through the nineteenth century (Kilday 80).

steadily passing on information about fertility control that British writers had collated since at least the early sixteenth century, avoided researching the matter much further (Kilday 78). Association with “the subjects in surgery and midwifery which can offend and disgust” was likely to put these professionals’ careers in jeopardy (“Art. VIII” 442). As the social standing of the medical profession was in the very process of being established, particularly during the third and fourth decades of the century, its members were sensitive to the dangers of seeming to sympathize with disreputable doctrines. Later in the century, it seemed appropriate to discuss procreation and abortion within the confines of professional literature while it was still considered necessary that the public should be shielded from these subjects (Matus 1995, 13). In cases where fertility control was referenced publicly, as was the case in a *Saturday Review* article from 14 March 1857, the “infamous purpose” of inducing abortion was imagined to exist within a “hideous web of sin and horror”; an underworld where England’s poor practiced “[f]ornication and adultery, incest and murder, abortion and poisoning,” at a safe distance from the offended middle-class observer’s gaze (“Sweet Auburn” 239). Only towards the end of the century did the number of guides for the bride-to-be increase, although contraceptive information was usually conveyed in coded language and did not address abortion explicitly (Woods 2000, 149).

Although abortion at any state of pregnancy had been criminalized under Lord Ellenborough’s Act of 1803, some historians believe that the practice, clearly widespread before 1803, did not abate after the passing of this first criminal statute (Perkin 282). The 1803 Act allowed for a range of punishments, depending on whether the abortion occurred during the period before or after “quickening,” the time when the mother first sensed the movement of the fetus. The most severe punishment for administering drugs to procure a miscarriage was the death penalty (Keown 26). The Act targeted the professions that specialized in illegal abortions,

such as unlicensed medical practitioners, midwives, and quacks, while the woman herself was accessory to the crime. In practice, however, courts interpreted the law as pertaining to unmarried women, hence circumscribing abortion as an act initiated by single women who sought to avoid the public scandal of their illicit affairs (Riddle 207). As the medical profession worked to eradicate midwives' and irregular practitioners' involvement in maternity care and increasingly voiced concerns about the validity of the mother's subjective judgment concerning the time of quickening, the 1803 Act underwent repeated amendments in 1828, 1838, and 1861. These led to the eradication of the older pre- and post-quickening distinction and did away with capital punishment in 1838.⁴⁸⁵ Eventually, the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act identified the pregnant woman as the main perpetrator who would face imprisonment for life for attempting to procure an abortion, regardless of whether she had actually been pregnant.⁴⁸⁶ The 1861 Act also criminalized the dissemination of knowledge on how to bring about a miscarriage (Keown 33).

As a range of historians has shown, knowledge regarding herbal abortifacients, such as rue, pennyroyal, ergot of rye, sage, aloe, or savin, had been orally transmitted for centuries, although the effectiveness and accessibility of these remedies remains contested.⁴⁸⁷ The fact that many women used herbal emmenagogues and purgatives as well as pessaries or suppositories "to elicit a late period" was frequently discussed and increasingly condemned in the medical press whose contributors were still divided on the nature of the relationship between menstruation and

⁴⁸⁵ Brookes 25; see Keown 26-7; Kilday 81-2; Smart 18.

⁴⁸⁶ Brookes 22; see Kilday 81.

⁴⁸⁷ Woods 2009, 247; see Riddle 12. Savin, ergot of rye, and pennyroyal have proven anti-estrogenic properties. Most of the other plant-based abortifacients worked by causing violent gastric and intestinal cramps that were thought to induce uterine cramps similar to labor (Kilday 83).

pregnancy (McLaren 123). The negligible number of convictions for the crime of abortion suggests that women who bought herbal abortifacients from apothecaries were unlikely to face prosecution. Rather, women who had experienced instrumental manipulation of the uterus—with its extremely high incidence of laceration and infection that required emergency treatment by an experienced, licensed practitioner—risked coming into contact with the law (Brookes 22).

Patricia Knight argues that, throughout the nineteenth century, abortion “was probably the most prevalent form of contraception for working-class women,” while middle-class women also frequently resorted to abortion, as indicated by the widespread sale of abortion drugs, many of which were prohibitively expensive for working-class women (57-8). Contributors to medical journals complained about the widespread advertisements for “female remedies” in periodicals, serialized novels, and even religious tracts, and warned that respectable women might become victims of “a cunning system of blackmail” (Whitley 108). It seems clear that abortions were not confined to the working and pauper classes, although much of the respectable press approached it as a crime of which middle-class women were guiltless. Particularly clergy and medical practitioners were opposed to abortion and the spread of birth control information among the masses. The establishment’s class bias and hypocrisy become apparent when one considers that the 1911 census found that surgeons’ and clergy’s family sizes were among the smallest in the country (Woods 2000, 146). This suggests that these professional groups condoned or promoted discreet means of birth control within their own circles while insisting that, if information about contraceptive practices fell into the hands of the working classes, the country would drown in promiscuity and social disorder.⁴⁸⁸ As Carol Smart observes, the politicization of these issues occurred at a time when the definition of ideal motherhood had narrowed to denote a “specific

⁴⁸⁸ Knight 62; see Brookes 23; Smart 8.

model of caring activity” (Smart 15) carried out by morally pure, married middle-class women. These women were subjected to an increasingly institutionalized regime of enforced motherhood and, by the mid-nineteenth century, were ascribed a “biologico-moral responsibility” to become mothers (Foucault 1990, 104). Unmarried women’s abortions were discursively constructed as a public concern threatening the strength of the national body politic, while, for respectably married women, the “problem” was one to be solved privately and discreetly.⁴⁸⁹

The debates surrounding abortion in the literature for medical experts were concerned with the age-old question whether medical practitioners had the right to control life. For most contributors, it was understood that women were excluded from the debate, although doctors did encourage their female patients to space their births using abstinence, the rhythm method, and protracted lactation as “natural,” and hence, morally sound, fertility control strategies (McLaren 125). For the purposes of this chapter, the conflation of medical and moral authority in these writings is of the utmost importance because it allows for a re-creation of a normative, institutional backdrop against which to read the transgression of abortion in *Middlemarch*.

Vindicating Rosamond

Arguably, Rosamond Vincy is *Middlemarch*’s most successful character. When the narrative wraps up, Rosamond, after Tertius Lydgate’s untimely death from diphtheria, achieves almost everything she had desired all along. She marries “an elderly and wealthy physician” (*M* 782), and gains a satisfyingly elevated social status, along with money, residence in London, connections, and a carriage. Although she does not complete her ascendancy into the aristocracy, “that middle-class heaven, rank” (*M* 110), of which she had daydreamed earlier, the novel makes

⁴⁸⁹ Smart 2; see Riddle 218.

the point that Rosamond is perfectly adapted to polite society's expectations for successful femininity. Her achievement of laying the groundwork for and completing a series of marriages that guarantee her social climb is, of course, designed to evoke a bitter aftertaste in Eliot's 1871 audience. Given Eliot's novels' insistence on a didactic program of moral development and self-sacrifice that her major female heroines have to undergo, what Laura Green calls Eliot's "concern with service rather than self-fulfillment" (76), Rosamond is a flawed character precisely because she does not give up her aspirations when her marriage comes under critical pressure. The novel's persistent representation of Rosamond's misdirected (because mercenary) education and the dangerous "commodification of the domestic ideal" (Green 80) effected by that education render her extremely unlikeable to many readers. Few critics, feminist or not, have been willing to acknowledge the fact that Rosamond's determined undermining of her husband's material and intellectual aspirations is a radical—and radically successful—program of self-fulfillment. Whereas at the end of the novel Dorothea Brooke has to lay aside grand social and intellectual ambitions for the sake of becoming a dispensary of "incalculably diffusive" positive effects on those around her (*M* 785), and Mary Garth's authorship merges with that of her husband, Mrs. Lemon's schooling provides Rosamond, the nouveau-riche social climber, with the delicate feminine accomplishments ultimately rewarded by her society. Eliot imagines the realistic range of women's professional opportunities and likely successes as very narrow (muting the social impact of the author's own work, and of the novel itself, in the process) and dwells instead on the uncomfortable fact that egoism, superficiality, materialism, and erotic appeal, directly resulting from the practices enforced by domestic ideology, are central to female achievement.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁹⁰ Beer 2006, 28; see Green 80. In their assessments of Rosamond, scholars sometimes emulate nineteenth-century prescriptions regarding women's mandatory relationality, that is, they are stricter in their evaluation of Rosamond's

Late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century criticism has not been kind to Rosamond. In accordance with the narrator's overall treatment of Rosamond as an accessory to Lydgate's story, critics tend to read her as a purely relational being whose development, in contrast to Dorothea's, for instance, is rarely seen as self-contained or important in and of itself.⁴⁹¹ The traditional reading of Rosamond's character identifies her miseducation at Mrs. Lemon's establishment as one of the central contributing factors to Lydgate's professional and personal failure. Rosemary Ashton's 2003 introduction to the Penguin edition of *Middlemarch*, for instance, observes that "When [Lydgate] marries Rosamond ... he finds that blue eyes may be accompanied by selfishness and obstinacy ... Lydgate is checkmated, made to bow under the yoke, and so deteriorates from ardent researcher to fashionable doctor in London" (xiv). Ashton reads Rosamond as Lydgate's "punishment" (xv), building her argument here on the notoriously unreliable narrator who calls Rosamond "the irresistible woman for the doomed man of that date" (*M* 252). Similarly, Jill Matus deems Rosamond "too selfish for love and motherhood" (1995, 241), blaming Rosamond for not putting her husband's views and needs before her own. This well-known narrative of women hampering men's genius by erecting obstacles within their personal and professional lives is a highly problematic one, both structurally and politically. Only rarely do critics attempt to "rescue" Rosamond from such "readerly injustice," Anne Patrick's rarely-quoted 1987 attack on scholars' sexist readings of Rosamond being a rare

egoism than in that of male characters. It is easy to overstate Rosamond's egoism. Lawrence Rothfield helpfully reminds critics that Casaubon and Lydgate, for instance, "are merely egoists on a different scale, just as lost in the labyrinth of knowledge as Rosamond is in the labyrinth of her romantic plots" (90). Rothfield might underestimate the transgressive radicalism of Rosamond's romantic plot. In a somewhat different register, Steedman remarks laconically (and not wrongly) that *Middlemarch* is "really ... about sex and shopping" (94).

⁴⁹¹ Flint 164; Henry 2001, Henry 2012, 139, 192, 199-203; Michie 1987, 41, 106; Nestor 167; Rothfield 87; Steedman 94-9. Rebecca N. Mitchell's recent essay (2007) investigates the limits of knowability among the couple and resists the facile narrative of Rosamond hampering Lydgate's genius (see 321-2).

example (224). Although Patrick vindicates Rosamond, she also reads Rosamond's character as integral to Lydgate's story, arguing that Lydgate's "flawed perspective on women" is the main reason for his "tragedy" (223). For Patrick, Rosamond remains a lamentable "product of her culture" whose character must be read primarily in conjunction with Lydgate's flawed perspective on women as members of a different species (226).

I would like to show that Rosamond neither lacks ambition, as Anne Patrick assumes (237), nor is she the "fair fragile creature" of Lydgate's imagination (*M* 725). Rather, Rosamond and Lydgate are involved in a struggle over the decision-making powers central to their marriage, a struggle that will only end with Lydgate's untimely demise and that reaches its tipping point when Rosamond procures her own miscarriage by deciding to go horse-back riding with Lydgate's cousin. This overlooked detail in Eliot's novel is politically subversive, yet difficult to detect. As Jill Matus has documented, Eliot's—by post-Victorian estimates—very tame depiction of the progress of Hetty's pregnancy in *Adam Bede* had been harshly attacked by one reviewer for its "intolerable" depiction of the "several stages that precede the birth of a child."⁴⁹² While it is possible that Eliot took this rebuke to heart and adjusted her later depiction of Rosamond's pregnancy according to the reviewer's preferences, it is important to note that we can trace "the subjective state of the woman approaching ... motherhood" in *Middlemarch*, the factor that Eliot's reviewer found particularly revolting ("Adam Bede" 251). As Rosamond anticipates becoming a mother, she does not automatically assume idealized attitudes and behaviors commonly associated with middle-class maternity. She refuses a form of physical labor that the medical establishment and culture at large took for granted, and is accompanied by risk to her health and her goals. Even scholars today normalize married women's burden of

⁴⁹² "Adam Bede" 251; see Matus 1995, 1.

pregnancy as a natural given. Jill Matus' analysis of Rosamond's pregnancy warrants a longer quotation here:

Careless and irresponsible, Rosamond loses her unborn child... through her willful insistence in going horseriding. The loss seems not to affect Rosamond greatly; she is sure she would have had a miscarriage anyway, even if she had not gone riding. The suggestion is that she is too selfish for love or motherhood, both of which demand a heightened emotionality and capacity for intense connectedness. (1995, 241)

While I do agree that Rosamond cannot ascend into the hallowed realm of idealized maternity at this stage in the narrative, I would like to depart from Matus' reading (which interprets Rosamond's miscarriage as meaningful in the context of Dorothea's "coming of age," 1995, 242) and propose that Rosamond's miscarriage is an event that must be analyzed for the sake of the additional textual valences it opens up. It is possible to interpret Rosamond's "mild" insistence that "the ride had made no difference, and that if she had stayed at home the same symptoms would have ... ended in the same way, because she had felt something like them before" (*M* 549) as an indication of Rosamond's previous attempts to induce an abortion. The above statement, coupled with Lydgate's wonder "over the terrible tenacity of this mild creature" (*M* 549) and his "amazed sense of his powerlessness over Rosamond" (*M* 549) in the ensuing sentences is one of many textual instabilities allowing for the possibility that Rosamond is surreptitiously taking charge of the Lydgates' family planning.

Analyzing the extent of Rosamond's passive-aggressive control over the fate of her marriage, her financial future, and her most important asset—her irresistible physicality—not only adds a new dimension to Lydgate's failure to convince Rosamond that she must yield unequivocally to his judgment in all personal and professional (particularly medical) matters, but also endows Rosamond with a so far unacknowledged force of determination and political agency at the cost of one of the greatest moral infractions that a Victorian woman could commit.

Rosamond's self-induced miscarriage functions as Eliot's starkest critique of "the model of 'accomplishment' that represented the least morally serious ... version of women's education" (Green 83). Eliot, not particularly renowned for her radical feminist politics, provides in *Middlemarch* a veiled representation of an abortion to warn her audiences that middle-class women's morally empty education quite literally threatened to end the rule of the father.

Is It 1870 Yet?

As Gillian Beer has argued, one of the main interpretive challenges posed by *Middlemarch* is the fact that "it is endowed with the additional knowledge gained between 1830, the setting of the work, to around 1870, the time of its publication" (2006, 17). Beer reads the forty-year span between 1832 and 1871 as the novel's "invisible structuring arc" (2006, 18), enabling Eliot's first audiences to reflect on the tensions that exist between their immediate present and their past, thereby coming to terms with Victorian society's (in)capacity for change. In terms of Rosamond's willful miscarriage, the insight gained from Beer's observation is that, since the novel is set before 1861 when women became liable for prosecution (Brookes 25), Rosamond's action, if deliberate, is not directly punishable. Some of Eliot's readers in 1871, however, might have been aware that self-induced abortions now carried the punishment of imprisonment for life as did the act of procuring drugs or the use of instruments to perform someone else's abortion (Jones 196). The novel's appearance after 1870 carries a precisely defined legal dimension to the severity of Rosamond's transgression.

Rosamond's miscarriage can also be read in the context of raging debates in the press during the 1860s and 70s regarding "the emancipated woman's flight from maternity" (Perkin 283) and the fact that middle-class family sizes continued to shrink noticeably. Robert Woods

maintains that abortion in England remained too dangerous and its mechanisms largely unknown in England before 1850. However, in the second half of the nineteenth century, “induced abortions [were] responsible for a growing share of fetal deaths” (Woods 2009, 248). Reasons for this shift, according to Woods, were changes in middle-class expectations of well-being, leisure, and consumption which prompted restrictions of fertility (Woods 2000, 114). Rosamond, it can be argued, marks this shift in abortion-awareness in the second half of the nineteenth century. *Middlemarch* is very much a product of its publication’s time as Rosamond’s assumptions and behaviors can be applied to societal changes after 1850. The complaint of a contributor to the *Saturday Review* is illustrative. In September 1871, this writer detected in women “a decided diminution . . . in reverence for parents, trust in men, and desire of children” and bemoaned the existence of women who seemed to “[despise] the pleasures and [contemn] the duties of maternity” (“British Mother” 335). While this particular *Saturday Review*’s contributor had in mind women who sought entry to the professions and institutions of higher education, Rosamond shares with these “New Women”⁴⁹³ social ambition and perseverance. Dorothea Brooke has been read as a precursor to the New Woman who, in the absence of a robust political movement, “cannot sustain an individual challenge to society at large” (Beer 2006, 28). In *Middlemarch*, Eliot divides the emerging New Woman of the early 1870s into two constituent parts: New Women’s grand social and intellectual ambition is personified by Dorothea, while Rosamond exemplifies the movement’s troublesome tenacity.

Lawrence Rothfield suggests that, next to clinical conceptions of the body, Eliot allows for other systems of understanding physicality that “are valid without being medical” (88). In

⁴⁹³ The term “New Woman” was coined by Sarah Grand in 1894 but has been applied by scholars retroactively to denote various clusters of social and political movements that emerged in the 1860s and advocated an expansion of women’s educational, social, and legal rights (Schaffer 40).

order to theorize Rosamond's intractability beyond critics' common assertion that it arises from childish selfishness, it will be useful to take a look at a sample advice book for married women published in the 1860s. Here, bodily "rules that do not match those of the clinic but that nevertheless have the ring of truth" emerge (Rothfield 88). Eliza Lynn Linton, prominent journalist and essayist, recommended to wives in 1868:

If a woman's air simply says at the end of it all [after a long admonition from her husband], 'I can't answer you, but I know I am right,' a man has a lurking sense that his copious rhetoric has had a smack of the cowardly as well as of the tyrannical about it. And so, after a vigorous denunciation of some particular thing which his wife has done, a husband commonly finds himself no further than before; and the very instant that, from sheer weariness, he ceases, the wife usually steals out and does it again. (221)

Rather than "nagging," which Linton also suggests as a last-resort strategy to triumph over one's husband (Linton 1868, 221), Rosamond is said to "[turn] her neck" (*M* 557), a sign of "perfect obstinacy"⁴⁹⁴ which Lydgate, after a painful series of arguments, eventually learns to decipher (*M* 323). Silent, non-verbal protest allows Rosamond to demoralize and disarm her husband. It appears as if she, ostensibly born sometime in the 1810s, had been following Mrs. Linton's advice to the letter. Rosamond's "education in deceit," which might have been a staple for middle-class wives in the 1860s (Perkin 262), allows Rosamond to repress, conceal, and censor her thoughts and opinions while, to the amazement of her husband, continuing to advance her plans of upward social ascension. It is my contention that Rosamond's miscarriage can be understood as part of that verbally subdued, yet bodily loquacious agenda.

⁴⁹⁴ This fetishization of Rosamond's neck as a marker of silent sexual power also occurs on pages 105, 150, 282, 323, 330, 548, 557, 563, 610, 711. Helena Michie reminds readers that "synecdoche is both a way of introducing sexuality by implication and a fragmentation and fetishization of culturally selected parts of the female body" (1987, 86).

Rosamond's Ambition

When Lydgate learns that Rosamond has gone on a riding-exercise with his cousin, the foppish Captain Lydgate, he resorts to “thundering exclamations of astonishment” and insists that in matters such as these, he should be “the person to judge” for her (*M* 548). As Mrs. Linton’s advice-book prescribed, Rosamond’s reaction to her husband’s admonitions is silence, accompanied by “a little turning aside of the long neck” (*M* 548). Rather than responding directly to his request that she promise not to go riding again, she executes another of Ms. Linton’s advices: to evoke Lydgate’s realization that he has behaved tyrannically, she asks him to perform the delicate task of fastening her plaits, “so as to make a husband ashamed of standing there like a brute” (*M* 548). Lydgate temporarily assumes the role of his wife’s maid and loses the argument.

As a direct result of this disagreement, Rosamond repeats her outing with Captain Lydgate, “the baronet’s third son” (*M* 545). As Beer writes, “adultery is a threshold” for many characters in the novel and Rosamond is certainly “driven by this fantasy” (2006, 17). The narrator states without much circumlocution that “Rosamond delighted in [Captain Lydgate’s] admiration ... and he found it easy to spend several hours of the day in flirting with her” (*M* 546). Whether Rosamond performs actual or imagined adultery with Captain Lydgate is of secondary importance. It does matter that the narrator describes Rosamond’s feelings during her cousin’s visit as “unprecedented but gracefully concealed exultation” (*M* 545); the orgasmic quality of the sensation being obvious. Even Lydgate, usually not privy to his wife’s fantasies, remarks that she seems to prefer his cousin’s manners over his own (*M* 547). Captain Lydgate, with his “delicately scented” (*M* 547) fatuousness and titled father, personifies all of Rosamond’s aspirations. Early on in the novel we learn that Rosamond deplores her parents’ manufacturer-

and-innkeeper origins and that marrying into “family” (*M* 93) sums up her life’s aspiration.

Embodying “the spectacle of the socially ... ambitious woman” (Green 85), Rosamond eroticizes her connections to people of rank, and, more instinctively than rationally, calculates how she can bring about her own social rise: “There was nothing financial, still less sordid, in her previsions: she cared about ... refinements, and not about the money that was to pay for them” (*M* 110).

Eliot’s narrative does not conceal the fact that Rosamond marries Lydgate because he belongs to an aristocratic family, nor that she is more invested in forging a closer connection to his relatives than she is in improving the relationship with him. Upon first meeting Lydgate at Stone Court, Rosamond already anticipates the commencement of “the great epoch of her life” and conjures up a “little future” with him, since he neatly corresponds to her ideal suitor, being “somehow ... related to a baronet” (*M* 109). Such acquisitive fantasies indicate the “cultural uneasiness” of the 1860s with the socially ambitious, agential “New” woman (Green 85).

By chapter 58 Lydgate has turned out to be more difficult “to enslave” (*M* 110) than Rosamond expected, and his cousin emerges as a preferable double to her husband—he has the same name, is of the same “good family,” and he is even more closely related to the baronet residing at Quallingham. The erotic fantasy of aristocratic kinship with Captain Lydgate is so powerful for Rosamond “that she imagined the knowledge of what was implied by his presence to be diffused through all other minds ... his rank penetrated them as if it had been an odour” (*M* 545). Her sexual, rather than merely romantic, attraction to rank and refinement dominates Rosamond’s perception of social realities to the point of becoming all-encompassing. The force of Rosamond’s erotic social fantasy pervades her physicality and, symbolically, prevents the gestation of the child fathered by Lydgate. On a literal level, this fetishization of status urges her to actions that threaten to shut down the natural reproduction of patriarchy.

It is significant that the crisis of authority between Lydgate and his wife is fought out over the riding excursion with Lydgate's more appealing double. Rosamond's miscarriage occurs at a point when the division between her and Lydgate is reaching its climax and will lead to permanent rupture. The following passage encapsulates the decision-making process leading to Rosamond's miscarriage and contains an intricately interconnected web of ambitions: authority over her husband; the performance of an erotic, exhibitionist tableau with Captain Lydgate, visible to all her neighbors (and the reader); the exclusion of her husband from the adulterous adventure; the revival of her pre-marital condition (which includes her pre-pregnancy physical state); and her will to social ascension:

Rosamond had that victorious obstinacy which never wastes its energy in impetuous resistance. What she liked to do was to her the right thing, and all her cleverness was directed to getting the means of doing it. She meant to go out riding again ... and she did go on the next opportunity of her husband's absence, not intending that he should know until it was late enough not to signify to her. The temptation was certainly great: she was very fond of the exercise, and the gratification of riding on a fine horse, with Captain Lydgate, Sir Godwin's son, on another fine horse by her side, and of being met in this position by any one but her husband, was something as good as her dreams before marriage: moreover she was riveting the connection with the family at Quellingham ... (M 549)

The narrator, without judging Rosamond's actions, reiterates Mrs. Linton's counsel to the young bride: Rosamond "steals out and does it again." The direct consequence of the betrayal of Lydgate's authority is that Rosamond's horse "took fright, and caused a worse fright to Rosamond, leading finally to the loss of her baby" (M 549), while Lydgate is left to wonder at Rosamond's lack of compliance to his wishes as her husband and his advice as a medical professional. Lydgate's reaction to his wife's recklessness is one of outraged amazement because he overestimated the extent to which his expert medical knowledge allowed him to predict his wife's character. Early on in the novel, Lydgate reads Rosamond, in her "perfect blond loveliness," as possessing

just the kind of intelligence one would desire in a woman—polished, refined, docile, lending itself to finish in all the delicacies of life, and enshrined in a body which expressed this with a force of demonstration that excluded the need for other evidence. Lydgate felt sure that if ever he married, his wife would have that feminine radiance, that distinctive womanhood which must be classed with flowers and music, that sort of beauty which by its very nature was virtuous, being moulded only for pure and delicate joys. (*M* 252, 153)

Lydgate's mistake is that he fails to suspect that Rosamond's behavior, like that of a patient, could be explained by "conjunctions" of motivations that "always depend on conditions that are not obvious" (*M* 151). However, the "distinction of mind" Lydgate usually exhibits, particularly as a surgeon, does "not penetrate his feeling and judgment about furniture, or women" (*M* 141). To him, she is all sex. Because he classified, rather than interpreted Rosamond⁴⁹⁵, he misread, even failed to detect, the symptoms of *arriviste* determination.

Significantly, immediately following the description of Lydgate's impotent frustration, both medical and masculine, about his failure to regulate his wife's behavior, we learn that "Rosamond was soon looking lovelier than ever at her worktable ... She knew that she was a much more exquisite ornament to the drawing-room there than any daughter of the [baronet's] family" (*M* 550). The sequence of narration highlights Rosamond's concern to preserve her looks. Always "[conscious] that she was being looked at," she prioritizes maintaining her appearance over the physical changes and eventual seclusion associated with pregnancy because she wants to continue her project of social advancement (*M* 109). Mrs. Vincy's comment regarding her daughter's miscarriage—"poor thing ... I'm sure I felt for her being disappointed of her baby; but she got over it nicely" (*M* 535)—helps to cement further the suspicion that Rosamond, absolutely not crestfallen about the loss of her baby but contently "looking lovelier than ever," is aware of the risk to herself and the child when she disobeys her husband's orders.

⁴⁹⁵ See Rothfield 109; R. Mitchell 319.

Because of the degree of concealment to which Eliot's narrator must resort to avoid censorship, the intentionality underlying the course of events in this chapter must be added retroactively by the reader. Critics have underestimated the magnitude by which Rosamond's performance of physical perfection and dignified poise influences her behavioral choices. If we accept an early aside by the narrator and indeed consider Rosamond "an actress of parts that entered into her *physique*: she even acted her own character," we realize that motherhood is (not yet) part of this perfectly staged paragon of femininity (*M* 109). Directing "all her cleverness ... to getting the means of doing" what she likes, Rosamond is intently, doggedly focused on staying in character and maintaining her bodily status quo until she has secured permanent association with the baronet's family. When Lydgate begins to "survey[] her ... as if he were looking for symptoms," it is already too late (*M* 617).

The narrator does not mention whether Lydgate informed his wife of the medical risks associated with riding during pregnancy. However, the 1860s medical press documents that middle-class women knew these risks. Like doctors who were taken aback by "women's refusal to accept that abortion was wrong, especially since the women concerned were not usually depraved members of the criminal classes, but appeared quite ordinary and respectable" (Knight 64), George Greaves, contributor to the *Transactions of the Manchester Statistical Society*, lamented in 1863 that "married ladies, whenever they find themselves pregnant, habitually [begin] to take exercise, on foot or on horseback ... and thus [make] themselves abort" (13-4). Greaves furthermore criticized that married women, some of them "highly educated" and otherwise "most estimable" would "lightly and thoughtlessly treat this event, considering it as a 'mishap,' although it is an unnatural process ... altogether regardless of their social, moral, and religious responsibility" (13). George Napheys, in 1869, wrote that abortion was "fearfully

prevalent” among “respectable *Christian* matrons ... walking in better classes of society” (123, emphasis Napheys’s). If we remember that Victorian abortion was often conceptualized in terms of class, Rosamond’s unfashionable mother, the “innkeeper’s daughter” (*M* 89), arouses suspicion as to being the possible source of the prohibited information.⁴⁹⁶

As early as 1660, in *The Diseases of Women with Child, and in Child-bed*, François Mauriceau had stipulated that miscarriage could be induced by ““falling, leaping, dancing, and running or riding,”” next to a plethora of other accidental causes (qtd. in Woods 2009, 107). Alfred Swaine Taylor’s *Manual of Medical Jurisprudence*, first published in 1844 and reissued until far into the twentieth century, identified “violent agitations of the body, as by riding or driving over a rough pavement, in which case no marks of violence would be apparent” as some of the main causes of “criminal abortion.”⁴⁹⁷ Napheys suggests that “taking drugs, or using instruments” were the means usually applied, along with less definite “want of care” (123). Finally, the 1873 edition of Taylor’s *Medical Jurisprudence* contained the court case of *R v. Wallis*: during the Winchester Autumn Assizes in 1871, a solicitor was charged with having aided his wife in the procurement of abortifacient drugs. However, in the opinion of three medical experts, these drugs could not have brought about the solicitor’s wife’s abortion. The wife then admitted to having gone horseback riding shortly before she miscarried, and the court ruled that an accidental shock sustained from riding had led to the miscarriage. The charges were dropped (A. Taylor 1873, 186-7). This legal precedent, occurring when *Middlemarch*’s final

⁴⁹⁶ See Barret-Ducrocq 130, on historical evidence that working-class women were expected to possess such “traditional know-how.”

⁴⁹⁷ A. Taylor 1844, 591. The same passage occurs on p. 780 in Taylor’s 1865 edition of *The Principles of Medical Jurisprudence*. Scholars have identified other strategies commonly employed by women: “undertaking strenuous exercise, such as excessive dancing or the lifting of heavy objects; slamming stomachs into walls; tight lacing; and even deliberate provocations to incite domestic violence” (Kilday 83).

chapters were published, and the previous medical references indicate that pregnant women were aware of the dangers that accompanied strenuous exercise during pregnancy and that they had reason to feel relatively safe from prosecution. Rosamond could calculate her risks and she took her chances, having, as in financial matters, “no consciousness that her action could rightly be called false” (*M* 627).

A Failed Union

In *Middlemarch*, Eliot imagines the ideal heterosexual configuration between men and women in terms of an “intellectual union” in which husband and wife share similar aspirations and interests (Green 85). Laura Green argues that successful unions like that of Will and Dorothea, Fred and Mary, or Sir James and Celia are founded not upon the shared pursuits of professional life, but upon common temperament and mental capacity (85). Certainly, Lydgate’s reliance on popular metaphors about women forecloses the possibility of a union with a woman of his temperament. Lydgate’s admiration of Dorothea’s “fountain of friendship towards men” (*M* 723), that is, her abnormal ability to operate outside the logic of sexual relationality with men, leads to his quasi-religious idolization of her in the last chapters of the novel. It is probably Dorothea’s rank that enables this superiority—she simply is not a candidate for sexual reproduction with Lydgate. Rosamond, however, fully corresponds to Lydgate’s understanding of female physicality and intellectuality as pathologically stymied: “present in his imagination [was] the weakness of [women’s] frames and the delicate poise of their health both in body and mind” (*M* 610). In contrast to Dorothea, Rosamond, the parvenu, very much participates in the gender economy that privileges beautiful surface over moral depth and sexual attraction over serious communication. The uneasy encounter between Dorothea and Rosamond in chapter 43

underscores their class differential: Dorothea's easy grace and simple dignity can safely risk "sleeves hanging all out of the fashion," while Rosamond's vulgar and "wondrous crown of hair-plaits, ... her pale-blue dress of [perfect] fit and fashion ... [and her] large embroidered collar which it was to be hoped all beholders would know the price of" draw attention to their owner's materialism (*M* 406-7). Rather than supporting his ambitions, sharing his sensibilities, and offering herself as the reward for his hard work, Rosamond co-competes with Lydgate for material comfort and social standing, and fatally wrestles with him for marital authority. Because Lydgate—who is also, fatally, "perceptually limited" in his tissue research (Rothfield 95)—conceptualizes his wife as "an animal of another and feebler species," their marriage remains not only metaphorically, but biologically sterile until she has "mastered" him and convinced him to relocate to London (*M* 628).

As critics note, Eliot insists in *Middlemarch* on the "abstract moral significance" of "fulfilling family ties," such as parenthood and marriage (Green 100). Feminist scholar Carol Smart observes from a different political angle that compulsory motherhood in the nineteenth century "was a way of attaching women to marriage and the whole set of legal statuses that flowed from it" (30). With her miscarriage, Rosamond resists this attachment to marriage and parenthood. Within the logic of *Middlemarch*, Rosamond's uncanny ability to evade legal and moral coverture symbolically seals her husband's and her own incapacity to achieve marital mutuality. In a novel as invested in didactically problematizing "the deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men" (*M* 582), reproduction functions as the biological confirmation of heterosexual fellow-feeling—and Lydgate and Rosamond can ascend into this realm only after he has been fully "enslaved" by her (*M* 733). Procreation is by no means central to *Middlemarch*: Celia's flippant maternity evokes suspicions regarding the aristocracy's long-

term soundness, while Dorothea's maternal experiences are ticked off in a few sentences confirming that she becomes "absorbed into the life of another" and almost pays with her life for the privilege (*M* 783). However, in a letter to her friend Emily Davies, founder of Girton College, Eliot affirmed that her priorities lay with "the bonds of family affection and family duties": "We can no longer afford to part with that exquisite type of gentleness, tenderness, and possible maternity suffusing a woman's being with affectionateness, which makes what we mean by the feminine character" (*GEL* 4:467-8). Although *Middlemarch*'s last chapter confirms that Rosamond and Lydgate will have four children and that Rosamond happily makes "a very pretty show with her daughters, driving out in her carriage" (*M* 782), she is emphatically excluded from Eliot's conceptions of ideal femininity and maternity. Rosamond's miscarriage is a symptom of her unsuitableness for Eliot's "exquisite type" of woman.

What Counts as Evidence?

Asking what would happen to *Middlemarch* if one assumes that Rosamond's miscarriage was precipitated by a series of intentional choices makes visible certain politically incendiary aspects of the novel. A retroactive supplementation of the text with the rubric "induced miscarriage" not only brings into focus Rosamond's willingness to sacrifice long-term domestic harmony for the sake of pursuing her erotic project of social self-fulfillment; it unhinges conventional assumptions about how often middle-class heroines manage their reproductive capacity and thus potentially oppose the legally entrenched wishes of their husbands. Through this reading practice, it is also possible to extrapolate the conditions of representability of fertility management in Victorian fiction. In *Middlemarch*, abortion occurs as a superficially accidental incident whose legal, moral, and political ramifications are obscured by narrative indirectness

and the comforting—and protective—knowledge that accidental miscarriages were far from uncommon at the time.

It is very difficult, and possibly pointless, to trace the extent of George Eliot's own intentionality when it comes to Rosamond's miscarriage. The reading and composition notebooks she used during *Middlemarch*'s drafting do not provide guidance as to her conception of Rosamond's character or the question of Victorian fertility control. As is the case with the novel, however, the notebook itself leaves traces of prohibited knowledge. Penciled into page 32 of Eliot's notebook at the Folger Library we find a brief entry, presumably written sometime in 1869, simply reading "Eringo root" (Pratt and Neufeldt 21). Eliot might have gleaned the name of this root from her copy of the ninth edition of John Paris's *Pharmacologia* (1843), in which Paris comments that, during Elizabethan times, eringo "had the reputation of being able to restore decayed vigor" (98). The Latin name for eringo is *eryngium*; and some species, such as the alpine snakeroot (*Eryngium alpinum* L.), were used as abortifacients in the seventeenth century (Riddle 154). The chapter in which Paris references eringo root also lists several plants with abortifacient activity, such as opopanax and hemlock (95-6). Does this isolated reference to eringo root prove that Eliot knew about abortifacients and possibly used them herself or somehow incorporated them in the narrative of *Middlemarch*? Not at all. But it does help illustrate the existence of sub-public Victorian archives of knowledge and apparatuses of information circulation which we have inherited in the form of stray and decontextualized fragments and which I have attempted to recombine in a contextually sound and politically meaningful way.

CHAPTER EIGHT

TENDING TO OLD STORIES: *DANIEL DERONDA* AND HYSTERIA

How to Talk about the Hysterical Heroine

If it is Lydgate's incapacity to diagnose his wife's will to power that threatens patriarchal reproduction in *Middlemarch*, Eliot amplifies her critique of incapable fathers' guardianship over their families in her next novel, *Daniel Deronda*. Here, fathers and husbands again exhibit a lackluster incompetence in their dealings with their female kin, as do *Middlemarch*'s Lydgate and Casaubon. In addition, most adult men, aside from the titular hero, belong to a type of masculinity that Judith Wilt calls the "unscrupulous male."⁴⁹⁸ As decades of scholarly commentary on *Daniel Deronda*, and Gwendolen's plot in particular, have documented, negligent and vicious patriarchs thrive in Eliot's last novel and, along with unruly maidens, endanger the reproduction of the upper middle-class family.⁴⁹⁹ *Daniel Deronda* chiefly investigates this family's future cultural potential and, in the end, challenges its survival. As I have shown in the previous chapter, Rosamond clandestinely controls the Lydgates' family planning and bears four children on her own schedule. If Gillian Beer is correct when she notes that, in Eliot, the "future is suggested through progeny" (2009, 173), Rosamond's actions ensure not only the continuation, but also the social rise of her family—an ascension that remains

⁴⁹⁸ Wilt 314; see *DD* 33.

⁴⁹⁹ See Zimmerman 210; David 179; Herzog 38.

morally and intellectually empty. In the more radically pessimistic *Daniel Deronda*, elite families' reproduction is critically threatened. None of the main characters has produced legally recognized offspring by the last chapter of this long novel. Instead, with Deronda's help and after much suffering, Gwendolen, "the spoiled child," chooses the path of self-improvement, albeit without a clear sense on whom she should practice her newfound charity. Deronda, the moral center of the novel, sets out on a fuzzy proto-Zionist quest, removing his rectitude from England and from the class in which he was raised. As many critics have pointed out, Deronda leaves Gwendolen isolated and anticipating more suffering.⁵⁰⁰ Even more than in *Middlemarch*, patriarchy as a biological process is in decline, the symptoms of which are again communicated by the heroine's physical and psychosexual pathologies. As I will show, many of Gwendolen's symptoms are fleshed-out versions of the ones already observed in Rosamond.

This chapter suggests that Eliot's much written-about heroine, Gwendolen Harleth, embodies Eliot's continuing concern with ill-educated, sexually and socially ambitious femininity. In *Middlemarch*, Eliot pairs the female *l'enfant terrible* with a medical expert whose androcentric blinders render him incapable of diagnosing his wife's ailment, particularly her wish to achieve mastery over men by using her extraordinarily seductive physicality. In *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot surrounds Gwendolen (in many ways, Rosamond's direct successor) with male authority figures who are charged with correcting the heroine's initial moral miseducation. Among them is Henleigh Grandcourt, almost-titled sexual predator, who exploits Gwendolen's physical, social, and emotional vulnerabilities. In what follows, I suggest that *Daniel Deronda's* Gwendolen plot explores what would have happened to Rosamond if the men in her life had not only registered, but capitalized on the political dangers of women's erotically charged caprice.

⁵⁰⁰ Zimmerman 213-4; David 135; Weisser 10.

The result is a brand of malevolent patriarchy that produces abused wives and no legitimate offspring.

Eliot's plot replicates and critiques standard medical plots in which hysterical upper middle-class women are broken in and systematically turned acquiescent in order to function within a social system that primarily requires their sexual service and reproductive capacity. Although Eliot withholds Gwendolen's reentrance into the reproductive economy at the end of *Daniel Deronda*, Gwendolen achieves frictionless conduct, the price of which is sterility, melancholy, and a glaring absence of purpose. As I have suggested, *Middlemarch*'s hidden abortion plot operates in secret tandem with the novel's overall promotion of a pedagogy of female service and sexual restraint, advocating for a reining in of leisured women's ambition and vanity. Eliot's next novel sharpens this message by dissecting the legally and medically mandated crushing of the young heroine's dangerously fractious temperament. When the novel closes, Gwendolen's hysterical symptoms are alleviated by means of patriarchal technologies old and new, such as Grandcourt's marital intimidation and rape of Gwendolen, in conjunction with the proto-psychiatric talking cure administered by Deronda. Before I make my case about Gwendolen's hysteria—whose auto-erotic and orgasmic qualities previous critics have failed to note—and its terrifying cure, I will provide a brief comparison of Rosamond and Gwendolen's overlapping symbolic domains, followed by a review of the many previous approaches to Gwendolen's mysterious etiology, as the basis for my own contribution.

Eliot's Coquettes

Despite the many parallels between Rosamond and Gwendolen's characterization, narrative function, and their similar moral transgressions, not many critics have made the

connection. I want to draw attention to both characters' shared symbolic domain before analyzing such typification as rooted in contemporary medical discourse. Rosamond and Gwendolen represent the same type of femininity. Unabashedly vain, self-interested, and desiring admiration by men of rank, Gwendolen and Rosamond embody their milieu's impaired moral condition.⁵⁰¹ Their narcissism, reflective of English upper-class narcissism as a whole, has been nurtured by the unchecked reading of popular novels and their attendance of "showy" finishing schools (*DD* 17). Similar to Rosamond's education at Mrs. Lemon's, Gwendolen's two-year stay at a questionable *établissement* rounds off her accomplishments in music and French and, more importantly, trains her in the mercenary art of self-display. Throughout the novel, Eliot's narrator censures women's self-commodification and employs conventional Biblical or pagan imagery to critique public spectacles of female social ambition, unequivocally tied to female sexuality. *Daniel Deronda*'s first few pages include four instances of Gwendolen's association with a green-and-silver serpent, two with a "sylph," albeit a "problematic" one, and one with "Lamia," half woman, half snake, fatally bent on seducing men.⁵⁰²

As with Rosamond, the problem Gwendolen represents to the reader regards the relationship between form and content, the interactions between female body and mind. Does

⁵⁰¹ See Beer 2009, 205; David 179; Weisser 7.

⁵⁰² *DD* 5, 7. Eliot's narrator twice calls Rosamond a sylph (*M* 150, 556) and twice a mermaid (*M* 410, 547), usually when the narrator criticizes Lydgate's attraction to Rosamond's artful display of femininity or when Lydgate realizes that he has been deceived by that display. Gwendolen bears the timeworn epithet "nymph" on two occasions, both times during archery events when she is under Grandcourt's gaze (*DD* 85, 122). Eliot was probably aware of the semantic link to "nymphomania," a term denoting excessive female desire that had been in use since the early 1700s and that was used in Ferrier's *Functions of the Brain* (1876), a volume owned by Eliot and Lewes (*OED*, Ferrier 122, Baker 63).

Gwendolen adhere to a pre-formulated type—have we heard her story before?⁵⁰³ Like her Biblical and pagan predecessors, Gwendolen’s ambitions and motivations revolve pathologically around herself; she is actually not very “exceptional,” and, despite her self-absorption, lacks introspection. Her inner moral state—the question whether she can be redeemed—is as foreclosed to herself as it is to others, including the reader (Ender 236). The narrator orchestrates a plot in which Gwendolen, Deronda, and the reader engage in reading Gwendolen together in an attempt to solve the riddle posed by the relationship of female bodily performance and psychological configuration, mediated by Eliot’s often-ambivalent narrator.

Similar to descriptions of Rosamond, the narrator systematically fetishizes Gwendolen’s physicality that has a “rare grace of movement and bearing, and a certain daring which gave piquancy to a very common egoistic ambition” (*DD* 42). Even the “long white throat” Eliot’s narrator reserves for Rosamond in *Middlemarch* occurs again in *Daniel Deronda*’s descriptions of Gwendolen. Once more it functions as a sexually appealing body part that communicates defiance and snake-like cunning.⁵⁰⁴ Cryptic remarks about Gwendolen’s “undefinable stinging quality” caused by “a trace of demon ancestry” (*DD* 55) suggest that the girl challenges

⁵⁰³ See Beer 2009, 202-4, for a discussion on Gwendolen’s resistance to typification and the novel’s inability to propose a resolution outside the marriage plot. In the end, Beer suggests, Eliot chooses “indeterminacy” for Gwendolen (204).

⁵⁰⁴ *DD* 7, 22, 55-6, 83, 502. Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* notebooks show that the name ‘Gwendolen’ was chosen for its rich symbolic etymology, harking back to Celtic roots for “white,” “woman,” and “Venus” as well as figures that are mythologically analogous to the virgin moon goddess and huntress Diana/Artemis (see Beer 1983, 183; Reimer 38). Eliot’s use of Diana symbolism becomes intentionally heavy-handed during the novel’s archery scenes (*DD* 136, 272). ‘Gwendolen’ is a name exclusive to the British Isles, hence Eliot’s note: “Gwen is considered as the British Venus” (Irwin 445-6). ‘Harleth’ is a near homophone to ‘harlot,’ a connection so obvious that scholars do not usually comment on it. Despite Gwendolen’s complexity and depth of character, Eliot, in naming her heroine, creates the British virgin-harlot, a type of pathological femininity endemic to England. Eliot’s association of Gwendolen with a “demon” continues throughout the novel (*DD* 302, 348, 354, 577, 583).

Christian-patriarchal norms because, literally and symbolically, she operates without a father.⁵⁰⁵ This quality poisons her attractiveness in Deronda's eyes—and, for the implied male reader, it adds a titillating element to an otherwise clichéd body. When Eliot introduces Gwendolen at the seedy Leubronn gambling table, onlookers, including Deronda, inspect every feature of her face—complexion, nose, mouth—for its sexual appeal with an invasive, fragmenting gaze that borders on the pornographic. Eliot's hackneyed, fetishizing rhetoric suggests a devaluation of Gwendolen's sexually suffused self-staging and contains Gwendolen's transgressions within the realm of stereotype.⁵⁰⁶ Because her self-staging is inherently predictable, she likely will not go on grand adventures. The novel's setup as moral tale promises that she will either fall or ascend. As if to contain the potential for movement upwards or downwards, Gwendolen looks too pale, too aware of her own beauty, and is too intent on rendering her features statuesque, "immovable" (*DD* 7-8). Her one effort at semi-public acting—the famous tableau scene in which she fails to perform Hermione's release from statuesque imprisonment—ends in disaster: Gwendolen must decide, and, when accepting Grandcourt's proposal of marriage, she falls.

As the novel's first paragraph suggests, Gwendolen's beauty coerces observers to look again. She is aggressive in her demand for attention and admiration which allows her to run "a domestic empire" composed of her mother and four younger step-sisters, all of them in awe of the "princess in exile" (*DD* 32). Gwendolen, with her flock of subservient women and her distaste for the "insipidly feminine," plays at being patriarch herself, a pursuit unmistakably tied to her masterful horsemanship (*DD* 24). Similar to Rosamond, she perceives her connections

⁵⁰⁵ Athena Vrettos remarks that the "demonic" constitutes Gwendolen's "ability to appropriate and disrupt authorized forms of vision" (570). Although her bodily descriptions mark her as the object of Deronda's (and the reader's) gaze, Gwendolen keeps looking back.

⁵⁰⁶ For the complexities of the narrator's "masculine" gaze, see Ender 234-5; Vrettos 570.

to men of rank and the personal advantages potentially deriving from such ties as an “odour” that rules her choices.⁵⁰⁷ Again like Rosamond, Gwendolen has a penchant for erotically charged tableaux and has cultivated an “almost miraculous power of self-control” to avoid public humiliation (*DD* 503). Being of “very common” provenance, morally at least, Gwendolen, predictably, is compelled to put her “majestic figure” to use after her mother’s financial ruin, and, once married to Grandcourt, who is next in line for a baronetcy, Deronda’s friend Hans Meyrick half-admiringly, half-deridingly takes to calling the usually loftily poised Gwendolen “the Vandyke duchess” (*DD* 246). Gwendolen thus glides from one typification into another, never quite stabilizing an identity independent of spectacular performance. It is this “iridescence” the novel presents as pathological (*DD* 33).

Tending to Old Stories

Much recent scholarship explains Gwendolen’s mysterious “fits of spiritual dread” in terms of childhood abuse by her stepfather—the event that led to her being “spoiled”—and traces the incest’s burdening of Gwendolen’s marriage and her relationship to Deronda.⁵⁰⁸ A parallel “symptom school” resists the incest narrative, and investigates Gwendolen’s symptoms using contemporary medical writings.⁵⁰⁹ Most recently, Jill Matus has refuted the well-honed Freudian narrative of Gwendolen’s psychic development. Although she concedes that Gwendolen’s symptoms (nightmares, unreliable memory, and temporal confusion) constitute “textbook

⁵⁰⁷ *DD* 115; *MM* 545. For Eliot, the olfactory pervasiveness of scent has strong sexual undertones. It is also the sense that allows for the least precision in verbal representation, analogous to the extremely restricted verbal repertoire for female sensation, particularly sexual sensation, available to Victorian writers.

⁵⁰⁸ See Wilt; Penner; Herzog; Reimer; Henry.

⁵⁰⁹ See During; Vrettos; Ender; Tromp; J. Wood; Trotter; Matus.

symptoms of trauma or PTSD,” Matus cautions that the use of the word ‘traumata’ as signifying psychic wounds was not used until the turn of the century. She shows that Eliot helps create a discourse around psychological damage rendering memory and consciousness unreliable. For Matus, Gwendolen’s “hidden wound is most obviously the effect of terror in response to external events” confounded by Gwendolen’s interior “hauntings” (70).

Jane Wood provides the most thorough analysis of Gwendolen’s hysteria in light of contemporary nineteenth-century science to date. Drawing from neurological theory, such as Lewes’s *Problems of Life and Mind* (1874-79) and Henry Maudsley’s *Body and Mind* (1871), Wood sees Gwendolen’s “iridescen[t]” self-division as “a burden of inheritance” (145). Gwendolen, caught in Darwin’s deterministic headlights, is “pathologically self-obsessed,” Wood suggests, and lacks the “nervous equipment” to make rational choices, because her will is disproportionate to her physiological make-up (138-9, 142). I build on Wood’s suggestive reading by honing in on symptoms related to Gwendolen’s psychosexual development and Eliot’s conception of them as “hysterical.”⁵¹⁰

David Trotter, in an essay that links Gwendolen’s characterization to an emerging discourse surrounding agoraphobia, seeks to bypass discussions of hysteria and remarks that

the only symptom of hysteria [Gwendolen] ever exhibits is the choking sensation brought about by the thought of what her husband might do to her ... Unlike the hysteric, she suffers in mind rather than in body, and is able, to a large extent, to keep her fits under control. (467)

⁵¹⁰ See *DD* 303, 514, 601, 683, 691. Importantly, Eliot only uses the term in its adjectival form, possibly to avoid classification that would counter the sensationalist and supernatural aspects of Gwendolen’s “fits of ... terror” (*DD* 52).

Although Trotter acknowledges that Gwendolen does exhibit “fits”—she has three of them over the course of the novel—he focuses on Gwendolen’s “spiritual dread” as an agoraphobic, rather than a hysterical, presentation of nervous disease.⁵¹¹

After sampling some standard nineteenth-century texts on nervous disease in Eliot’s possession, it is possible to revise the notion that “Eliot wanted to try out rhetorics other than that of hysteria in designing her novel.”⁵¹² Eliot’s depiction of Gwendolen’s pathology owes much to an older tradition of medical writing about hysteria that was revitalized in the 1870s before being absorbed by Freudian practice at the end of the century. It understood hysteria to encompass a set of morally questionable behaviors and personality traits, along with diffuse physiological symptoms, whose diagnosis occurred with an implicit “healthy,” well-adjusted type in mind—and whose characteristics, in turn, differed from author to author. As this tradition increasingly located hysteria and related pathologies, such as hypochondria and nervousness, in bourgeois or aristocratic female bodies, the unacknowledged ideal began to correspond to an ever-narrower type of Victorian femininity (Micale 155). According to authors of this school, hysterics displayed morally questionable traits like “eccentricity, impulsiveness, emotionality,

⁵¹¹ Nightmares, phobias, avoidance of sex, and agoraphobia are symptoms of what scholars of sexual abuse now deem “rape trauma syndrome” (Hesford 192).

⁵¹² Trotter 467. Eliot’s notebooks for *Daniel Deronda* contain little evidence that Eliot consulted medical works explicitly for her description of Gwendolen; most of her copious research notes relate to the history of Judaism. In May 1876, Eliot read Sir James Paget’s *Clinical Lectures and Essays* (1875) and, possibly concerned about her own health, as Jane Irwin notes, marked up passages relating to “nervous mimicry” (Irwin 351). Paget had been Eliot and Lewes’ physician since February 1874 and had presented a copy of his book to Lewes. In an effort to curb the inflationary use of the term hysteria, Paget describes as “nervous mimicry” all symptoms previously classified as hysterical, apart from the “convulsions and sense of suffocation,” which can also be called simply “hypochondriasis and melancholy” (175). Paget distinguishes between the “[e]xtreme nervous sensibility” (or, interchangeably, “hyperæsthetic or hyperneurotic” states) of the neuromimetic and the symptoms reported by “hypochondriacs” on the basis of their responses to the perceived disease (this passage is underlined by Eliot). Hypochondriacs react to trivial pain with panic; the neuromimetic is calm, proud, or self-complacent about his ability to endure torment (180, see Irwin 351-2). Gwendolen, according to this classification, is a hypochondriac.

coquettishness, deceitfulness, and hypersexuality,” but these criteria were flexible enough to allow diagnosis of conduct that seemed politically impermissible (Micale 24). Among its most eminent advocates were Wilhelm Griesinger in Germany as well as Robert Brudenell Carter and Henry Maudsley in England—all of whose works were extant, and some of them partially marked-up, in Lewes and Eliot’s library.⁵¹³ It is fair to say that these nineteenth-century descriptions of hysterical symptomology read like Gwendolen’s blueprint, even on the lexical level.⁵¹⁴

Earlier representatives of hysteria’s moral school⁵¹⁵ posited a connection between dysfunctions of the female genital tract and psychological disruptions, although later authors questioned this facile chain of causation. It can be assumed that, for many of these authors, femaleness itself constituted a pathological condition.⁵¹⁶ Moritz Heinrich Romberg postulates with magisterial concision in 1853: “The condition for the origin of hysteria is the sexual

⁵¹³ Baker 26, 62, 81, 115, 132. Baker’s annotations suggest that Griesinger’s *Gesammelte Abhandlungen* (1872), a 1874 edition of Thomas Laycock’s *On Certain Organic Disorders and Defects of Memory*, and Moritz Heinrich Romberg’s *A Manual of the Nervous Diseases of Man* (1853) had Lewes’s marginal notes; Maudsley’s *The Physiology of Mind* (1876) and Sir William Paget’s *Clinical Lectures and Essays* (1875) had Eliot’s. Baker lists no annotations for Carter’s *On the Pathology and Treatment of Hysteria* (1853) apart from a personal dedication from the author to one “Dr. Tweedle” from 1853, indicating perhaps that either Lewes or Eliot purchased the work second-hand. I also use Laycock’s *A Treatise on the Nervous Diseases of Women* (1840), as Carter references him. Romberg is mentioned by Maudsley (1876).

⁵¹⁴ I am unable to provide a more complete history of the concept of hysteria here; for an outline, see Micale 3-29. Ilza Veith’s *Hysteria* (1965) remains the standard historiography.

⁵¹⁵ See Veith 199-210; Micale 146-61.

⁵¹⁶ See Maines 2, 35. Jean-Martin Charcot, French “father of neurology,” polemically resisted conceptualizations of hysteria as originating in the uterus or ovaries, and contradicted physicians who associated hysteria with hypersexuality. For Charcot, hysteria could be traced back to a dysfunction of the nervous system, and its outbreak was aided by hereditary and environmental factors, such as physical and emotional shock. He was the first to classify the paroxysm and its stages, leading to a widely circulated atlas of photographs depicting hysterics published by his disciples between 1876-80. Like many of his contemporaries, he did not believe hysteria could be cured. It was only in the 1880s that he classified hysteria as a psychological rather than neurological disease (Micale 25, 88-95, 137). Eliot and Lewes owned volumes II and III of Charcot’s 1874 *Leçons sur les maladies du système nerveux* (Baker 38).

maturity of the female” and “the source of the disease is permanent” (Romberg 86, 99).

Although the range of hysterical symptoms described by my limited sample is enormous, authors agree that the necessary ingredient of the disease is the “hysterical paroxysm,”⁵¹⁷ a spasm produced by an underlying environmental trigger and resulting in emotional disturbance, as opposed to the epileptic fit. The paroxysm was said to be marked by paleness, dream-like states of distraction, sudden panic attacks, laughing or sobbing fits, and dizziness, less often hallucinations, swoons, convulsions, even catalepsy and coma.⁵¹⁸ Often, patients are “stunned by the shock of a calamity, or ... stupefied by terror” (Carter 1853, 4); they lose control over their thoughts and become fixated on the origin of the unusual excitement. Causes of the paroxysm include “sudden fright, disappointment, or anger”; when the trigger is removed, recovery is instant (Carter 1853, 3, 5). Aftershock can occur, accompanied by pains of the nerves, and by an overall estrangement from the own body, from others, or from reality itself.⁵¹⁹

The hysterical patient is usually a woman, although Griesinger and Romberg also allow for male hysterics; Griesinger sees uterine dysfunctions as symptoms rather than triggers of hysteria.⁵²⁰ Hysterics are often virgins and their symptoms begin at the onset of puberty; the disease breaks out fully in one’s twenties.⁵²¹ Patients generally have relatives suffering from

⁵¹⁷ For the fascinating history of this view, see Micale 149-52. Compared to his colleagues, Robert Carter’s defense of the paroxysm is outdated; clinicians remarked far more often on smaller fits, postures, tics, twitches, and fainting spells.

⁵¹⁸ Griesinger 1872, 174-6; Carter 1853, 2-3; Laycock 174; Paget, 175.

⁵¹⁹ Griesinger 1872, 173; see also Griesinger 1867, 180.

⁵²⁰ Griesinger criticizes the futile local manipulation of the female sexual organs as a treatment for hysteria that was practiced very “eagerly” [“eifrig”] by his colleagues (Griesinger 1872, 179). Carter equally denounces overusing the speculum upon female patients’ request (1853, 67). I will expand upon the sexual implications of hysteria discourse below.

⁵²¹ See Maudsley 1867, 300; Romberg 94; Griesinger 1872, 171.

nervous disorders, and experience their disease as highly embarrassing “psycho-sensitive” interruptions at unpredictable intervals. Yet a continuous disease progression usually reveals itself.⁵²² Many patients have very good self-command and appear “fresh and blooming,” despite bouts of exhaustion, anxiety, and trepidation temporarily colonizing their consciousness.⁵²³ Carter writes that suppression of excess emotion causes the outbreak of hysteria. Because women are “more prone to emotions” than men and simultaneously more sharply required to conceal them, they are most affected (Carter 1853, 26). Maudsley postulates that women’s “nerve-centres” suffer from “a state of greater instability” (1874, 473). Their passion seeks to “discharge itself through the muscular ... system,” hence producing spasms.⁵²⁴

All writers agree that hysterics are “too alert, or too highly charged with nerve-force” (Paget 175). They display “immoderate sensitiveness” and are usually possessed of “lively intellects” (Griesinger 1867, 179). Despite such seemingly sympathetic description, a morally deficient type of hysteric crystallizes. Laycock’s patient starts out as “a spoiled child”⁵²⁵ (140); thirty-five years later, Paget offhandedly associates hysteria with “the silly, selfish girls among whom it is commonly supposed that hysteria is rife or an almost natural state” (179). As children, hysterical women often manifest “maniacal attacks” with “singing, cursing, ... nymphomaniacal excitement ... [of a] demoniacal character,” says Griesinger, although these episodes are not well recalled in adulthood (1867, 180). Writers habitually warn of girls’ miseducation at schools whose curriculum appears to include lectures on hysterical performance: “the young female

⁵²² Griesinger 1872, 171. Laycock, Paget, and Romberg also suggest the disease’s hereditariness.

⁵²³ Griesinger 1872, 172; see Laycock 139.

⁵²⁴ Carter 1853, 15; see Maudsley 1874, 469.

⁵²⁵ “The Spoiled Child” is the title of *Daniel Deronda*’s Book I which mainly concerns Gwendolen.

returns ... a hysterical, wayward, capricious girl ... prone to hysteric paroxysms upon any unusual mental excitement” (Laycock 141). Education at home is equally unsafe if it is “lax and frivolous, allowing an uncontrolled play of every impression.” Moral training is necessary for the girl to control her temper. Whatever a girl’s inherited disposition might be, “The example of an hysterical mother developes [sic] the disease in the daughters” (Romberg 86-7). Thomas Laycock, in breathless crescendo, tells the story of the coquette’s formation:

After the young female has returned home, and is introduced into mixed society, she is more than ever exposed to influences acting injuriously on the nervous system. The excitement and competition of social life, excited love, ungratified desire, disappointed vanity as well as affection, late hours, long and late indulgence in sleep, and the excessive use of stimulants, as wines, liqueurs, coffee, tea, &c., all act with more or less of combined energy upon the unfortunate young lady in fashionable life. (142)

Finally, unmarried young women who indulge in “strong passions, indolence, and luxury” (Laycock 142) or in the vices of “sentimental love, jealousy, and disappointed vanity” (Romberg 87) will witness the effects of an unproductive and high-strung existence on their system that becomes increasingly prone to fits. In wonderful tautology, feminine vices both cause and are aggravated by hysteria. Maudsley, in one of the first essays aimed at a wider, non-specialist audience, argued for the physiological—and sexed—materiality of the psyche: “There is sex in mind as distinctly as there is sex in body.”⁵²⁶

Gwendolen’s Inheritance

Gwendolen’s erotically charged display of self-assurance and will corresponds to Carter’s indictment of hysterical girls’ “ill-regulated minds and ungoverned tempers” (1853, 78). Three early vignettes provide insight into her hysteria’s history. They suggest that Gwendolen inherited

⁵²⁶ Maudsley 1874, 468. This polemic statement contradicted long-held liberal views about the split between humans’ sexless minds and their sexed bodies. Also see Laqueur 19; Malane 30-43.

her symptoms from her mother and that these symptoms burden the mother-daughter relationship. The narrator, in a casual aside, acknowledges young Gwendolen's "having strangled her sister's canary-bird in a final fit of exasperation at its shrill singing which had ... jarringly interrupted her own" because Gwendolen had not yet learned to assume her aristocratic bearing (*DD* 18). That "infeligious murder"—it is one of Griesinger's "maniacal attacks"—is never again mentioned in the family, although it arose from intense anger. Second, one cold night, Gwendolen, "that healthy young lady, snug and warm as a rosy infant in her little couch," refuses to leave her bed and fetch her mother's medicine. Mrs. Davilow never receives it, suffers her "attack of pain" in silence, and abstains from referring to the incident again (*DD* 18). Third, Mrs. Davilow, with "a violence quite unusual," silences twelve-year old Gwendolen's inquiry about her mother's reasons for remarrying, betraying "a slight convulsive movement" on her flushed face (*DD* 18). Mrs. Davilow's habitual concealment of anger and its eruption as a facial tic suggest that she is one of Romberg's "hysterical mother[s]" who feed their daughters cues about hysterical performance. In the Davilow household intense emotions are buried, yet they release themselves through the facial muscles and through young Gwendolen's "passionate acts" (*DD* 18) which evolve into the unnatural statuesque poise she assumes as an adult, her "frozen internality of suppression" (J. Wood 13). Gwendolen kills her sister's canary in defiance of the obligation to repress aggressiveness, an obligation that rules her home and, as Carter notes, feminine conduct in general.

The narrator indicates that Mrs. Davilow's second marriage, a source of perpetual guilt and shame, is one of the topics that cannot be discussed, a stricture leaving Gwendolen in a nervous flutter. On the day of the family's arrival at Offendene, Gwendolen observes the outcome of her mother's two marriages, that is, "being dull and not minding anything," and

clairvoyantly determines that, in case her own marriage should turn out to be “not a happy state,” she “will not put up with it.” Mrs. Davilow adheres to doctrine and gloomily affirms, against all evidence, that “[m]arriage is the only happy state for a woman.” Gwendolen exclaims, “I don’t see why it is hard to call things by their right names, and put them in their proper places” (*DD* 22). A critique of marriage’s truth—it does not accommodate women’s wishes, it ravages their bodies, and it sometimes ends catastrophically—cannot be articulated in Mrs. Davilow’s home, although the novel’s symbolic domain garrulously tells a story that supplements the incomplete literal one. For instance, in Offendene’s master bedroom, Mrs. Davoliw’s grotesque “black and yellow catafalque” sits next to Gwendolen’s “pretty little white couch.” The catafalque, where a continually morose, twice-widowed woman’s body, afflicted by recurring painful attacks, lies in state at night, symbolizes the ghastly future of Gwendolen’s virginal bed. A passage from Henry Maudsley helps cut through the prohibited narrative:

Through generations her character has been formed with that chief aim; it has been made feeble by long habit of dependence; by the circumstances of her position the sexual life has been undesignedly developed at the expense of the intellectual ... It is not only that women of the better classes, not married, have no aim in life to work for, no opening for the employment of their energies in outward activities, and are driven to a morbid self-brooding ... their organic life is little able to withstand the consequences of an unsatisfied sexual instinct.⁵²⁷

Eliot’s portrait of Fanny Davilow offers a rendition of Maudsley’s darkly pessimistic evolutionary tale; women “cannot disregard [their reproductive function] in the labour of life without injury to their health” (1874, 468). Feeble and brooding Mrs. Davilow regrets her “indiscreet” second marriage to a man of a class lower than her own, a “sad blunder” occasioned by blind sexual appetite that yields nothing but abandonment, painful chastity, and excess

⁵²⁷ Maudsley 1867, 203. The paragraph ends: “Masturbation is undoubtedly sometimes provoked, and aggravates the evil for which it was sought as a relief.” I suggest below that Eliot’s disclosure of Gwendolen as prone to nervous fits enacts the same slippage from hysterical symptom to autoerotic insanity.

girls.⁵²⁸ Eliot's narrator appears keenly aware of the symptomatology of female hysteria caused by sexual frustration. The discussion of Fanny Davilow's body is complemented by gothic tropes to make visible the nightmarish quality of Maudsley's teleological view of reproduction. For androcentric clinicians like Maudsley, women's hysteria is a necessary outcome of their constitution's adaptation to the pressures of their culture; they must breed, no matter with whom, or go insane. More sharply, Eliot—who simultaneously replicates and undercuts Maudsley's androcentrism—says that widowed women like Fanny are, in fact, already dead.

Within *Daniel Deronda*'s deterministic world, enervated women, ideologically functioning “as vessels of continuity,”⁵²⁹ bear superfluous girls without a sufficient number of morally sound men available. Useless daughters pile up everywhere in *Daniel Deronda*: Lady Mallinger has produced three girls (but no heir to Sir Hugo's estate), as do Mrs. Meyrick and Lydia Glasher. If women “represent[] what men in a specific culture most desire” (Beer 205), *Daniel Deronda*'s inflationary creation of redundant women represents a critique of a culture that wishes to maintain a morbid state of greater supply over demand. W. R. Greg, in 1862, censured the “unwholesome social state” caused by superabundant genteel women, and he famously suggested the emigration of half a million women to remedy this “wretchedness and wrong.” Unable to channel their “honourable energies” into venues other than reproductive ones, single and widowed women live in a degenerate state as perpetual “involuntary celibates” and become hysterics (Greg 436, 445). The narrator's public prose cannot describe Mrs. Davilow's nervous enervation in Carter's medical terms, but the woman's hysterical symptoms are made clear through recourse to the gothic. But what about Gwendolen's?

⁵²⁸ *DD* 23, 27; see also Carter 1853, 21-2, 36; Griesinger 1867, 181.

⁵²⁹ Beer 205; see J. Wood 145.

George Eliot and the Masturbating Girl

Carter explains that “when sexual desire is taken into the account, it will add immensely to the forces bearing upon the female, who is often much under its dominion; and who, if unmarried and chaste, is compelled to restrain every manifestation of its sway” (1853, 33).

Gwendolen’s “miraculous power of self-control,” itself a hysterical symptom and developed as a barricade against public humiliation, covers up something beyond what the novel can represent.

Gwendolen’s motivation at the novel’s outset is purely and emptily tautological, although her mother and uncle navigate “that border-territory of rank where annexation is a burning topic”

(*DD* 17). In contrast to Rosamond, Gwendolen contentedly assumes that she will marry upward;

“her favorite key of life” is “doing as she liked” rather than pursuing baronets. Gwendolen’s

social rank is not quite as low as Rosamond’s: her late father descended from a titled family that

refuses to recognize her mother’s upstart, plantation-owning clan. Gwendolen’s class affiliation

and her schooling provide her with the liberties “to do ... whatever she could do so as to strike

others with admiration and get in that reflected way a more ardent sense of living” (*DD* 31).

Middlemarch’s narrator famously over-uses “ardent” to signify Dorothea’s passionate character

and wish for intellectual transcendence. Gwendolen, on the other hand, is “a Dorothea without

the idealism” (Weisser 4), aspiring to transcendent sensation by creating continuous, heightened

feedback between body and mind. Speaking with Maudsley, who, in pre-Freudian fashion, traces

all human impulses back to two “fundamental instincts ... self-preservation ... [and]

propagation” (1874, 470), I would offer the formulation that Gwendolen’s object is “self-

preservation” elevated to such a pathological degree that it forecloses that of “propagation.”

Moreover, her object is created by the interactions between herself and her spectators. She is

driven by an “inborn energy of egoistic desire,” a hunger for feeling intensely, or, more

precisely, feeling herself intensely (*DD* 33). This masturbatory ambition is best accomplished with the help of an admiring audience, preferably male, enhancing Gwendolen's sense of self with feelings of power and exultation⁵³⁰, a set of signifiers tied to her ability to win men's admiration and to her masterful horseback riding throughout the novel's early chapters. Although Gwendolen requires male spectators to produce erotic sensation—her “vanity is ill at ease under indifference”—she is stubbornly inaccessible, physically and spiritually, to her male admirers and tends to ride off without them (*DD* 90). Her often-noted “iridescence of ... character—the play of various, nay, contrary tendencies” results from the mismatch between her self-love and the cultural mandate to communicate through physical performance her sexual availability to the highest bidder, a requirement to which she fully commits only when faced with the specter of having to earn her money as a governess.⁵³¹

As Jane Wood notes, female willfulness had long been imagined in terms of equestrianism, the horse epitomizing the animal body and its nervous system, the rider rational consciousness, the latter considered woefully underdeveloped in women.⁵³² Throughout the nineteenth century, women were prescribed horseback riding to reduce hysterical symptoms, although some doctors were wary that riding caused dangerous friction, overstimulated women's abdominal muscles, and led to masturbation.⁵³³ *Daniel Deronda* is rife with explicit associations between Gwendolen's autoeroticism, her will to transcend class and gender boundaries, and

⁵³⁰ The term is applied to Gwendolen nine times over the course of the novel.

⁵³¹ *DD* 33; see J. Wood 142, 161; Wilt 319.

⁵³² See Shuttleworth 187-8. The trope traces back to Plato.

⁵³³ J. Wood 143. For riding as a safeguard to prevent hysterical fits, see Trall 139, 144; Romberg 97; Carter 1853, 102; for a historical account, see Stengers 9. Stengers (88) and Maines (59) summarize medical advice against riding for causing too much abdominal friction. For a general overview on scholarship about female masturbation, see Mason 27-43.

equestrianism: “the beautiful creatures ... sent a thrill of exultation through Gwendolen ... [because they] were the symbols of command and luxury” (*DD* 258). Moments like this are plentiful, as most of Gwendolen’s sexual maneuvering with Rex, Grandcourt, and even Deronda occurs on horseback: “I never like my life so well as when I am on horseback ... I only feel myself strong and happy,” Gwendolen tells Grandcourt (*DD* 92-93); when on horseback, she deems herself “secure as an immortal goddess” and “her blood stir[s] ... with the intoxication of youth” (*DD* 58-59; 265). During the scene in which Rex’s horse breaks its knees and throws him off, Eliot borrows conventionally masculine-coded signifiers for Gwendolen’s erotic sprint away from Rex and toward heightened self-sensation. The description combines rapid visual and auditory information, Gwendolen’s sexual display before elite men chasing (with) her, abandonment of rational thought through collapsing equine and canine imagery, and the overwhelming feeling of embodied, galloping power. The narrator puts Gwendolen’s autoerotics on narrative display, providing an arousing fantasy of the virgin’s ecstasy:

Gwendolen felt no check on the animal stimulus that came from the stir and tongue of the hounds, the pawing of the horses, the varying voices of men, the movement hither and thither of vivid color ... that utmost excitement of the coming chase which consists in feeling something like a combination of dog and horse, with the superadded thrill of social vanities and consciousness of centaur-power which belongs to humankind. (58)

Despite, or perhaps because of, many sexually suggestive scenes like this, scholarship has made much of Gwendolen’s “dread of adult sexuality” (David 193). As has been well documented, Gwendolen rebuffs Rex’s gentlemanly advances and later freezes when Grandcourt initiates physical contact. The narrator’s sharp-sighted analysis of Gwendolen’s distaste for physical contact with men is coherently mentioned until it disappears under Grandcourt’s sexual coverture: “she objected, with a sort of physical repulsion, to being directly made love to ... there was a certain fierceness of maidenhood in her” (*DD* 57). The reader may infer that

Gwendolen has no knowledge of the sexual act; her erotic riding is instinctual, inarticulate, self-enclosed. Similarly, her distaste for male advances is all sensation unmediated by speech: “Gwendolen herself could not have foreseen that she should feel in this way ... But now the life of passion had begun negatively in her. She felt passionately averse to this volunteered love” (*DD* 67). Scholars have read this passage as proof that Gwendolen is sexually “frigid.”⁵³⁴ They thereby miss Eliot’s systematic depiction of Gwendolen’s acts of hysterical self-love. For example, at Leubronn, Gwendolen has a nightly habit of “look[ing] lingeringly at herself for pleasure,” a routine Eliot’s wry narrator deems to be “surely an allowable indulgence” (*DD* 11). In the novel’s most explicit instance of erotic self-gratification, Gwendolen basks in “a *naïve* delight in her fortunate self” and kisses her image in the “cold glass which had looked so warm” (*DD* 13). Eliot reminds her readers that Gwendolen’s autoerotics are productive of neither social warmth nor happiness.

Medical practitioners’ anxiety around women’s independent sexual excitement sparked institutional formations such as gynecology and, later in the century, psychoanalysis. The clinical type of the young female masturbator had gained currency among gynecologists after 1830, “taking on almost sinister connotations as the archetypical sex deviant” and prompting much anxious research into the function of the clitoris (Moscucci 60). According to Eve Sedgwick, before the distinction between the hetero- and homosexual individual became fully institutionalized in the 1890s, as described by Foucault, the masturbator, “as one of the very earliest embodiments of ‘sexual identity’ in the period of the progressive epistemological overloading of sexuality, ... may have been at the cynosureal center of a remapping of individual identity ... along modern lines” (1990, 826). That is, the masturbator was “uniquely formative”

⁵³⁴ See Weisser 3; Reimer 38.

in the nineteenth-century creation of the modern sexual individual (Sedgwick 826). Gwendolen, who does not know her own desires, nevertheless embodies the precursor to this individual. I suggest that the novel's teleology attempts to suffuse her identity with conscience, to domesticate it for an unknowable future.

As historians of hysteria have shown, masturbation, like femininity itself, was seen as both a result and a cause of hysteria.⁵³⁵ Romberg warns that “[d]ebilitating influences are the most fertile sources of hysteria; among these we must mention over-excitement ... of the sexual organs, [and] self-indulgence” (86). Henry Maudsley tells the terrifying story of how even the most innocent woman, if the life of passion begins negatively in her, like Gwendolen's, can stumble onto the path of vice:

Let it not be supposed, however, that ... these things take place consciously in the woman's thoughts, feelings, and actions: the sexual passion is one of the strongest passions in nature, and as soon as it comes into activity, it declares its influence on every pulse of the organic life ... conscious and unconscious; ... when there is no vicarious outlet for its energy, the whole system feels the effects, and exhibits them in restlessness and irritability, in a morbid self-feeling taking a variety of forms, and in an act of self-abuse which on the first occasion may, I believe, be a sort of instinctive frenzy, of the aim of which there is only the vaguest and most dim notion. (1867, 203-4)

Maudsley argues that temperaments such as Gwendolen's can be easily “infected” with onanism, a habit leading to eventual insanity and death: Girls “who do silly and eccentric things ... out of a morbid craving to attract notice ... are often masturbators.”⁵³⁶ Thomas Low Nichols, in 1873, provides advice about how to spot a masturbating girl, “this practice” being “fully as common—perhaps more common—with girls than boys” (280):

⁵³⁵ Finn 85. While medical writers observed female hysterics who did not masturbate, all female masturbators were considered hysterics. See Maines 37, 54; Romberg 86.

⁵³⁶ Maudsley 1867, 414. Maudsley's censure of masturbation is reprinted in the second volume of John Russell Reynold's *A System of Medicine* (1870-77), a work Eliot owned (Baker 169).

they are timid; but it is not the amiable timidity of modesty and chastity, which is very different from what they display. The timidity natural to a young person is an ornament to her; theirs overwhelms them; they are more confused than timid ... They not only have no desire for marriage, but an invincible repugnance against it. (283)

Isaac Baker Brown, in his infamous⁵³⁷ work, *On the Curability of Certain Forms of Insanity* (1866), suggests that masturbators are “indifferent to ... domestic life” and, once married, had “a distaste for marital intercourse” (14, 16). Medical writers’ catalogues of the horrors resulting from masturbation are too long to reproduce here, but a few of their examples will suffice to illustrate Gwendolen’s association with the conventional medical type of the masturbating girl. Baker Brown warns that “There will be quivering of the eyelids, and an inability to look one straight in the eye” (15). When Deronda first scrutinizes her at Leubronn, Gwendolen wishes to avert her gaze before meeting his eyes reluctantly (*DD* 5). Similarly, Nichols posits that the “young girl who gives way to [onanism], loses her colour” (282). During the same introductory scene at Leubronn, observers discuss the quality of her paleness at length (*DD* 7). Nichols also warns that “solitudinarians have nervous affections,” such as “tremors and apprehensions of future misery”; “her eyes, mouth, her walk, her mode of speaking, all her features, all her carriage, in fact, bespeak languor and indifference” (Nichols 281-2). Whenever Gwendolen walks out alone, helpless apprehension and tremors overcome her (*DD* 52); while engaged in trivial conversation at Leubronn, however, her voice takes on a studied “languor of utterance” and she exclaims repeatedly that she is “bored to death” (*DD* 8, 9). Her family is fully aware of her frequent “fits of timidity and terror” (*DD* 52). Carter recommends co-sleeping if parents’ suspicions are aroused and, if appropriate, discussing the habit to ensure the hysteric understands

⁵³⁷ Baker Brown advised doctors to practice cliterodectomy to control women’s “loss of nerve power” which he attributed to masturbation (7). The medical controversy around cliterodectomy was “one of the most heated” of the century, and, after accusations that he had performed the surgery without patients’ consent, Baker Brown was forced to close his clinic and lost his membership in the Obstetrical Society of London (Moscucci 61, 68).

that her actions constitute a “crime” (1853, 149). While it seems unlikely that such conversation would occur in Mrs. Davilow’s household, Gwendolen and her mother share a bedroom, perhaps to prevent Gwendolen’s nightly “fits of ... terror.” Fanny remarks at one point that Gwendolen is “afraid to be alone in the night” (*DD* 52, 44).

Although she is unprepared for the reality of men’s sexual egoism and excess (and sexual intercourse in general), Gwendolen plays at being a man with her archery, hunting, and gambling, always aspiring to be “daring in speech and reckless in braving dangers.” Baker Brown warns that the hysterical masturbating girl displays “a great disposition for novelties ... desiring to escape from home” (*DD* 15). Thus, in idle schoolboy fashion, Gwendolen tells Rex that she would like to “go to the North Pole, or ride steeple-chases”; later, when Grandcourt’s proposal seems unavoidable, she mentions to him improbable alternatives, such as “find[ing] out the North-West Passage or the source of the Nile, or to hunt tigers in the East” (*DD* 57, 113). The closest thing to adventure within Gwendolen’s reach is intrepid horseback riding, for Eliot the quintessential symbol of female sexual power, as Rosamond’s example makes clear.⁵³⁸

Gwendolen, already “inwardly rebellious against the restraints of family conditions,” confronts a new challenge to her pursuit of heightened narcissistic affect when she agrees to submit herself to the erotic obligations imposed by Grandcourt (*DD* 43). Symbolically and figuratively, her performance of masculine will prevents her development of sexual interest in other men. Gwendolen rejects Rex Gascoigne’s polite attempts at courtship because her “young self-exultation” requires the redirection of male desire (borrowed from Rex) onto ideal feminine surface, herself (*DD* 31). With the help of admiring male spectatorship, Gwendolen’s nervous

⁵³⁸ Rebecca Mitchell provides the insight that “‘Rosamond’ is derived from the Teutonic name ‘Hrosmond,’ meaning ‘horse protection’” (313n14).

system energizes its own feedback loop of desire and exultation. For instance, when she moves through the long rooms at Quetcham Hall under the admiring gaze of male guests, she feels “exultingly that [the grand promenade] befitted her” (*DD* 34). Gwendolen’s pleasurable vanity, fueled by men’s attraction to her, constitutes a form of embodied sexual agency that contemporary medical writers linked to hysteria generally, and to masturbation in particular.

Rachel Maines argues that hysteria and its long roster of associated ailments can be interpreted in light of what medical discourse considers “the normal functioning of female sexuality” today (2). The hysterical paroxysm, understood by many nineteenth-century medical professionals to be evoked by terror, could often have constituted orgasmic sensation.⁵³⁹ Since Eliot’s narrative replicates clinicians’ androcentric view—although its sympathies are more ambivalent than medical writers’—it is possible to interpret at least some instances of Gwendolen’s “fits of spiritual dread” as symptoms of female sexual arousal. Thus far, critics have agreed that during such moments, something intensely private, unknown to Gwendolen herself—a repressed memory, a psychological pathology—erupts and becomes public spectacle, laying bare Gwendolen’s self-division that expresses itself in violent outbursts (*Vrettos* 570-1). Yet Gwendolen’s spasms have not been examined in light of Nichols’s wonder at girls’ “convulsions which almost always accompany the acts of solitary indulgence” (*DD* 283), and Carter’s suggestion that “the sexual passion is more concerned than any other single emotion, and, perhaps, as much as all others put together, in the production of the hysteric paroxysm” (1853, 36).

⁵³⁹ Maines 3; see Laycock 173-4; Carter 1853, 31-2.

Gwendolen's Fits

On the day Gwendolen and her female entourage arrive at Offendene, Gwendolen's sister Isabel opens a hidden wainscot panel and reveals "a picture of an upturned dead face, from which an obscure figure seemed to be fleeing with open arms" (*DD* 20). Upon entering the salon, Gwendolen strikes a pose by the organ as Saint Cecilia, martyred patron saint of music, loosens her hair, and "laughs with delight," before everyone's attention is directed at the picture of the dead face. Isabel ominously remarks that Gwendolen "will never stay in this room by [her]self" (*DD* 20). Gwendolen "shudder[s] silently," scolds Isabel for "open[ing] things which were meant to be shut up" and, going upstairs with her mother, continues to express her *idée fixe* of making "a tolerable Saint Cecilia" (*DD* 20-1). A series of gothic motifs structures this scene; as critics have suggested, its images of violent struggle and death are meant to be locked up in the panel, in the gothic space that is Offendene, or the mind.⁵⁴⁰ As has been noted, *Daniel Deronda* appears to rehearse gothic horror stories as "domesticated ... family drama" (Henry 229). Yet, what tends to get overlooked is that Gwendolen's "delight" breaks through the horror because, as hysteria discourse postulates, terror and ecstasy often co-mingle.

As the unbending Klesmer⁵⁴¹ reveals later, Gwendolen's self-fashioning as Saint Cecilia is preposterous, because her artistic talents are mediocre at best. Since "no one had disputed ... her general superiority," Gwendolen is unaware that her performances are not only

⁵⁴⁰ For the reader inclined to analyze names (perhaps too closely), Offendene might register as "offending." It is also a clean anagram of the German word "Öffnende": 'the thing to open' or 'the thing that opens' (the letter 'ö' consists of 'o' and 'e').

⁵⁴¹ Eliot perhaps named her fictional German composer after the hypnotist Franz Anton Mesmer whose interest in the unconscious was all the rage in the last decades of the eighteenth century and whose popularity had not yet waned in second half of the nineteenth century (Micale 23-4; see Peterson 186-7). Eliot was "impatient" with mesmerism as a particularly unscientific theory, although she felt a "restless desire" to learn more about hypnotized clairvoyants (*GEL* 8:45).

unconvincing; they are in bad taste (*DD* 32). Gwendolen's penchant for self-display risks exacerbation of her social precariousness and might propel her away from cultured wealth towards the vulgar life of struggling actresses. *Fraser's*, in 1869, condemns genteel ladies' proclivity to act in *tableaux vivants* and provides useful commentary on Gwendolen's class-less show. The magazine calls them "instances of frivolity illustrative of the extreme childishness of a certain class of educated women," and insists that spectators do not receive "a high idea of the dignity and simplicity of ladies of rank" who use such performances to display their finery ("Women's Education" 539). On the day of the fateful *tableau vivant*, Gwendolen's wish to show off her "Greek dress" while in "statuesque pose" drives the gestation of the project and causes much delay and dispute (*DD* 47). However, the tableau produces something else in Gwendolen, that is, "that exalted susceptibility to the effects of emotion, and that insatiable desire for the notice of others" that Carter considers necessary for the occurrence of the hysteric fit (1853, 76-7). Social debasement and erotic stimulus entwine in this scene to produce transgressive affect as public spectacle.

As the family and guests assemble for a *tableau vivant* depicting the scene of Hermione's release from confinement as a statue in Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*⁵⁴², the narrator comments on the dilettantish execution of the scene—it is an absurd "imitation of acting" (*DD* 48). Nevertheless, anticipation fills Gwendolen with "special exultation" (*DD* 49). Again, as during the previous scene that functions as a rehearsal for this more public tableau, Gwendolen's attempt to turn herself into a statue is accompanied by an ecstatically heightened sense of self. She wants to embody perfectly controlled, beautiful surface; a surface that she, with her limited and vulgar education, perceives to constitute art. By thus transcending her "distasteful petty

⁵⁴² For an analysis of Hermione's function in this scene, see Peterson 183-92.

empire,” Gwendolen turns herself into pure spectacle (*DD* 378). During her brief tableau as Saint Cecilia, Gwendolen presented a “charming picture” to her family and the housekeeper, with her waist-length hair suggestively let down. Now, owing to the many onlookers (some of whom she suspects to be her admirers), her sensation turns into “special exultation,” “an unforeseen phase of emotion” (*DD* 49). Any reader of neurological theory will be able to predict what happens next:

Herr Klesmer ... struck a thunderous chord—but in the same instant ... the movable panel ... flew open ... and disclosed the picture of the dead face ... Everyone was startled, but all eyes ... were recalled by a piercing cry from Gwendolen, who stood without change of attitude, but with a change of expression that was terrifying in its terror. (*DD* 49)

Gwendolen’s spectators are witnessing the “immediate effects of extreme fear or terror on women” (Laycock 174). Thomas Laycock had long warned of the sexually “excitant” influence of music on the nerves and, although Carter dismisses Laycock’s concerns regarding young girls’ exposure to music, he also anticipates that moments such as the tableau could lead to hysterical outbursts.⁵⁴³ In felicitous contrast to Shakespeare’s Hermione, who awakens into vitality, Gwendolen instead freezes into marble, accomplishing a transformation into *plastik*, as Klesmer generously calls it. This is spectacular hysterical performance to the second power; it occurs as and within narrative.

She looked like a statue into which a soul of Fear had entered: her pallid lips were parted; her eyes, usually narrowed under their long lashes, were dilated and fixed. Her mother, less surprised than alarmed, rushed toward her ... But the touch of her mother’s arm had the effect of an electric charge; Gwendolen fell on her knees and put her hands before her face. She was still trembling, but mute, and it seemed that she had self-consciousness

⁵⁴³ Carter 1853, 135n. Thus Carter: “a young woman whose chief enjoyment rests either upon a complacent contemplation of her own perfections ... or else upon an imagined gratification of her sexual desires, is not in the best possible frame of mind for withstanding the pressure of a new temptation; such as is held out by the discovery that she can, at will, produce an apparently serious illness, and thus make herself an object of great attention to all around her” (1853, 52).

enough to aim at controlling her signs of terror, for she presently allowed herself to be raised from her kneeling posture and led away ... (DD 49)

Gwendolen experiences a textbook case of the hysterical paroxysm. With her eyes appearing fixed upon the terrifying object, she undergoes one of Griesinger's "psycho-sensitive" interruptions. Once her mother touches her, Gwendolen's body begins to tremble in the aftershock of nervous energy's muscular discharge.⁵⁴⁴ Carter states that the violence of the hysterical attack is directly proportional to the duration of the responsible emotion's concealment—in this case, the moments of Gwendolen's "special exultation." He continues that, in women, "the most common of these feelings is terror; and the most violent is the sexual passion."⁵⁴⁵ Eliot stages a perfect storm of "fear and fondness" (DD 33), leading to Gwendolen's frozen awe when confronted with the gothic interruption of her exultation.

The important conjunction of terror and eroticism in this scene is produced by the gothic element of the "dead face" and its sudden disruption of Gwendolen's selfish passion. Because the dead face belongs to Gwendolen's future husband, Jill Matus understands Eliot's slippage into gothic mode as enabling Gwendolen to become "clairvoyant about her own disastrous fate with Grandcourt" (Matus 67). Carter had already speculated in 1855 about nervous disease's overlap with "mesmeric phenomena."⁵⁴⁶ In this scene, Gwendolen's heightened sensation cannot be contained by the narrator's realism and produces the supernatural event. More precisely, sexual coverture in marriage, represented in *Daniel Deronda* through gothic tropes, delimits the

⁵⁴⁴ Eliot's depiction of Gwendolen's physical reaction to shock might also be indebted to Charcot's depiction of paralytic seizures, his "hysterical stigmata" (Micale 25; see Peterson 185). Carter says the "hysteric paroxysm produced by terror, is so common among servant-girls, and in fourth-rate boarding-schools, ... that it is needless either to cite examples or to illustrate ... them" (1853, 31-2). Gwendolen's fit is very "common."

⁵⁴⁵ Carter 31-2; see also Griesinger 1867, 180.

⁵⁴⁶ Carter 1855, 230; see Vrettos 558.

realm of possibility—and foreshadows the horrible future manifestation—of Gwendolen’s maidenly arousal.⁵⁴⁷ If Maines is correct in her assertion that hysterical fits would today be interpreted as manifestation of “normal” female sexuality, Gwendolen’s “perfect climax,” a phrase used by Klesmer, indicates that Gwendolen experienced something akin to a terrifying orgasm.

Eliot faithfully adheres to medical script. Klesmer intuitively Gwendolen’s “mortification” about her “betrayal into a passion of fear” (*DD* 50); likewise, Griesinger observes that his patients evince embarrassment after experiencing paroxysmal fits. The touch of Mrs. Davilow, the assiduous co-sleeper, ends Gwendolen’s paralysis and rescues her for the time being from the future specter of Grandcourt’s total claim on her body. In order to re-stabilize the novel’s adherence to realism, the narrator explains that, before the scene in question, “inconvenient” Isabel had stolen the panel’s key from Gwendolen’s drawer and caught a glimpse of the painting, albeit without re-locking the panel. It must have burst open because of the piano’s “vibration,” that is, Laycock’s erotic stimulus (*DD* 50-1). In medically correct terms, the narrator attributes Gwendolen’s fit of terror and passion to her being a “sensitive creature,” having remarked earlier that Gwendolen takes her “peculiar sensitiveness” to be “a mark of her general superiority” (*DD* 50, 18).

Only after staging Gwendolen’s fit for public consumption (and readerly titillation), does the narrator reveal Gwendolen’s anamnesis. She has a defined “susceptibility to terror,” a “liability ... to fits of spiritual dread,” and an interior “fountain of awe” with a tendency to flow

⁵⁴⁷ Gwendolen’s delirious, clairvoyant consciousness collapses time. All motifs are picked up when Gwendolen and Grandcourt board their boat in Genoa, “fulfilling a supernatural destiny.” The pair on the quay is “a thing to paint”—like the painting at Offendene, hidden by the wainscot panel, of a figure fleeing from a dead face—and Gwendolen’s body is again “like a statue” (*DD* 583). The “dead face” haunting Gwendolen in the novel’s final chapters is that of the drowned Grandcourt (*DD* 590, 592, 594, 597).

over at inopportune moments (*DD* 51, 52). Gwendolen's shameful outburst of objectless passion is, in fact, a regular occurrence—which explains her mother's lack of surprise during the Hermione tableau:

[Gwendolen] wondered at herself in these occasional experiences, which seemed like a brief remembered madness, an unexplained exception from her normal life; ... she felt a peculiar vexation that her helpless fear had shown itself, not, as usual, in solitude, but in well-lit company (*DD* 51)

Gwendolen's performance of masculine will is syncopated by irregular bouts of "madness," occurring when the girl is without the audience necessary to channel her exultation safely into vanity, although her nervous system continues to operate in its habitually overexcited state. Carter warns that the first fit lowers the threshold for subsequent ones; increasingly strong self-control is necessary to curtail overwhelming emotion.⁵⁴⁸ Gwendolen is not a solitary masturbator because the burden of half-remembered terror and its effects upon her body are too heavy:

Solitude in any wide scene impressed her with an undefined feeling of immeasurable existence aloof from her, in the midst of which she was helplessly incapable of asserting herself ... [B]ut always when some one joined her she recovered her indifference to the vastness in which she seemed an exile; she found again her usual world in which her will was of some avail ... (*DD* 51-2)

As David Trotter suggests, "[I]mitlessness, the absence of boundaries, is Gwendolen's problem" (467). I would add that, in absence of paternal boundaries guiding her moral and sensual education, Gwendolen is allowed to play the dandy, a "petty" patriarch who rules over her mother and sisters (*DD* 378) and yet who shivers when confronted with spheres of knowledge that are as far removed from her own existence as the stars, or actual men. Without sufficient development of moral conscience to relieve the strain of nervous exultation upon her nerves, Gwendolen is too receptive, too unbounded an individual, unable to perceive among the flood of

⁵⁴⁸ Carter 1853, 41, 54; see also Griesinger 1867, 180.

sensations upon her body the systems of power and knowledge that determine her existence (see Carter 1853, 52). Whenever she is without “that reflected way” of self-assurance provided by others, Gwendolen experiences the world’s incomprehensible horizons, male sexuality included, as unarticulated (and—for sociopolitical reasons—unrepresentable) feelings of helpless, trembling abandon. Although Gwendolen’s “young self-exultation,” in her eyes, distinguishes her from others “who allow themselves to be made slaves of” (*DD* 31), her will falters completely when it is opposed by scenes of erotic terror; scenes that will be, in fact, produced by Grandcourt later on. If Gwendolen is to be one of “these delicate vessels” in which “the treasure of human affection” is “borne onward through the ages,” she must face heterosexual coition and have children (*DD* 103). Yet, Gwendolen’s erotic terror signals that she fears sex as a form of self-annihilation (Beer 204). Once she hands the reins to Grandcourt, her dread erupts spasmodically, before the narrator politely excises Gwendolen’s married body from the narrative. It only reappears on an empty ship in the bay of Genoa, more thoroughly hysterical than ever. In the last chapter I examine the politics of this incomplete representational excision as well as the causes of Gwendolen’s exacerbated hysterical symptoms. After all, as Griesinger notes, there is “great frequency” of hysteria “amongst married women.” (1867, 181).

CHAPTER NINE

DANIEL DERONDA AND THE END OF REPRODUCTION

Gwendolen's Fall

In 1855, aged twenty-seven, Robert Brudenell Carter recommended to his fellow clinicians the following procedure of dealing with unmarried, hysterical women. Perhaps owing to his youth, Carter's treatment fetishizes institutionalized male power and the effects of men's forceful commands (see Micale 147):

In dealing with such people, it is only necessary to meet violence by passive resistance, and to assume a tone of authority, which will, of itself, almost compel submission. Thus, if a patient ... exhibits furious passion, so soon as the storm of her words has abated for lack of breath, she must be told to sit down, and to conduct herself like a lady. So, if she interrupts the speaker, she must be told to keep silence and to listen; and must be told, moreover, not only in a voice that betrays no impatience and no anger, but in such a manner as to convey the speaker's full conviction, that the command will be immediately obeyed. (Carter 1853, 119)

Eliot's depiction of Gwendolen and Grandcourt's courtship and marriage not only sedulously follows Carter's advice, but—with often ambivalent sympathy—traces the reshaping of Gwendolen's nature that results from such treatment. Although Gwendolen's schooling in ways of the world is successful—and deepens her hysteria—the novel enacts her delirious revenge fantasies and suggests that Grandcourt's ownership of Gwendolen's body is an unconscionable condition. Whenever Eliot's prose confronts representational barriers erected by legally entrenched male sexual and class power, her narrator depicts Gwendolen's invaded body using highly conventional rhetorical devices, such as medical typification of Gwendolen's body as

hysterical or animalistic, and Gothic, sensationalist imagery. In the sections darkly evocative of sexual trauma, Eliot's narrative techniques function as instruments in a rhetorical negotiation of married women's claim to legal, bodily, and psychological independence, and tell stories for which medical writers, the law, and realism at large had not yet developed a language, but that were in such universal circulation by the 1870s that the registers available to Eliot risked literary cliché.

I argue in this chapter that Eliot, in *Daniel Deronda*, reflects on the need for ongoing marital reform, both legal and cultural. She does so in a curiously sublimated way via the clandestine plot of Gwendolen's rape, psychological breakdown, and imperfect reconstitution as moral subject. I contend that this plot remains hidden due to three representational barriers with which Eliot saw herself confronted: her own aversion towards openly feminist agitation, the taboo surrounding the depiction of elite men's abuse of power, and, of course, the injunction against explicit depiction of sexually suggestive content. However, the novel's critique of mercenary marriage is thoroughly framed in terms of sadistic sexual performance, although Grandcourt, up until his death, officially remains "perfectly polite" (*DD* 575). Transferring the implied physical violence onto bodies other than Grandcourt's and Gwendolen's, Eliot mutes the connection between Gwendolen's frantic sense of entrapment and her experience of mandatory marital sexual intercourse while consistently providing allusions to Grandcourt's sexual sadism.⁵⁴⁹ As I will show, Eliot employs legal and medical frameworks to situate the Grandcourts' marriage, contrasting a failed and outdated model based on patriarchal force with the implicit modern ideal of the companionate marriage. While it is not surprising that Eliot was

⁵⁴⁹ Many critics have noted Grandcourt's sadism, for example, Bernstein 114; Dowling 332; Ender 261; Flint 175; Henry 227; Herzog 42; McCarron 79; Tromp 455; Weisser 5. They have not yet read systematically for sadistic practice in the novel. See Deleuze 20-1, for an account of modern sadism.

aware of the competing legal and ethical frameworks underlying marriage in the 1870s, her radically pessimistic representation of the Grandcourts' union indicates a response to, and overall agreement with, reformist political discourses that is much more focused and deliberate than we might expect.

(Legal) Fictions of Marital Rape

Matrimonial law in the nineteenth century tolerated systematic sexual injury of wives by their husbands even as it widened definitions of intramarital cruelty. A husband could not be charged with raping his wife because she was understood to have granted lifelong consent to her husband's sexual access to her body upon marriage.⁵⁵⁰ Victorian feminists noted that the law appeared to regard wives' status as lower than prostitutes' because the latter could withdraw their consent and were therefore legally able to accuse men of rape. The "marital bed"—the last bastion of patriarchal privacy—remained legally untouchable until 1991, more than a century after Eliot's death.⁵⁵¹

When Gwendolen realizes that marrying Grandcourt was a mistake, her sense of the necessity to speak while not having anything to say "that would not be a condemnation of herself" (515) implies a revolt against self-prostitution, the physical act of which, like elite violence, remains unrepresentable in Eliot's fiction. However, the novel's veiled, yet continuous, representation of Gwendolen's traumatic sexual experiences implies that, for Eliot, the rules of

⁵⁵⁰ Shanley 8, 178; see Doggett 46; H. Nelson 123-5. Nineteenth-century legal theorists cited a 1736 commentary by Sir Matthew Hale (that itself cited no precedent) when arguing in favor of the marital rape exemption: "for by their mutual matrimonial consent and contract the wife hath given up herself in this kind unto her husband, which she cannot retract" (qt. in Hasday 1397). Hale's phrasing actually "acknowledged the potential divergence" of the husband's will from the wife's, and "enforced the legal presumption of consent" (Hasday 1399).

⁵⁵¹ Bourke 2008, 421; see Hasday 1396-7.

patriarchal privacy themselves are at stake. Coverture, the guarantor of that privacy, is seen to be complicit not only in the destruction of women's bodies but their ability to utter dissent. As Andrew Dowling argues, "silence," in *Daniel Deronda*, "operates as a sign of some truth beyond itself; of an unspeakable, and specifically sexual, horror."⁵⁵² The narrator, similar to the feminists in Eliot's circle, is very much aware of Gwendolen's interconnected legal, economic, and sexual vulnerabilities and consistently gestures towards them. The novel even puts Grandcourt conditionally on trial and declares itself unable to find him guilty:

Grandcourt might have pleaded that he was perfectly justified in taking care that his wife should fulfill the obligations she had accepted. Her marriage was a contract where all the ostensible advantages were on her side, and it was only of those advantages that her husband should use his power to hinder her from any injurious self-committal or unsuitable behavior. He knew quite well that she had not married him—had not overcome her repugnance to certain facts—out of love to him personally; he had won her by the rank and luxuries he had to give her, and these she had got: he had fulfilled his side of the contract. (*DD* 573)

By agreeing to marry Grandcourt, Gwendolen's legal person is incorporated into her husband's in accordance with the legal custom of coverture, the Victorian legal fiction of marital unity. The law enshrined patriarchal authority as governing the physical relationship between husband and wife. At the heart of coverture was men's superior physical strength and the resulting ability to subdue women. If men were naturally stronger, so would be their will.⁵⁵³ Gwendolen's "ostensible" advantages of rank and wealth are made explicit throughout the narrative; other "certain facts" about her "husband's private deportment" remain unexplained because they fall

⁵⁵² Dowling 323; see McCarron 78.

⁵⁵³ Doggett 60-1. Coverture as a legal concept goes back to William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-9), which stipulates that "the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage" (qt. in Doggett 35).

under Grandcourt's privacy rights.⁵⁵⁴ The narrator seems to play by the rules despite conspicuously drawing attention to inexpressible circumstances.

Nineteenth-century feminists, among them Barbara Bodichon, Eliot's close friend, identified the husband's absolute rights to the wife's body as the origin of women's subjugation (Hasday 1412). John Stuart Mill, an acquaintance of Bodichon, in *The Subjection of Women* (1869), had already polemically declared the wife's state to be lower than that of the American slave:

though it may be his daily pleasure to torture her, and though she may feel it impossible not to loathe him—he can claim from her and enforce the lowest degradation of a human being, that of being made the instrument of an animal function contrary to her inclinations. (57)

The usually conservative Eliza Linton wrote in 1870, “As it is, men have the right to demand from their wives absolute attention to their wishes, because they are their property, their dependent creatures whom they feed and clothe in return for certain services” (226-7). In the decade of Eliot's writing, public debate regularly focused on marital rape as protected by the law and as unmentionable private practice in the home. Marital advice literature of the period negotiated the law's tolerance for non-consensual marital sex by urging husbands to practice forbearance. However, authors assumed that the husband ultimately retained—and deserved—the choice to use force.⁵⁵⁵

Advice literature between 1870 and 1900 emphasized Mill's point: unwanted sex was degrading and morally wrong, not only for the wife, but particularly for the husband. Along with feminist agitation, medical handbooks and marriage manuals attempted to reframe virility by

⁵⁵⁴ *DD* 353; see Bernstein 118.

⁵⁵⁵ Hasday 1437; see Bourke 2008, 429.

advocating men's daily sexual self-restraint. Early psychiatrist Henry Maudsley, influenced by evolutionary theory, warned that unrestrained "sexual indulgence" in both sexes would lead to the "destruction" of the nervous system, enervating the male body and shortening men's lives (284). In a less theoretical vein, George Napheys, in 1869, assured young wives of their right to refuse intercourse in certain situations, especially when the family was already large. He provides rare insight into the sexual mores in the Anglophone world of the late 1860s:

Continenence, self-control, a willingness to deny himself,—that is what is required from the husband. But a thousand voices reach us from suffering women in all parts of our land that this will not suffice; that men refuse thus to restrain themselves; that it leads to a loss of domestic happiness. (121)

Russell Thacher Trall, American physician and reformer, warned in his immensely popular *Sexual Physiology* that marital rape was unnatural; it only existed in wholly degraded human relationships. He appeals, like Maudsley, to popular fears about male degeneracy.

No male animal offers violence to the female; he never compels her to submit to the sexual embrace against her desire, nor forces her to bear offspring against her inclination or will. But, when she is in condition to propagate her kind, and desires the co-operation of her male partner, she informs him of it. He ... never compels her to submit to the mere gratification of his lust. So it is in the order of Nature, and so it should be in practice with human beings.⁵⁵⁶

Studies of Victorian sexuality tend to agree that many, if not most, women did not enjoy sexual intercourse. John Cowan, in 1874, wrote with melodramatic flourish that "a great, dark, heavy cloud would be swept off from the hearts of ... married womankind ... if this law, the right of woman to her own person—the right to deny all approaches, save and only when she desired maternity—was universally respected" (394). Although a great advocate for female orgasm, Cowan likened all non-reproductive intercourse in marriage to prostitution. He believed that the conditions of prostitution continued within marriage under the same circumstances as outside of

⁵⁵⁶ 1866, xi; see Cowan 105; Bourke 2008, 423.

it, and that most men initiated intercourse to satisfy their desires without consideration for their wives' wishes. His words betray the same expectations about women's eagerness for sex as Napheys': "if the woman—as nearly all women do who are used by their husbands simply as chattels—lie passive and motionless, the husband may have intercourse and no impregnation follow" (Napheys 111). From Cowan's vantage point, marriages that remained sterile—like the Grandcourts'—resembled prostitution even more sharply.

Another Failed Union

Shortly after the wedding, Gwendolen fantasizes about leaving her husband, and the novel's tracing of foreclosed passages within Gwendolen's "labyrinth of reflection" outlines the entrenched social and legal customs that keep her "an imprisoned dumb creature" (*DD* 514, 504).

How could she run away to her own family—carry distress among them, and render herself an object of scandal in the society she had left behind her? ... What could she say to justify her flight? ... Her husband would have power to compel her. She had absolutely nothing that she could allege against him in judicious or judicial ears. ... How was she to begin? What was she to say that would not be a condemnation of herself? ... her capability of rectitude told her again and again that she had no right to complain of her contract, or to withdraw from it. (*DD* 515)

The novel's action takes place between October 1864 and October 1866, and reassesses the more immediate past after legal changes allowed for the application of enlightened hindsight (Henry 208). Eliot wrote the novel in the aftermath of *Kelly v. Kelly* (1870), a decision that widened the definition of matrimonial cruelty by which a wife could gain a legal separation from her husband. Previously, English law had acknowledged the existence of such cruelty only in cases in which one party, usually the wife, could prove that the spouse had inflicted severe physical injuries. If a woman decided to leave her husband without procuring a divorce, she could be found guilty of desertion, lose financial support and custody over her children, and face

imprisonment until she decided to rejoin her husband's household.⁵⁵⁷ Gwendolen's frantic thoughts represent the mind of a woman confined within the pre-1870 legal context. Procuring an order for the restitution of conjugal rights, Grandcourt could indeed compel her to return. Owing to Grandcourt's zealous abstention from nonsexual physical violence, Gwendolen cannot accuse him of a legal crime. After 1870 the Divorce Court would allow for cases of extreme emotional or psychological cruelty, although neglect and coldness alone would not pass legal muster until 1893's broader definition.⁵⁵⁸

Grandcourt displays behaviors that public commentators increasingly found intolerable although, predictably, many men were loath to cede legal and domestic authority. Gwendolen's sense that her complaints should remain unheard must be read in context of the slow but constant whittling away of the wife's legal coverture and the relaxation of English divorce laws during the 1860s and 70s.⁵⁵⁹ The creation of the Divorce Court in 1857 had opened English homes to increased public scrutiny, and *Daniel Deronda* operates within a wider public discourse that sensationally negotiated the rules of elite marital privacy, formulating a negative code of conduct enumerating unacceptable marital behaviors. The target of Eliot's critique is Grandcourt, heir to

⁵⁵⁷ Shanley 9, 156-8. The rule that wives could be imprisoned until they complied with the court's order to return to their spouse was abolished in 1884 (Shanley 158). Before the Divorce Act of 1857, a marriage could only be terminated either by "ecclesiastical annulment private [or] private Act of Parliament" (Shanley 8). Afterwards, divorce proceedings were available to classes other than the very elite, although a wife had to prove that her husband was "physically cruel, incestuous, or bestial in addition to being adulterous" to secure a divorce—husbands only had to prove wifely adultery (Shanley 9; see Conley 534; Dowling 326). The sexual double standard ruling divorce proceedings remained in place until 1923.

⁵⁵⁸ Bourke 2008, 434-5; see Dowling 326; Hammerton 94-101. In the 1870 case, the Reverend Kelly had established a regime of surveillance and discipline over his wife for several decades. He forbade his wife to go out alone or receive friends; he further displaced his wife as the manager of his household and belittled her in front of their staff. Mrs. Kelly suffered a decline in health and left her husband. The court was appalled by this "regime of incarceration," as Hammerton calls it (97-8).

⁵⁵⁹ Only two years after *Daniel Deronda*'s publication, the 1878 Matrimonial Causes Act allowed wives to separate from their husbands in cases of aggravated assault while remaining eligible for maintenance and custody—for a divorce, wives would have to prove their husband's adultery until 1937 (Surrdige 1994, 2; Hammerton 119).

a baronetcy, who fears public exposure of unseemly details about his marriage and who admonishes Gwendolen repeatedly for transgressive talk with Deronda. His words imply that the Grandcourts' marriage is vulnerable to gossip and defamatory inference:

“You have been making a fool of yourself this morning; and if you were to go on as you have begun, you might soon get yourself talked of at the clubs in a way you would not like. What do *you* know about the world? You have married *me*, and must be guided by my opinion.” (DD 507)

Grandcourt's speeches replicate patriarchal law, which commissions him with the control of his wife and holds him accountable for her conduct. Dreading that Gwendolen is about to cuckold him with Deronda, Grandcourt begins to manage Gwendolen's movements and her appearance. When he tells her, “You will either fill your place properly—to the world and to me—or you will go to the devil” (384), his threat is legalistic. In turn, Gwendolen's recalcitrance against male authority manifests as exacerbating hysterical febrility, offering the only possible response—a physiological one—to absolute legal impotence. Marriage in *Daniel Deronda* emerges as a quasi-therapeutic institution that treats maidenly fractiousness with pointed spousal exhortation:

Every slow sentence of that speech had a terrific mastery in it for Gwendolen's nature. If the low tones had come from a physician telling her that her symptoms were those of a fatal disease, and prognosticating its course, she could not have been more helpless against the argument that lay in it. (DD 507)

Grandcourt's speeches to Gwendolen indicate the legal, medical, and ideological frameworks sanctioning his authority. Once her husband realizes that speech will not suffice, he relocates Gwendolen to “the tiny plank-island” of his yacht the better to police her and oversee her treatment.

After 1870, Grandcourt's “active divination ... of refractoriness in her” could, if exercised long enough, constitute excessive cruelty, a point that Eliot makes in contractual terms (508). Although Gwendolen's marital trouble, “the yoke she had brought on her own neck”

(518), might appear superficially trivial, she finds release for her intense resentment by indulging in fantasies of murder. Highlighting Gwendolen's inability to tap into systems of legal support, the novel mobilizes Gothic fantasy to portray a mind made brittle by a history of strenuous self-control punctuated by hysterical outbreak.⁵⁶⁰

The thought of his dying would not subsist: it turned as with a dream-change into the terror that she should die with his throttling fingers on her neck avenging that thought. Fantasies moved within her like ghosts, making no break in her more acknowledged consciousness and finding no obstruction in it: dark rays doing their work invisibly in the broad light. (*DD* 518)

Through recourse to Gothic delirium, Eliot balances editorial taboo ("elite men are untouchable") and her heroine's suffering ("elite men kill their wives") to censure pre-1857 marital norms within the context of a slowly changing legal situation. Thanks to sensationalist discourse around divorce, courts increasingly paid attention to the effects of spousal ill treatment on wives' bodies. *Daniel Deronda* does not call for drastic legal changes, but the Grandcourts' nightmarish union functions as dark antithesis to the companionate marriage model based on mutual negotiation of power rather than on brute force. Even Gwendolen's naïve expectation that, once married, she would "manage" her husband, takes for granted Grandcourt's adherence to the (potentially exploitable) companionate model. Eliot implies that companionate marriage requires husbands' self-control as well as wives' moral education in appropriate deference to their husbands because only such conduct would ensure the health of the wife's reproductive body.

⁵⁶⁰ Eliot's use of hysterical fantasy corresponds to Lord Stowell's 1790 anticipation of wifely fears: "the apprehension [of bodily injury] must be reasonable: it must not be an apprehension arising merely from an exquisite and diseased sensibility of mind" (qt. in Dowling 325). Lord Stowell's definition of marital cruelty remained in place until 1870.

Wedding Night

Before turning to the novel's creation of a causal link between marital abuse and spiritual and biological barrenness, I trace the submerged plot of Gwendolen's sexual initiation. Although Eliot never advocated for girls' sexual education prior to marriage, *Daniel Deronda* sedulously explores the psychological and physiological outcomes of Gwendolen's loss of virginity. Young wives like Gwendolen were often shocked to find themselves at the mercy of their husbands. The realization that they were expected to serve as sexual objects had irreversible repercussions for their sense of self. As I show below, Eliot cautions that sexual abuse, if not heterosexual activity of any kind, shatters and reconstitutes the bride's subjectivity. Echoing feminist reformers, the scenes of Gwendolen's sexual initiation underscore that the continued legality of marital rape provided the essential argument in favor of the companionate marriage model.

Gwendolen marries Grandcourt for complex reasons. She wants to avoid becoming a governess, leave an existence in which she must please others, prevent her mother's descent into poverty, and enjoy a life of affluent leisure with a husband who is "free from absurdities,"—in other words, passionless (*DD* 115). Gwendolen's sexual panic, already conspicuous during her flirtations with Rex, structures her relationship with Grandcourt from the moment she accepts his proposal. Previously, Grandcourt's physical courtship had been as "inobtrusive as a wafted odour of roses" which mainly "gratified vanity" (*DD* 275). The "odour of roses" again denotes men's ability to create women's autoerotic arousal, but once Grandcourt actually begins to claim physical tokens of affection, that autoeroticism is replaced with terror. The novel's sinister courtship scenes, loaded with unarticulated conflict, outline the rules of their sexual power play. Grandcourt is aroused by "her agitation," the symptom of Gwendolen's unwillingness to engage in physical contact. Gwendolen understands Grandcourt's "reticence" to mean that he will not

impose “inexplicable” things upon her—she still has no idea about intercourse—a relief that is “delightful” (*DD* 277). Grandcourt’s insistence on a speedy wedding and the narrator’s previous comment about Grandcourt’s “pleasure in mastering reluctance,” however, hints that Gwendolen’s hope is illusory (*DD* 266, 269).

As Helena Michie has argued, Gwendolen would have required sexual education to make an informed choice about Grandcourt’s marriage proposal. Although she is aware of Grandcourt’s sexual history, Gwendolen is neither given information about the act itself nor about its psychophysiological ramifications, which, in turn, complicates questions of her moral accountability (Michie 2006, 162). This is not to say that Eliot would have condoned such sexual education for Gwendolen.

Could there be a slenderer, more insignificant thread in human history than this consciousness of a girl, busy with her small inferences of the way in which she could make her life pleasant? ... What in the midst of that mighty drama are girls and their blind visions? (*DD* 102)

Eliot’s narrator naturalizes the monumental demarcation between knowledge allocated to girls and that reserved for adults. To participate in the grown-up world of global and “mighty drama,” the girl must undergo ritualistic initiation into womanhood on the wedding night. The narrator laments the “cruel paradox” of the virgin’s uninformed consent to marriage, but does not call for a change to that eternally painful story (Michie 2006, 164).

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the wedding night was generally regarded as a period of heightened emotional and physical vulnerability for women. Medical writers and marital advice literature normalized the expectation that newlywed women would betray signs of nervous shock resulting from unexpected physical intimacy. Nicholas Cooke, in 1871, advises the new husband to halt all sexual advances if the bride evinces signs of fear as “the first conjugal act is little else than a legalized rape, in most cases” (147). George Napheys writes in

1869 that “initiation into marriage ... is attended with more or less suffering” (91-2). In his experience, young wives often develop nervous disorders immediately after the wedding night. Thomas Laycock’s patient becomes hysterical because she finds her “husband physically incongruous.”⁵⁶¹ A quarter century after *Daniel Deronda*’s publication, Delos Wilcox outlines the effects of the Victorian wedding night:

What shocks a woman ... is nothing inherent in the change from virginity to wifehood, but rather the sudden discovery that she is no longer a free woman. Her lover was all deference to her wishes and respect for her personality. Her husband, when once the keys to her sanctuary are in his hand, is transformed by some perverse alchemy into a sensual tyrant. He may use violence, he may use only the persuasions of the benevolent despot; but her freedom is gone. (120-1)

On the day of their wedding, Gwendolen, “still walking amid illusions,” exhibits “febrile ... excitement” manifesting as constant chatter when the couple approaches Grandcourt’s estate.⁵⁶² The following passage evokes Gwendolen’s dread of losing her virginity in terms that are as frank as Eliot can make them without risking censorship:

Was it alone the closeness of this fulfilment which made her heart flutter? or was it some dim forecast, the insistent penetration of suppressed experience, mixing the expectation of a triumph with the dread of a crisis? Hers was one of the natures in which exultation inevitably carries an infusion of dread ready to curdle and declare itself. She fell silent in spite of herself as they approached the gates, and when her husband ... for the first time kissed her on the lips, she hardly knew of it ... (*DD* 301)

Heart pounding and unusually distracted by the inner conflict of exultation and dread in light of the coming “penetration,” Gwendolen evinces textbook symptoms of an oncoming hysteric fit (Carter 5-6). After receiving Lydia Glasher’s diamonds and the enclosed letter-curse, Gwendolen surrenders to prolonged hysteric spasms. Her fit announces the otherwise unrepresentable annihilation of her maidenly and morally unburdened self during the socially mandated “crisis.”

⁵⁶¹ Laycock 143; also see Gardner 83.

⁵⁶² *DD* 300, 301; see Griesinger 1867, 181.

According to critics, Gwendolen taints herself by displacing Lydia, and her moral metamorphosis occurs as a ritualized and, I suggest, physical event, as the consummation of marriage. Gwendolen's displacement of Lydia contains its own punishment in the form of marital rape whose materiality is outside the scope of Eliot's realism. The novel therefore represents Gwendolen's hysterical, invaded body as a set of symptoms conveyed by sensationalist, spectacular narration. Her symptoms are "pallid" skin, "trembling fingers," a "spasm of terror," "shrieking," and "tremor in her lips and hands," inaugurating Grandcourt's coming "empire of fear" (*DD* 364). The reflections of Gwendolen's image, "like so many women petrified white," signify Gwendolen's moral self-division as consolidated by coition. Her mirror images visualize the shattering of control, mastery, even identity itself. Gwendolen experiences her wedding night as a maximally threatening event when her genophobia, the origin of her "fits of spiritual dread," materializes to invade her body (*DD* 19).

The narrator's editorial intervention stops completely in this scene of sexual trauma. Likewise, interpretation of Gwendolen's screams and the usual reporting of Gwendolen's thoughts come to a halt. The moment of Gwendolen's insemination—"the poison had entered into this poor young creature" (*DD* 303)—is also the moment of her freezing into that familiar statuesque, "petrified white" body. Gwendolen becomes an unconscious object, Grandcourt's property, at the moment of their marriage's consummation. With Grandcourt's entrance into Gwendolen's boudoir, rendered as "profound scopic violation" (Michie 2006, 168), her only way of retreat is into hysterical physicality. Grandcourt's assumption of diagnostic vision ("He saw her") transfers narrative focalization from Gwendolen to her husband, and Gwendolen's screams loudly resist coverture while announcing their own futility.

Animal Impulses

Gwendolen's wedding-night paroxysm will be the final glimpse the reader has of Gwendolen's body for a while. After the wedding night, Eliot, ostensibly in adherence to the laws of coverture, erases Gwendolen's body from the narrative. The narrator adheres to Grandcourt's privacy rights while staging auxiliary bodies in situations that, at first sight, appear only tangentially related to the central marriage. Eliot transfers the signifiers of sexual excess and violence onto other bodies—that of Grandcourt's spaniel as well as his valet Lush—to avoid overt sensationalism. This device had been employed by previous realist writers to such an extent, however, that Eliot barely shields Grandcourt from public view. Merely pretending to respect elite privacy rights, Eliot actually invites the reader to peek behind the curtain.

In May 1856, nineteen months before the new Divorce Court assembled, J. W. Kaye's essay, "Outrages on Women," inveigled against the English epidemic of wife-beating. Kaye focused on the socioeconomic reasons of spousal abuse among the working poor and reserved little space for a polemic against the upper classes. However, his short description of marital cruelty among people of rank spells out the rules for such cruelty's representation in public discourse and fiction. They would remain in place throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.⁵⁶³

[In] the upper classes men rarely lift their hands against their wives. ... Men of education and refinement do not strike women; neither do they strike one another. This is not their mode of expressing resentment. They may utter words more cutting than sharp knives; they may do things more stunning in their effects on the victim than the blows of pokers or hammers; they may kill their wives by process of slow torture—unkindness, infidelity, whatever shape it may assume—and society will forgive them. The Law, too, has nothing

⁵⁶³ See Cobbe 58; Hammerton 73; Lawson and Shakinovsky 14-6; SurrIDGE 2005, 3-4, 108. On their wedding day, the couple is observed by Pennicote inhabitants, and, in the first paragraph of the chapter dedicated to Gwendolen's nuptials, the narrator records a conversation between the townspeople that is heavy with foreboding: "A quarrel may end wi' the whip, but it begins wi' the tongue" (*DD* 298-9). Working-class speakers can express what the polite voice of the narrator cannot.

to say to them. They are not guilty of what is recognised as an assault, because they only assail the affections—only lacerate the heart. (235)

Taboos constraining the depiction of marital abuse among the upper classes led to authors' conventional displacement of such violence from the wife's battered body to that of abused domestic animals, usually dogs or horses, acknowledging implicitly wives' social and legal position to be as degraded (and degrading) as a pet's. Spaniels in particular symbolized "gentleness, submission [and] a willingness to be beaten" (Surridge 1994, 6). Eliot provides a preview of the treatment Gwendolen can expect after the wedding when Grandcourt sits alone at breakfast, his "beautiful liver-colored water-spaniel" Fetch begging for attention. Under Grandcourt's long silent stare—he wants to elicit "amusing anguish" in the spaniel—Fetch whimpers and fawns. Once the dog disrupts the quiet with a howl, Grandcourt commands his valet Lush to "[t]urn out that brute" (*DD* 105). The same scene, performed by Gwendolen rather than Fetch, occurs several hundred pages later when Gwendolen, who is now "part of the complete yacht," squirms under Grandcourt's "immovable gaze" (*DD* 575). Because Eliot cannot represent Gwendolen and Grandcourt's "hidden rites" after the wedding night (*DD* 576), her discourse—which is nearly as polemical and sensationalist as Kaye's—conflates the bodies of animals and women, critiquing the husband's legal coverture over and virtual ownership of his wife's body. By the time of *Daniel Deronda*'s publication this technique had been repeated so frequently in popular fiction that hackneyed animal imagery barely shielded the reader's view from Grandcourt's unspeakable acts.

Grandcourt's class affiliation makes it impossible to depict the loss of his temper or show him behaving aggressively, although Eliot's narrator details his psychological vulgarity at length:

he utters almost nothing but slowly drawn-out expletives.⁵⁶⁴ Grandcourt is Carter's polite executioner of woman's moral education—he even supports Gwendolen's mother and Lydia Glasher's children handsomely. All is proper. Eliot relegates Grandcourt's "animal" impulses to the minor character of his secretary—or "procurer" (David 184)—Lush, who embodies the physical aggression necessary to overcome Gwendolen's recalcitrance.⁵⁶⁵ Lush, socially inferior appendage to Grandcourt's estate, invites Gwendolen's repulsion because she cannot ever express it towards her husband. (101). Grandcourt, as "a consummate picture of English brutality refined and distilled," as Henry James put it, carefully guards against committing an act that would declass him and turn him into an object of sensationalist spectacle (1903, 166).

When Gwendolen first meets Lush—whose name implies sexual excess—she instinctively shies away from him: "Mr. Lush's prominent eyes, fat though not clumsy figure, and ... hair of frizzy thickness ... created one of the strongest of her antipathies" (*DD* 101). Lush's vulgarly expansive physicality and his knowing, violating gaze tell a story that Grandcourt's blonde and enervated refinement does not: men of rank may treat women cruelly. Gwendolen remembers that, during their courtship, Grandcourt had promised he would remove Lush to accommodate Gwendolen's repulsion. He breaks that promise when he has Lush deliver the will that leaves most of Grandcourt's assets to Lydia's illegitimate son. In Gwendolen's ignorant interpretation, Grandcourt had likewise insinuated that he would respect her dislike of physical intimacy. When Lush sets foot into Gwendolen's boudoir, echoing Grandcourt's entry on the wedding night, Gwendolen's assumption is revealed to be wrong. Lush not only transmits

⁵⁶⁴ See McCormack 93n5 for a list of Grandcourt's expletives—they all involve "brutes, dens, kennels."

⁵⁶⁵ See Surridge 1994, 17, for the long history of this rhetorical device in Victorian fiction.

distasteful sexual information, he is its embodiment. Gwendolen, despite powerfully aggressive impulses to the contrary, has no recourse to Grandcourt's treatment but fearful silence:

The words that she wanted to utter, as one wants to return a blow, were, "You are breaking your promise to me—the first promise you made me." But she dared not utter them. She was as frightened at a quarrel as if she had foreseen that it would end with throttling fingers on her neck. ... There may come a moment when even an excellent husband who has dropped smoking under ... a pledge during courtship, ... introduce[s] his cigar-smoke between himself and his wife, with the tacit understanding that she will have to put up with it. Mr. Lush was, so to speak, a very large cigar. (*DD* 483)

Without overplaying the narrator's gross phallic imagery, I relate the image of the smoking cigar to Grandcourt's "throttling fingers on her neck," and take them to represent Gwendolen's physical sensation of suffocation. Gwendolen has no right to refuse her husband's sexual advances, and the novel's symbolic domain garrulously tells the story of Gwendolen's legally mandated and "perfectly polite" sexual degradation, the actual "cure" for her autoerotic hysteria.

Lush, "muddy hound," "hog," and "toad-eater," serves a master whose representation is no less steeped in animal imagery (*DD* 102, 258, 240). Grandcourt, all silent menace, looks as "neutral as an alligator" and like a "handsome lizard of a hitherto unknown species."

Problematically, "Gwendolen knew hardly anything about lizards."⁵⁶⁶ She trusts that Grandcourt will be sexually cold; he is not as "ridiculous" as Rex had been.⁵⁶⁷ Whereas Lydgate made the mistake of interacting with Rosamond as if she were a preconceived type, Gwendolen lacks the knowledge to assess Grandcourt's type correctly. The authorized reader has long realized that Grandcourt's past sexual excess and moral enervation cast him as the most degenerate type of the Victorian literary repertoire. Eliot's evolutionary joke equates the ancient cliché of the

⁵⁶⁶ *DD* 133, 115. Grandcourt continually subjects Gwendolen to his disconcerting stare, an intensification of the pornographic gaze that introduces Gwendolen at the beginning of the novel: "he looked at her with his most lizard-like expression" (*DD* 502; see Ender 234).

⁵⁶⁷ *DD* 92; see Wilt 330.

aristocratic rake with a case of degeneration so extreme that Grandcourt is at the reptilian stage of evolution. Gwendolen, whose naïveté the narrator compares to a “lap-dog’s,” cannot yet put together perceptual cues and their sexual meanings (*DD* 467). Although Eliot’s narrator condemns Gwendolen’s will to power, the novel structurally avenges Victorian society’s colossal epistemological crime of leaving Gwendolen in sexual ignorance by drowning Grandcourt, while Gwendolen, once more frozen into Hermione, frantically watches (see Michie 2006, 154).

Honeymooning with Grandcourt

Daniel Deronda tells the tale of Gwendolen’s moral fall from grace. Gwendolen gambles away her conscience for the amenities of aristocratic life and the right to vain self-display. Gambling, in the novel, is associated with winning money at the expense of someone else, but it also functions as a placeholder for sexual unsoundness.⁵⁶⁸ The story of Gwendolen’s awakening to the error of gambling is also the story of Gwendolen’s sexual awakening. Although Gwendolen “had not consented [to Grandcourt’s proposal] in ignorance” of Grandcourt’s illegitimate family, she consented in ignorance of sex, a story that Eliot cannot reproduce

⁵⁶⁸ *DD* 285. Eliot’s letters show that she found gambling in women to be particularly revolting (*GEL* 5:314). In October 1872 she observed Byron’s grandniece, Miss Geraldine Leigh, at gambling in Bad Homburg’s Kursaal whose description mirrors that of the first pages of *Daniel Deronda* and evokes the interior of a brothel (see Henry 2012, 216; *DD* 3-4). The novel’s introduction creates the backdrop of a rootless, “fallen, threatening world” and sets the stage for the novel’s exploration of Europe’s cultural, and particularly moral, degeneracy (Reimer 36). Gambling resorts often had reputations for luxurious dissipation because they also offered other, unspeakable amenities. Many women traveled to Europe’s bathing spas to receive treatments for hysteria, often “massage or douches of the genitalia (Maines 2, 72-81). Romberg writes, “I have obtained the most beneficial effects from the use of tepid hip-baths in cases of hysteria, in which sexual excitement, with voluptuous dreams, and the ejaculation of a mucous fluid, is followed by extreme prostration” (94). He cured “inveterate” hysterics by “the prolonged use of the mineral waters of Spa and Pyrmont”; otherwise, he recommended “cauterisation of the ... uterus” (Romberg 95, 94). Perhaps the Baroness von Langen, Gwendolen’s cousin and travel companion, not only “taught the girl to gamble,” but sought the services of a gynecologist at Leubronn (*DD* 8).

directly, but whose arc she outlines carefully.⁵⁶⁹ The reader may piece together a story in which Gwendolen's schooling in the "know[ledge] of the world," administered by Grandcourt, results in a "mental enlargement" and "new repulsion" that is predicated upon bodily enslavement (*DD* 507, 469, 364). If women's desire for sex in Victorian fiction is represented by illicit hunger for food (Michie 1987, 13), Gwendolen's repeated show of anorexia after the wedding suggests that she already has had enough (*DD* 470, 502). Gwendolen is said to "devour[] her mortification" instead under the "quiet massive pressure of [Grandcourt's] rule" (*DD* 508, 502). Gwendolen's marriage forms "a hidden wound" (*DD* 482) whose painfulness is increased by Gwendolen's overstimulated perception and her frantic anticipation of disaster.

Contemporary readers might be justly taken aback by the sexual martyrdom Gwendolen undergoes, but Eliot's narrator, as Jill Matus reminds us, remains primarily interested in the psychic conditions that produce female conscience rather than traumatized consciousness (72). That is not to say that Eliot does not pay ample attention to Gwendolen's psychic damage. Gwendolen's fledgling conscience depends on her realization that her bodily dependence, if not her essential penetrability, enshrined by the law, prevents her from attaining the political agency she had assumed to possess before marriage. Painful sexual knowledge in the form of ceaseless rape enlightens Gwendolen as to her legal and social status as property and chastens her to the extent that she drops her wish to master others. For Eliot, marital rape is the lawful, if deplorable, materialization of a marriage model based on physical force, with the effect of endowing Gwendolen with the moral apparatus she had lacked as a virgin. The notion of rape as a technology of moral growth will likely be unacceptable to many twenty-first century readers, but

⁵⁶⁹ *DD* 277. Right after Gwendolen accepts Grandcourt, he offhandedly remarks that "this is such a brute of a world, things are always turning up that one doesn't like" (*DD* 258).

I assert that Eliot understands rape to constitute a way for willful women to come into moral being.

In describing Gwendolen's inability to get away from Grandcourt and his insistence on having his wife near him, Eliot seems to be taking a hint from James Schouler's *Treatise on the Law of Husband and Wife*, first published in 1870. Schouler writes that "the refusal of sexual intercourse and the nuptial bed, without good excuse, is a serious wrong ... [and] *per se* a breach of duty, tending to subvert the true ends of marriage" (61). However, Schouler conceded that, "sexual intercourse ... should be mutually regulated with ... kindly forbearance; and a husband who wantonly abuses his wife ... and disregards her health and delicate organization, is guilty of legal cruelty" (61-2). When Deronda meets Gwendolen in Genoa, he thinks she looks "handsomer" than before, her bearing enriched by a "nameless something" that "makes a woman more interesting after marriage than before, less confident that all things are according to her opinion ... —more fully a human being" (*DD* 580). For Deronda, who only studies surface, the "nameless something," Gwendolen's education in wifedom and sexual submission, conditions her ascension into humanity. Depicting Gwendolen's altered state through Deronda's focalization, the novel makes visible the public effects of Gwendolen's new self-denial, the wished-for effect of successful therapeutic intervention. (Carter 1853, 142). Gwendolen, meanwhile, experiences her treatment as "misery" and "torture," a "sort of truth" that "could not be uttered" (*DD* 574, 581). Eliot's narrator—most aligned with Deronda's ethical viewpoint throughout the novel—romanticizes Gwendolen's loss of freewheeling temper and egotism. Deronda's recognition of Gwendolen as potential fellow-subject depends on her sexual subjection. If readers were still in doubt about the "nameless" origin of Gwendolen's change,

Eliot produces sexually explicit discourse for much of the novel's final chapters, tracing with quasi-pornographic fascination the circumstances of Gwendolen's breaking-in.

Had she only “fancied that [Grandcourt's] eyes showed a delight in torturing her” shortly after the wedding, Grandcourt is soon intentionally and aggressively “using pincers on that white creature” (*DD* 366, 503). Verbal exchanges between the couple are entirely suffused by the language of sadistic erotics. Although the narrative frames Grandcourt's “mastery over her” in rhetorical terms (“His words had the power of thumb-screws and the cold touch of the rock”), the narrator reproduces the effects of Grandcourt's mastery in the language of immediate physical sensation. Grandcourt encourages in Gwendolen a “habitual stifling consciousness of having an immovable obstruction in her life” (*DD* 582). She is “as fully aware” of her bondage as “of a locked hand-cuff.”⁵⁷⁰ The novel depicts at least one instance of the couple's erotic exchanges in explicitly physical terms: Grandcourt is aroused when observing Gwendolen's proud efforts to suppress her anger: “But the rage was silent, and therefore not disagreeable to him. It followed that he turned her chin and kissed her” (*DD* 510). Grandcourt has just mentioned that Mr. Lush will carry his will into Gwendolen's boudoir. His kiss represents not only the breach of Grandcourt's implied promise to remain chaste but announces the existence of more invasive sexual acts past and future, embodied by Lush's disgusting physicality. Grandcourt's enforcement of coverture even includes Gwendolen's physical volubility that expresses her

⁵⁷⁰ *DD* 499. Gwendolen's association with horses, symbols of male sexual prowess, is first slippery and later mobilized by Eliot's explicitly sadistic sexual discourse. The narrator first turns her into a horse when comparing her refined and calculated femininity to that of her female relatives: “Imagine a young race-horse in the paddock among untrimmed ponies and patient hacks” (*DD* 19). Despite the repeated insistence that Gwendolen “wishe[s] to mount the chariot and drive the plunging horses herself,” others, first her Uncle Gascoigne and then Grandcourt, “hold the rein” and, after marriage to Grandcourt, Gwendolen—she who rode so well—is “brought to kneel down like a horse under training for the arena” (*DD* 115, 64, 269). She becomes one of Grandcourt's possessions; he is “perfectly satisfied that he held his wife with bit and bridle” (*DD* 582). The sexual connotations are as obvious as they are disturbing.

(barely) suppressed rage: “the proper thing for you is to take it as a matter of course ... Not to toss your head and bite your lips” (*DD* 510).

Gwendolen’s body emerges thus spasmodically throughout the final scenes of her marriage. The reader participates in Gwendolen’s hysterical imagination that inflates the horror because it cannot be circumscribed: Grandcourt and the narrator alike “shr[i]nk from explicitness and detail” (*DD* 508). Yet, the narrator’s language insistently hints at unspeakable sexual acts.

[H]er husband had gained a mastery which she could no more resist than she could have resisted the benumbing effect from the touch of a torpedo. ... And she had found a will like that of a crab or a boa-constrictor, which goes on pinching or crushing without alarm at thunder. (*DD* 363)

Gwendolen’s situation on Grandcourt’s yacht, a claustrophobic “prison,” epitomizes the narrowness of individual marriage as surrounded by wider patriarchal systems of power that are unfathomable, yet irresistible in their effects (*DD* 502, 578). Grandcourt’s yachting excursion with Gwendolen represents nightmarish, eternally drawn-out honeymoon during which Gwendolen is expected to “reorient” her body in spatial and psychosexual terms towards mandatory heterosexual practice (Michie 1997, 131). If Dorothea’s Roman honeymoon with Casaubon had constituted an intellectual—and possibly sexual⁵⁷¹—failure, the Grandcourts’ expedition provides sufficient titillating rhetoric to assure readers that Grandcourt is scrupulous about his marital duties. Grandcourt is “using her as he liked,” and, “liking his particular pleasures,” won’t let up “suffocating” Gwendolen in the yacht’s “red silk cabin”; he is “a dangerous serpent ornamentally coiled in her cabin without invitation.”⁵⁷²

⁵⁷¹ See Michie 1997, 134, for a reading of the Casaubons’ honeymoon as a locus of Dorothea’s rape.

⁵⁷² *DD* 511, 581, 575. See McCormack on the imperialism of Grandcourt’s yachting excursion with Gwendolen as his “colonized creature” (84). The yacht’s interior invokes the interior of the Leubronn gambling house on the novel’s first page which, with its “gilt mouldings, dark-toned color and chubby nudities” (3), in turn, has the aspect of a brothel. Gwendolen has indeed “sold herself” (573).

The novel lexically relates Gwendolen's plight to that of English wives. In *The Subjection of Women*, John Stuart Mill had denounced marital rape as women's degradation to "personal body-servant of a despot" (59). Eliot borrows these formulations verbatim in *Daniel Deronda*: the section immediately following the comparison of Grandcourt with a serpent teems with sexually evocative language, including use of Mill's "despot," supported by the narrator's casual note regarding Gwendolen's dread of pregnancy. Eliot produces maximally frank sexual discourse:

Grandcourt had intense satisfaction in leading his wife captive after this fashion; it gave their life on a small scale a royal representation and publicity in which every thing familiar was got rid of, and every body must do what was expected of them whatever might be their private protest—the protest (kept strictly private) adding to the piquancy of despotism. To Gwendolen, who even in the freedom of her maiden time, had had very faint glimpses of any heroism or sublimity, the medium that now thrust itself everywhere before her view was this husband and her relation to him. (*DD* 575)

This passage, framed, like Grandcourt's private and public comportment, in sedulous adherence to representational laws, indicates that he gleefully commits what the state allows him to do, while his wife's doubly "private protest" helplessly draws attention to itself. Like the legal text of sexual coverture, the passage only pretends to hide the fact that Gwendolen does not and cannot consent. Rape occurs in plain sight because elite respectability and its attendant legal fictions are revealed to be a sham, the "Satanic masquerade" (652) of Gwendolen's hallucinations.

During her fitful confession to Deronda, Gwendolen speaks in images even more extreme in their sensual and political intensity. Gwendolen's "solitude" with Grandcourt makes her feel "like a galley-slave"; she imagines that "he would kill me if I resisted his will" (*DD* 594-6). Her words again evoke a famous line by Mill—"[t]here remain no legal slaves, except the mistresses of every house" (147)—in an analogy that, as we have seen, had much cachet with formerly

abolitionist feminists. In the context of proto-therapeutic breakdown, Gwendolen can speak the truth that Eliot cannot otherwise publish: upper-class husbands are as prone to marital violence as their working-class counterparts. Like her sensations, Gwendolen's fantasies of vengeance break through fitfully, framed themselves in the language of rape: "plans of evil that would come again and seize her in the night, like furies preparing the deed that they would straightway avenge" (*DD* 583). Gwendolen's hysterical mind clairvoyantly anticipates, if not generates, the final catastrophe.

As critics have noted, Gwendolen's hysteria challenges the novel's otherwise conservative moral framework, an infraction that is itself "straightway avenge[d]." Eliot remains unwilling to advocate explicitly for marital reform despite outlining marriage law's psychological and physiological effects upon the wife. Although hysteria enables a politically radical telling of secrets, "disrupt[ing] the narrative status quo with psychic ... power" (Vrettos 572), Gwendolen's fantasies, like the narrative itself, are painfully pulled back to the status quo; her (re)action against patriarchal power is thoroughly punished. Female dissatisfaction's undermining of the dominant narrative's proscriptions incurs a great moral debt that Eliot's narrator claims in the form of Gwendolen's spectacular irresolution at the end of the novel.

The Story of a Cure

Deronda's probing and censorious gaze in Leubronn begins Gwendolen's moral education because it reveals to her that her performance is somehow lacking to win his approval. His subsequent retrieval of her father's Etruscan turquoise necklace signals the starting point of Gwendolen's instruction in benevolent, non-violent patriarchy. By "finding" her father for her, Deronda incurs the onerous responsibility of confidante and moral doctor. His assumption of

specular and moral control over the girl is analogous to Carter's prescriptive moral gaze: "we must look for a degree of perversion of the moral sense, which is most painful to witness, and often most embarrassing to encounter. . . . to check vicious propensities, and to induce the abandonment of vicious habits" (Carter 1853, 106). Scholars have made much of Deronda and Gwendolen's proto-therapeutic relationship that, for long stretches of the novel, looks like the foreplay to courtship (David 144). The narrator, who calls Deronda Gwendolen's "conscience," "priest," and "terrible browed-angel,"⁵⁷³ explores with these terms traditional categories of moral mentorship, and discards them all because they do not quite match the professional, non-erotic relationship Deronda himself has in mind (and wants to discharge as quickly as possible), and that Carter had theorized in 1853. While the novel imagines the formation of the psychiatric patient-doctor relationship, it maintains that romantic, even sexual, investment—something beyond empathy—is necessary for the cure.⁵⁷⁴ Gwendolen must be touched by "Mighty Love" because her affinity to Deronda counterbalances Grandcourt's physical conditioning (*DD* 660). Carter himself anticipated such balancing.

Deronda's treatment of Gwendolen has apparently unhealthy results: his retrieval of the necklace initiates a series of events that culminates in Gwendolen's marriage and subsequent abuse. In fact, Gwendolen's route through suffering is intentional; the hysterical girl cannot be treated in the maternal home because it caused her miseducation in the first place (Carter 1853, 105). Eliot, in fact, traces in splendid detail Carter's treatment plan "to exorcise the demon" of female willfulness: "to obtain this end, there must be a constructive, as well as a destructive system, and the two must advance together, the endeavour being made to plant right principles

⁵⁷³ *DD* 355, 369, 577; see Weisser 7.

⁵⁷⁴ See Weisser 7; Beer 2009, 208.

and feelings, as fast as the rooting up of evil ones makes room for them” (1853, 132). Whereas Deronda is Carter’s agent of moral construction, Grandcourt is hired to destroy Gwendolen’s claims to independence. Gwendolen soon becomes “conscious of an uneasy, transforming process—all the old nature shaken to its depths, its hopes spoiled, its pleasures perturbed, but still showing wholeness and strength in the will to reassert itself” (*DD* 362). The many almost identical scenes of therapeutic encouragement and punitive disciplining inject Gwendolen with the required dosage of reasonableness and knowledge of her own insignificance, just as Carter described:

It will, however, be ... found, that the deadened moral sense of an hysterical woman requires many and strong appeals to rouse it from slumber ... In all cases it will be necessary to use plain words, and to convey the ideas of selfishness and falsehood by their simplest names, and not under the disguise of polite and elegant periphrasis. The patient needs to hear the truth, and to have her conduct put before her. (Carter 1853, 114)

Carter further writes that the hysteric should find a healthy pursuit (“music, reading, or chess”) to occupy her thoughts rather than to achieve excellence (1853, 133, 138). Accordingly, Deronda suggests to Gwendolen that she find a purpose in training her voice. Right away, Grandcourt forbids Gwendolen to sing because he “doesn’t want to hear squalling in private” (*DD* 502). Construction and destruction pull Gwendolen away from aberrant willfulness. Next, Carter writes that the patient must be shamed for betraying hysterical symptoms; the goal should be “to make them appear ridiculous” (1853, 118). The narrative repeats the two-pronged system: Deronda tells Gwendolen to “[t]urn your fear into a safeguard” so that she may achieve a clearer moral vision (*DD* 388). Soon thereafter, Gwendolen loses her nerves in Grandcourt’s presence and is promptly reprimanded: “What the devil women can see in this kind of thing, I don’t know” (*DD* 581). When Gwendolen confides that she is unhappy in her marriage, Deronda wants her to “confess” her unhappiness and moral struggle to her husband. By thus “appl[ying] precept

to soothe pain” (Tromp 457), Deronda assumes that the structure that causes Gwendolen’s misery will be its antidote, that reasonable patriarchal law is capable of soothing wifely misery. Grandcourt, in turn, proves this not to be the case and imprisons her on his yacht.

In a last step, the novel exorcizes the evil manifestation of patriarchy embodied by Grandcourt. For Carter’s system to work, the plot requires the coincidence of Grandcourt’s inability to swim: Gwendolen can never “be good” while Grandcourt is alive (*DD* 657). Deronda rewards her frantic, conscience-stricken acceptance of guilt for Grandcourt’s death with release from any responsibility for the boating accident and discharges her into loneliness, “the beginning of a new existence.”⁵⁷⁵ What’s left for Gwendolen—who has now given up on erotic self-transcendence—is a hysterical body, “reduced to a mere speck,” that returns to quiet country life and, perhaps, marriage to Rex Gascoigne who still has a weakness for her (*DD* 689). Purified Gwendolen is readied for an uncertain, but most likely utterly conventional, future in which kindness to her family, “that penitential, loving purpose,” overrides all claims to selfishness.⁵⁷⁶ Crucially, Gwendolen still does not consent to her conversion into Dorothea-style idealism. When Deronda—and the narrator—leave her in the penultimate chapter, she submits to endless “fits of shrieking,” interrupted by rational assurances to her mother that she will survive and become better.⁵⁷⁷ This spectacle of hysteria, remarkably similar to the wedding night’s, gives voice to otherwise unpronounceable feelings of betrayal by patriarchal structures—both Deronda’s therapeutic and Grandcourt’s legal kind.⁵⁷⁸ Men continue to betray and desert

⁵⁷⁵ *DD* 659; see Herzog 54; Vrettos 573; J. Wood 155.

⁵⁷⁶ *DD* 658; see Vrettos 576; Beer 2009, 203.

⁵⁷⁷ *DD* 692; see Vrettos 577.

⁵⁷⁸ See Weisser 10; Wilt 333.

Gwendolen, and her hysteria continues to erupt as “private counter-narrative that challenges the cultural and ideological presuppositions of the novel’s dominant narrative voice” (Vrettos 553).

Gwendolen’s nervous body cannot realistically become an agent of moral rejuvenation.

Scholars rightly deplore that Gwendolen loses her spunk and ambition as the novel closes. In contrast to most recent criticism, however, the novel is not as attentive to the politics of Gwendolen’s re-containment—both by the social order and by her debilitating hysteria’s continuation—as it is invested in endowing Gwendolen with the ability to comprehend and atone for her struggle against domestication (Matus 72). After all, Carter assures readers, “with good conduct on her part, there is every prospect of her complete moral restoration” (1853, 112). Gwendolen still has work to do—but whether she will continue the reproduction of her class is a future to which Eliot’s novel does not commit. As the novel ends, Gwendolen’s chances for such restoration are unclear. Gwendolen is received back into the care of her uncle and mother and, although she shows signs that her moral maturity surpasses that of her previous guardians, she might not be able to evade her uncle’s continued upward social ambition.⁵⁷⁹ Deronda, whose morals again overlap with those dominant in the narrator, suggests to Hans Meyrick that it would be better if Gwendolen did not marry again, thereby yanking conventional narrative closure away from the reader (*DD* 685). If scholars today are interested in holding the narrator and men like Deronda and Grandcourt accountable for Gwendolen’s future existence as hysterical penitent, Eliot herself seems to have been more interested in the operations of conscience that allow one to transgress and then repent (Matus 73). In light of the narrator’s (and Deronda’s) scruples

⁵⁷⁹ David 187. The narrator suggests that Reverend Gascoigne, secret upstart and former military captain, is as much to blame for Gwendolen’s prostitution as she is herself. His military past implies that he is just as ruthless in his dealing with women as Captain Davilow and Lydia’s abusive husband, Colonel Glasher, were. Further, he had heard rumors of Grandcourt’s dissolute past and, following the “practical wisdom” of a social climber, did nothing to protect his niece from marrying such a man (*DD* 118; see David 180; Henry 2001, 154).

regarding Gwendolen's chances for rehabilitation, she might not get to marry again because she simply hasn't earned it. Her body is too stubborn.

***Daniel Deronda* and the End of Reproduction**

Daniel Deronda both replicates and undermines the assumption that inexpressible emotional and physical secrets make themselves available to authorized interpretation. Critics tend to consider Gwendolen's childlessness a "fairy-tale" absence (Beer 209), declare it to result from her spiritual barrenness (Zimmerman 210), or speculate that her marriage's foundation on "the gratification of sado-masochistic compulsions" can only lead to sterility (David 194). What is usually not considered is that the novel also identifies men's bodies as the moral and physical seat of infertility. Grandcourt has already fathered four children (three of them girls, indicating a lack of virility) and appears now much depleted and "flaccid" (91). Cowan warns that men whose early life has seen much sexual excess father sterile children or become themselves infertile (344, 359). Although Grandcourt prides himself on his "remarkable physical courage," he drowns without much fanfare (583). Indulging in "legalized prostitution" appears to soften men's muscles and drains them of strength.

Contemporary medical authorities read sterility as a sign that women's moral conduct and their physiological preparedness for maternity were at odds. Gwendolen's "spoiled," hysterical body might not be capable of natural reproduction. Nichols had warned that masturbators risked sterility (288); Cowan assumed that wives' absence of erotic feeling during sex as well as excess in intercourse among newly-weds might prevent gestation.⁵⁸⁰ Maudsley, who defined as "moral insanity" all behaviors of cultivated women who are "lost to all sense of the obligations of their

⁵⁸⁰ Cowan 111, 359; also see Napheys 92.

position,” declared that such selfishness would lead directly to “sterile idiocy.”⁵⁸¹ The circumstance that all of these descriptions seem to fit Gwendolen’s pathology illustrates the great flexibility in medical writers’ attempts to harness female reproduction to moral discourse. Eliot creates a semantic link between Gwendolen’s moral deficiency and failure to conceive.

Gwendolen not only dreads married intercourse and pregnancy (“She was reduced to dread lest she should become a mother”), her dread is internalized both morally and physiologically: “Gwendolen felt that to desire a child for herself would have been a consenting to the completion of the injury she had been guilty of” (*DD* 576), the injury being her stealing Grandcourt (and his money) away from Lydia’s son. The novel literally incorporates Gwendolen’s theft of little Henleigh’s inheritance as sterility. The whole situation is unbearable. Because Gwendolen remains barren, her marriage amounts even more radically to self-prostitution than if she had borne Grandcourt a child. The body, money, and their social meanings are textually conjoined in this story of hysterical non-reproduction in which women’s selfishness and incapacity to comprehend spiritually grand horizons indicate a state of cultural and genetic decline.⁵⁸²

Whereas, in *Middlemarch*, Dorothea’s motherhood is enabled by her “altruism and visionary idealism” which function “as positive and healthy signs of social integration” (J. Wood

⁵⁸¹ 1867, 316, 215; 313-9; also see Griesinger 1867, 155.

⁵⁸² The paragraph ends, “To dwell on the benignity of accident was a refuge from worse temptation” (*DD* 576). Even though the “accident” ostensibly refers to Gwendolen’s hope that Grandcourt might die in an accident, Eliot could be repeating the rhetorics of “accident” that obscure the guilt of Rosamond’s intentional miscarriage. Gwendolen, afraid “lest she should become a mother,” could very well imagine procuring an accidental abortion here. If Gwendolen is pregnant already, her hysterical outbursts effected by shock and guilt after Grandcourt’s death serve as abortifacients (see Carter 1853, 15). Finally, to emphasize the medically ‘accurate’ interlacing of symptoms with which Gwendolen is described, it should be noted that Brown postulated that masturbating wives displayed “distaste for marital intercourse and very frequently either sterility or a tendency to abort in the early months of pregnancy” (I. Brown 16).

149), *Daniel Deronda* interrupts the Romantic plot of the upper middle-class girl's deserving ascension into the aristocracy that had ruled English literary imagination for nearly a century. Daniel will not marry Gwendolen; he will exit the circuit of elite reproduction and have children with Mirah in a different racial, geographic, moral, and spiritual location. If Austen imagined the quintessential English fairy tale in which the union of gentry and aristocracy would morally reinvigorate England after decades of revolution, Eliot's utopianism consists in the revelation of Daniel's Judaism, Mirah's moral incorruptibility, and their common enshrinement in a Jewish nation-to-be. The English middle class and aristocracy are morally spent and cannot produce cultural rejuvenation or continuation together. As Napheys theorized, "by crossing nearly-related individuals ... such unions lead to degeneracy and sterility" (71). Gwendolen and Grandcourt are simply too similar in their "piteous equality."⁵⁸³ Eliot looked for renewed moral vigor elsewhere—science and its moralistic prescriptions, nationalism, and high art (see Henry 2012, 210). As Zimmerman notes, Eliot might have been better equipped to detect dysfunctions within the social system of the 1860s and 70s than she was able (or willing) to imagine viable alternatives, particularly when it came to women's roles.⁵⁸⁴

Eliot's Coquettes, Concluded

In contrast to Rosamond, whose too expensively furnished household is not yet ready for the arrival of Lydgate's children during *Middlemarch*'s main action, Gwendolen possibly never undergoes the trials of motherhood. Throughout *Daniel Deronda*, Gwendolen is shown to be a bad housekeeper: she has no idea who is assigned individual tasks in her mother's establishment;

⁵⁸³ *DD* 256. See Dowling on the inversion of their initials and the similarity of their behaviors (332).

⁵⁸⁴ Zimmerman 213; see Flint 178.

later, when Grandcourt takes her on an endless round of estates and foreign domiciles, he deprives her of ever getting settled somewhere. During the only scene that shows Mrs. Grandcourt in her domestic surroundings, Lush arrives in her boudoir with information that she will be deprived of a home—apart from the apocalyptic Gadsmere—upon her husband's death. Gwendolen is a bad wife because she is bad at making a home—and making herself at home. The rootlessness that plagues Deronda with regards to his ancestry also affects Gwendolen, whose education in self-display, vanity, and aimless freedom, like Rosamond's apprenticeship in aristocratic romance, is insufficient to prepare women to choose their husbands wisely and commit to a lifelong companionate marriage.

Middlemarch and *Daniel Deronda* counter Victorian sentimentalizations of family life at a moment when women's expectations regarding the quality of marital companionship were higher than ever.⁵⁸⁵ The novels' central failed marriages occur against a backdrop of an implied marriage ideal built on rational and sympathetic, rather than physical, control over women. If women were not taught to embrace wifely duty, pleasant submission, and reasonable, selfless conduct, Eliot shows, their unruly bodies would interrupt the natural progression of the family, and that of national culture at large. In order for the family to reproduce itself, women were to be raised in awareness of their moral power and educated to dispose of that power wisely. Eliot sees men's training as equally misguided because it encouraged them to exploit women's naïveté and to disregard women's claims to selfhood. Although Eliot's marriage ideal, as illustrated by Dorothea and Will's union at the end of *Middlemarch*, consisted of dutiful wives' ministering cheerfully to their spouses, she saw that too few men actually deserved women's voluntary self-abnegation. Like most social critics of her time, Eliot, in her depiction of Grandcourt as

⁵⁸⁵ See Shanley 7; Hammerton 78.

un(re)productive husband, aims at correcting the outgrowths of men's legally entrenched power, rather than at abolishing that power wholesale. As Eliot noted in a letter to Sara Hennell, "nothing can outweigh to my mind the heavy desecration of family ties ... One trembles to think how easily that moral wealth may be lost which it has been the work of ages to produce, in the refinement and differencing of the affectionate relations" (*GEL* 5:56). Wives' social, legal, and sexual coverture is never at stake, but patriarchal responsibility is. Ideal marriage, Eliot wrote in 1868, involves the "mutual subjection of soul between a man and a woman—which is also a growth and revelation beginning before all history."⁵⁸⁶ Grandcourt and Deronda's amelioration of Gwendolen's moral deficit restores the community's historically grown—and, to Eliot, sacred—gender hierarchy and division of moral tasks.

Similarly, Gwendolen's body's hysterical interruption of the dominant narrative voice is not only re-contained, as scholars have suggested.⁵⁸⁷ Marlene Tromp writes that Gwendolen's "sensationalized, performative madness" constitutes "an interrogation of the discourse of 'reason' as a means for Gwendolen to understand her world" (452). Here, Tromp echoes Beer's judgment that Eliot "presents [Gwendolen's] 'large discourse of imaginative fears' not simply as curtailing action but as liberating experience" (2009, 206). Beer remarks further,

Gwendolen's predicament is that she has will without authority, rebellion without speculation. She enters the feminist challenge to her prescribed lot without any sort of theoretical or practical *consciousness*. She is eventually liberated by her frantic unconscious. (2009, 211)

⁵⁸⁶ *GEL* 4:468. Eliot writes to Emily Cross, "That is really the highest good of a wife—to be quite [certain] sure in the midst of the dimness and doubt which this difficult world surrounds us with, that there is one close to her whose life is everyday the better for her" (*GEL* 6:116-17).

⁵⁸⁷ See Matus 2008, Tromp, Vrettos, J. Wood.

I am less optimistic than Beer and Tromp about the liberating possibilities of *Daniel Deronda*'s assimilation of hysteria discourse. Rather, critics' celebration of Gwendolen and Lydia's irrational, bodily interruptions of patriarchal reason might cover up another taboo unspeakable for feminist critics: Eliot's fiction suggests that women do not necessarily possess the capacity for reason that would enable them to become political subjects. Eliot was very well aware that "woman's citizenship ... began, locationally, with the body" (Hasday 1420). It is precisely their bodies that prevent them from attaining political maturity.

In my view, Eliot's own authorized use of medical and legal frameworks cements women's bondage to patriarchal institutions and allows Gwendolen's hysterical body to emerge within the narrative. The display of Grandcourt's "imperfect mastery" (*DD* 297) of the hysterical woman—which Marlene Tromp reads as endowing Gwendolen with "a modicum of control" (458) over her relationship with men—is not a loss of narrative control in light of women's excessive physical affect, as scholars like Tromp have suggested; rather, it is the ultimate affirmation of that control, although it occurs on the terrain of sympathy. As medical writers were unclear about many fundamental processes governing women's reproductive bodies, they resorted to morally prescriptive, and often apparently entirely fictional, delineations of them. Eliot taps into that same process of delineation and utilizes epistemological repertoires similar to those used by experts whose work she read: storytelling by means of deterministic narratives, figurative language, and containment by means of authoritative deployment of legally, medically, and socially sanctioned knowledges (J. Wood 139). Eliot's text participates in the formation of cultural and institutional narratives that tie female bodies and their difficult-to-relate(-to) symptoms ever more closely to expert scrutiny. If *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* are understood as both indexes of, and agents within, long-term intellectual discourses about

women's reproduction of both children and excessive affect, it can be posited that they allow for the historicization of the standards by which the dysfunction of such reproduction was measured and allowed to be represented. Eliot did believe in slow reform and useful employment for women. However, Rosamond and Gwendolen's selfish sexual imagination, along with their resentment, if not rage, at having been lured into horrible marriages, present insurmountable obstacles in the narrative quest for mutuality.

CODA

Once More, with Realism

What is the nature of the textual legacy linking Eliot's narratives with those of EBB and Mary Prince? Archival traces connecting EBB and Eliot's estates are plentiful and reveal both writers' appreciation for one another. Eliot and Lewes read *Aurora Leigh* in late 1856 and again in the summer of 1857. Eliot felt *Aurora Leigh* gave her "a deeper sense of communion with a large as well as beautiful mind" (*GEL* 2:342), and, as has been noted, reviewed it favorably in the *Westminster Review*. She thought the poem combined "masculine vigour, breadth, and culture" with "female subtlety of perception, feminine quickness of sensibility, and feminine tenderness," uniting the strength of both sexes to produce the complete "poetess" who deservedly commands the attention of the literary world (1857, 306). Eliot wrote to Sara Hennell that, to her, books like *Aurora Leigh* counted "among the great blessings of life" (*GEL* 2:282). The feeling was mutual: Eliot and Lewes were invited into EBB and RB's "congenial bosom" in Italy in June 1860. EBB was gratified to meet Eliot because she "admire[d] her books so much" and the visit was repeated.⁵⁸⁸ In 1870, Eliot revised the relationship between the exceptional woman artist and the common woman in her dramatic poem *Armstrong*, using *Aurora Leigh* for inspiration (Hudd 68). Eliot clearly inherited from EBB the conviction that women artists deserve recognition beyond "the price / [o]f such a woman in the social mart," as *Armstrong*

⁵⁸⁸ *LEBB* 2:400; see Hudd 64; Stone 1987, 102. EBB, with a knowing jibe at the unmentionable nature of the couple's bond, termed Lewes Eliot's "elective affinity" (*LEBB* 2:388).

“scornfully” exclaims (Eliot 1885, 56), and, using *Aurora Leigh* as her foil, she took greater pains than EBB to depict lower-class characters realistically.

What remains of British slavery, and the legacy of runaway women slaves as arbiters of Britain’s global liberationist project, are dispersed echoes that, rather than indicating Eliot’s assuredness of her nation’s universal moral mission, suggest that black female bodies continue to operate as the sites of scandalous, uncivilized spectacle—just as they did before Emancipation.

Eliot’s narrator, in *Mill on the Floss*, muses that

It is a pathetic sight and a striking example of the complexity introduced into the emotions by a high state of civilization, the sight of a fashionably dressed female in grief. From the sorrow of a Hottentot to that of a woman in large buckram sleeves, with several bracelets on each arm, an architectural bonnet, and delicate ribbon strings, what a long series of gradations! (2015, 53)

The passage, in addition to its dismissive interest in the sartorial excesses of Victorian ladies, encapsulates the sublimated abolitionist holdover of the slave woman in pain as it materializes within Eliot’s realism. Analogous to Eliot’s narrator, this project has traced how the spectacle of women’s anguish historically moves across that “long series of gradations,” from the ‘Hottentot’ woman (and her apron) on the stage in Piccadilly in the first decade of the nineteenth century to the “fashionably dressed” lady who struggles with the injunctions of high Victorian moral law. From exotic burlesque to sentimental abolitionist fictionalizations, via EBB’s ambiguous, post-Emancipation remobilization of slaves’ anguish, to Eliot’s high realist depiction of bourgeois moral decline, “the sorrow of a Hottentot” simultaneously burdens and enables the depiction of white women’s selfhood in British literature.

Realism, according to Eliot, serves a political mode that facilitates elites’ understanding of poor people’s lives in the service of cultural unity. She rejected sentimentalism’s “unreality”

in depicting social conditions, and considered its penchant for pastoral idyll a “grave evil.”⁵⁸⁹ As an inheritor of the tragic paradox of pleasure, Eliot saw it as the artist’s task to produce sympathy in the reader, not in spite but because of social difference. Social hierarchy, for Eliot, in fact constitutes “the raw material of moral sentiment” (1856, 54). But even for the liberal Eliot, with her emphatic reverence for difference and clear-voiced support of Jewish nationalism, there is a limit to sympathy. As her narrator asserts in *Daniel Deronda*, “one man differs from another, as we all differ from the Bosjesman.”⁵⁹⁰ In 1876, the South African bushman, the ‘Hottentot’s’ blackness, still marks the underside of liberal selfhood, propping up Eliot’s realism and the nation a half-century after British Caribbean slaves turned into legal subjects of Empire. White fantasies of essential black difference survive, as does the elite prerogative to dismiss abolitionism’s aborted and pro-forma attempts to somehow assimilate blackness into the liberal state. As the 1880s roll along, we are left to observe with Deronda “that the whites had to thank themselves for the half-breeds” (*DD* 279).

⁵⁸⁹ Eliot 1856, 54; see Hudd 65-6.

⁵⁹⁰ *DD* 274; Gilman 239n16.

APPENDIX: MARY PRINCE TIMELINE

- 1788 born in Brackish Pond, Bermuda; owned by Charles Myners [Miners]; subsequently bought by George Darrell for his granddaughter, Betsey; lives in the household of Betsey's parents, Captain Williams and Sarah Darrell Williams (Maddison-MacFadyen 2014, 3)
- 1800 (12 yrs) Mary hired out to Mrs. Pruden [Prudden]; Sarah Darrell Williams falls ill and dies; Mary and her two younger sisters, Hannah and Dinah, are sold separately; Mary sold to Captain John Ingham and Mary Spencer Ingham of Spanish Point; stays with them for five years
- 1801 (13 yrs) earthquake on February 19; Mary runs to her mother at Richard Darrell's house, Cavendish, to hide from the Inghams (Maddison-MacFadyen 2014, 25n5)
- 1803 (15 yrs) sold to Robert Darrell on Turks Island; works there for "about ten years" (*MP* 75)
- 1812 (24 yrs) returns to Bermuda with Darrell and works at Cedar Hill; mother and father have died while she was on Turks
- 1815 (27 yrs) sold to John Adams Wood and relocates to Antigua; freeman named Oyskman courts her (in Macqueen, November 1831, Curtin notes that Mary had "a quarrel with a free man, of dark complexion, named *Osterman*"; according to Curtin, Mary also "had taken up with Captain L— ... a mariner," presumably around the time of the baptism)
- 1817 (29 yrs) baptized by the Anglican Rev. Curtin (April 6); Mary states this had occurred in August; had previously applied to visit Curtin's school on weekdays (Curtin assumes she is around 25 years old); appears in the Antigua slave register as "Molly"; age given as "thirty" (September 19)
- 1819 (31 yrs) relationship with "Captain Abbot" begins seven years before her marriage to Daniel James (*Times* March 1, 1831, 7)
- 1820 (32 yrs) appears before the magistrate, presumably Joshua Dyett, twice over quarrels with other slave women (or the same one) involving a pig and a white Captain: Macqueen's sources claim that the slave woman Phibba found Prince in bed with Phibba's "husband," a Captain William; the same incident (presumably) is reported in the *Times* report of Wood v. Pringle, only its actors are reversed: Prince found Captain Abbott in bed with another slave woman and flogged her; Mary is sentenced to spend a night in "the Cage" at her mistress's request, although Dyett ruled in her favor regarding the pig (*MP* 80)
- 1821 (33 yrs) appears in slave register as "Molly"; age given as "Thirtythree" (2 May)
- 1823 (35 yrs) joins Moravian congregation (Thomas 2011, 83; Thomas 2014, 120); is later excluded from school for seven weeks because of her relationship with Captain Abbott; alternatively, she might have been turned out of the Moravian chapel for cohabiting with Captain (Samuel?) Williams and beating Phibba
- 1824 (36 yrs) appears in slave register as "Molly"; age given as "Thirty six"

- 1826 (38 yrs) Captain Samuel Abbott murders Samuel Frogman, a carpenter, on board the schooner Wellington (John Wood owns the vessel), is arrested at Crab Island (Vieques), Puerto Rico, in January 1827, and convicted of murder on St. Kitts in September 1827. He is sentenced to six months in prison (Thomas 2014, 208n100). Prince ends her relationship with Abbott and marries Daniel James around Christmas 1826; attended for illness by Dr. Musgrave (until 1828).
- 1828 (40 yrs) appears in slave register as “Molly”; age given as “Thirtynine” (April 26); after a summer journey, arrives in London with the Woods in June and resides at Leigh Street; receives note by Mr. Wood dated August 18; leaves Woods in early fall and resides with Mrs. Mash, the Woods’ new laundress, and her husband, a shoeblack, for a few months; works as charwoman and shares her pay with the Mashses; calls at the Anti-Slavery Office in Aldermanbury in late November after a woman named Hill advises her to do so (*MP* 91)
- 1829 (41 yrs) Woods leave England and return to Antigua; a petition in her name “as “*Mary Princess* or *James*, commonly called *Molly Wood*” is presented to Parliament on June 24; Mary employed as charwoman by Mrs. Forsyth in the summer until September 28; after eleven weeks of unemployment, Mary is hired by Pringle and goes into service at his house at Claremont Square (Vigne 2012, 204)
- 1830 (42 yrs) Strickland records and edits Mary’s oral history late in the year and into 1831
- 1831 (43 yrs) Pringle sends Mary with a note to Rev. Curtin asking to corroborate her story (February 7); first edition of *History of Mary Prince* published before February 19; Pringle’s post-script to second edition refers to Mary’s deteriorating eyesight (March 22); Mrs. Pringle, Susanna Strickland, and other women inspect Mary’s back (March 28); Mary attends Susanna Strickland Moodie’s wedding (April 4); *History* goes through three editions this year; Pringle is slandered by Macqueen on July 26 in the *Glasgow Courier* and in the November issue of *Blackwood’s*
- 1832 (44 yrs) loses her position in June, presumably due to illness; receives weekly allowance of ten shillings by Pringle; asks to be readmitted to the Fetter Lane Moravian congregation in London (July); Wood states in Antigua slave register that “Molly” has “quitted my service” in England
- 1833 (45 yrs) appears twice in February as a witness in libel cases Pringle v. Cadell (February 21, Court of Common Pleas) and Wood vs. Pringle (February 27, Court of King’s Bench); Pringle writes on March 6 that he hopes for Prince’s return to Antigua after Emancipation
- 1834 (?46 yrs) Antigua abolishes slavery without introducing apprentice system (August 1); Pringle dies (December 5)
- 1836 (?48 yrs) John Adams Wood dies in London on January 29, having received £10,575 in compensation (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/431>; see Thomas 2014, 164)

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