

ABSTRACT

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DEPICTION OF SLAVERY IN AMERICAN
NOVELS, 1875-2000.

Patricia Lynn Hunt, Ph.D., 2007

Directed By: Dr. R. Gordon Kelly, Department of American
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The publication of *Beloved* by Toni Morrison made apparent a quiet in the American literary canon for novels about the subject of U.S. slavery. This dissertation attempts to interrogate the fictional silence to understand its origins and then examines the thirty-five historical novels, beginning with those published ten years after 1865 and ending in 2000, that depict American slavery. What image of the American slave experience is presented? The dissertation explores some reasons why the authors wrote what they did, and when they did, given their personal histories. Each chapter covers thirty-year periods, and each chapter begins with a brief historical overview of the major social and political events of the period. The novels within a chapter are discussed in chronological order of publication, beginning with a biographical sketch of the novelist. The plot is summarized and then an analysis, focusing on the depiction of slavery, is presented. What is illustrated and

what is avoided? Speculations about why the novel is what it is are advanced. Critical and popular reception for each novel is reviewed. Finally, every chapter concludes by looking at the novels as part of a “generation,” and suppositions are advanced about why these stories were written when they were. Relatively few novelists in the American literary canon write about slavery that it has been, in the words of Toni Morrison, largely a story *not* to be told. This dissertation examines the few historical novels to shatter the fictional quiet about slavery to see what they add to the ongoing conversation about American identity.

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NOVELS, 1875-2000.

By

Patricia Lynn Hunt.

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Advisory Committee:
Professor R. Gordon Kelly, Chair
Professor Sharon Harley
Professor Lawrence Mintz
Professor Mary Corbin Sies
Professor Nancy Struna

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Dedication

To all who have come before,
especially my grandparents
and mother and father,
Eleanor and William Hunt

Acknowledgements

I owe a debt I cannot repay

to the Creator of All Things

to every teacher I have ever had, especially Mrs. Dorothy C. Thomas and all others at Windsor Hills Elementary School #87, the professors at my beloved Lincoln University, and the professors in creative writing program at American University

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to computer technology for the ease of research and of editing. On most days I am glad I procrastinated about pursuing a doctorate until the invention of the computer

to my church for their faith

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to Dana and Daniel, constant joys, and their mother, my generous sister-in-law,
Denise

to loving aunts, uncles, cousins extraordinaire— all one thousand of you and yet
each has encouraged me in your own way.

to my parents and grandparents who are responsible for my accomplishments, and
especially those who may have wanted to see this day but are no longer on this
physical plane; still, up above my head I hear their singing in the air.

I owe a debt I cannot repay

Selah.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

According to Tom Wolfe in *You Can't Go Home Again*:

To most people *history* and *fiction* are contrasting words. History, they are told, is an account of what *really* happened; fiction is a literary work portraying *imaginary* characters and events. What could be more different? Yet the historian and the novelist have more in common than these definitions would suggest. At the most obvious level each has to have some of the other's quality. The historian who is a mere grubber for facts and has no imagination is seriously handicapped. He must select his material; he must give it a meaningful order and analysis; he must convey its color and drama to the reader. Such tasks require imagination--a properly disciplined and responsible imagination, to be sure. Similarly, the novelist who has nothing but imagination will be a mere spinner of tales; the serious author tries to convey to his reader what really might have happened--what, in the novelist's experience, is true.

(Wolfe 330).

For more than two hundred years, Africans were transported to America to provide free labor for their owners. Historians have never agreed on the numbers of Africans involved in the slave trade. The lack of records and the inaccuracy of existent records pose insurmountable challenges. No one knows who was counted as cargo in the surviving documents. Often the children were not. Then there is the problem of accounting for the dead who were thrown overboard. American historians begin their estimates in the millions. After surveying authorities on the subject, Toni Morrison believes sixty million is the minimum threshold, so *Beloved* is dedicated to “Sixty Million and More.”

Slavery was not unique to the United States, having existed in sundry times and locales throughout the world. However, two dimensions of American slavery remain singular: (1) the racial component, enslaving people based on race; (2) the lack of any means of escape from the oppression because of slaves’ racial identifiers. Added to these two unique characteristics is a third. The United States remains a young country, and within its short history it has been struggling with 200 years of chattel slavery followed by another 150 years of racial apartheid. American culture remains haunted by its slave past. Nevertheless, Americans of all kinds have resisted, in daily life, exploring, discussing, writing or reading about American history or fiction that examines slavery. In an interview shortly after *Beloved* was published, Toni Morrison explained to a reporter:

We live in a land where the past is always erased and America is the innocent

future in which immigrants can come and start over, where the slate is clean. The past is absent or it's romanticized. This culture doesn't encourage dwelling on, let alone coming terms with, truth about the past. The memory is much more in danger now than it was thirty years ago. (qtd. in Ferguson 109)

America almost demands forward-looking, future-oriented citizens. Such a young country is enthralled with possibility and has little tolerance with ancient grudges. The result, in terms of literature, is only a handful of novels whose subject is the experience of bondage.

American slavery has remained a subject of varying interest for two types of writers who try to reconstruct the past, the historian and the historical novelist. Both must find a way to confront and reconcile themselves to the misery and mendacity inherent in American slavery. It was a nasty, bloody business---so nasty and so bloody that many authors paid to address the subject write around it.

This dissertation was born out of astonishment after reading Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). There was no American novel like it that attempted to describe the psychic and emotional impact of chattel slavery on a slave mother. The historical novel about a slave mother is not the only one missing from the American literary canon. Where were other novels *about* slavery? A peculiar silence haunts the "peculiar institution" in American fiction. The answer may lie in *Beloved's* conclusion, a refrain, insightful enough to become the partial title of the dissertation: "It was not a story to pass on...Remembering seemed unwise..." (Morrison 274). On the basis of my research, only thirty-five novels, published between 1875 and 2000,

chose slavery as their central focus.

This dissertation examines a very specific type of novel. The novel must not only be set in the American South prior to Emancipation, but the novel must focus on the slave experience. In other words, a novel merely set in the antebellum South with slavery in some guise or another, a backdrop or shadow, is not enough to qualify for inclusion despite the presence of slavery. The following plots, therefore, fall outside of the dissertation's parameters: the grand parties, love lives, and adventures white characters had among themselves with a black servant standing nearby; the quest of former plantation owners to become rich again after Reconstruction; the moral ambiguities of fighting and killing in the Civil War; questions of whether mulattos will be discovered as such and will therefore have to abandon the power and wealth attained while "passing"; the adventures of former slaves after Emancipation. In short, these criteria preclude an examination of such works as *Gone with the Wind*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Our Nig*, *Contending Forces*, and *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*. There are many Civil War novels that skirt a mention of slavery as the catalyst for the conflict. In these novels characters fight because ...characters fight. Yes, there are novels of the Old South with plantation life, such as *Gone with the Wind*, but only the loves and losses of the white characters are of import. Then there are novels by African-Americans, such as *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, that ignore the plantation and portray life during Reconstruction and beyond. There are the picaresque novels that journey *around* the questions of freedom (and hence its

opposite, slavery), most notably, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Other historical novels that fall outside the rubric are the handful that focuses on slavery in the Caribbean or South America. Another work that resides in a twilight zone for this dissertation is *Roots* by Alex Haley. Is it a historical novel? Largely autobiographical—the Haley family’s journey from Africa to North America—it has many fictional attributes. However, the main reason for rejecting *Roots* for my research purposes is because its focus is not exclusively on slavery; *Roots* begins in Africa, lingers for half of its time during slavery and continues several generations after Emancipation. Clearly Haley’s main agenda was not an examination of slavery alone. The changing venues of *Roots*, more than its hybrid fiction-fact attributes, explain its absence from the dissertation.

In an earlier conception of this research project, I wanted to investigate why African-American novelists produced so few fictional works about slavery. Given that slavery for African-Americans remains **the** central historical event from which all other possibilities and probabilities flow, I wanted to explore the cultural pressures that may have encouraged silence. However, I soon discovered that slavery was never a popular choice for plot or theme among *American* novelists of any racial pedigree. Expanding the racial categories of novelists who explored the issue did not substantially increase the list of primary sources.

In short, the dissertation will address the following questions: What are the goals of each historical novelist who wrote about slavery, keeping in mind each writer’s unique perspective in terms of race, gender, and time? Does the historical novel

about slavery change over time, and if so, in what ways? Are there distinctive obstacles facing an African-American novelist, as opposed to a non-black novelist, when writing about slavery? Do gender differences exist in the portrait of slavery by historical novelists of any race?

A. T. Dickinson and Virginia Gerhardstan have provided an invaluable resource by editing an annotated bibliography of historical novels in *American Historical Fiction*, fifth edition (1986). The annotations provide plot summaries. In addition, other secondary sources that examine either African-American literature or American historical fiction were combed for references to and reviews of obscure titles.

In terms of methodology, I employed close textual analysis, looking for similarities and differences in the portrait of slavery by novelists from various eras, races, and genders. Are there stock plots, themes, characters, and symbols that these authors employ? Which aspects of slavery get described the most in the novels and why? What effects on readers did the authors anticipate? Compared to the narrative strategies employed in a standard history textbook (say, John Hope Franklin's *From Slavery to Freedom*), what techniques do these imagined works use to depict bondage?

Since there is a wide variation in both authorial motivation and intent and writing styles, book reviews and interviews will be used to ascertain what the novelists themselves and others thought of the works. The thoughts of twentieth century novelists are easily accessed, yet the world of nineteenth century America is not as invisible as it once was thanks to their incessant letter-writing and to the

groundbreaking work of many feminist literary critics who are removing the veils from faces of lesser-known authors. Diaries and biographies are fruitful sources of information about public reaction to the novels as well.

Although examining the novels will be the primary focus of the dissertation, providing biographical information about the authors is essential in an attempt to discover their motivations for tackling a subject so few chose. In addition, I attempt to answer the question: to what extent did the novelists research the subject or stay true to “real” historical events or personages? For example, some compose, never leaving their kitchen tables, and with the most vague sense about the subject, knowing, for instance, that slavery involves Africa, ships, chains, and field work, spin yarns for their own and others’ amusement. Then there are others, such as Toni Morrison, professor of English at Princeton, who traveled to Brazil--unable to find the records and slave-holding artifacts in the U.S.--to research *Beloved*. Other writers can be located between these extremes.

In addition, the racial identities of the novelists inform the works. Of the thirty-five novels examined, African-American authors produced fourteen, with Chapter 5 (1968-2000) containing novels written almost exclusively by African-Americans. For these African-American writers, the slave narrative serves as a source of inspiration for the historical novelists. Professor Hazel V. Carby observes, “The slave narrative...differs from the historical novel in that the prior form is concerned exclusively with how ‘the ex-slaves wrote [their selves] into being’ through an account of the condition of being a slave” (qtd. in Parrish 81). Critic Timothy Parrish

adds,

The contemporary writer, in contrast, can only re-imagine the conditions of slavery, and therefore writes in order to connect the receding past to the living present....Seen this way, the question of how one connects oneself to (or disconnects oneself from) the experience of slavery has been a preeminent concern for all African-American writers from the time of slave narratives on.

(81)

In modern literature, African-American writers in all literary genres are haunted by the slave past. Playwright August Wilson stated, “The odyssey of the African-American throughout the twentieth century has been one of loss and reclamation. It’s about reclaiming those things which were lost during slavery” (qtd. in Parrish 81). In many ways these African-American historical novelists *correct* the historical record—that does not describe the emotional and spiritual responses to slavery’s pain nor does it show evidence of African-American humor. The historical record barely attests to how many were involved; what the slaves, the slaveholders, and abolitionists thought and felt is the purview of the novel. The African-American authors “write themselves into being” in these novels.

In terms of gender, eighteen female and fourteen male novelists write novels about slavery. However, that gender balance is maintained only in the first chapter, 1875-1905. In 1906-1936 “generation,” there are five male historical novelists to two female, whereas in the 1937-1967 and 1968-2000 periods, female historical novelists outnumber male. Chapter 4 from 1937-1967, in particular, is dominated by female

writers by two to one; perhaps female historical novelists' lives were not as disrupted by having to fight in the various wars occurring during this period. African-American female writers get the first and last words in the thesis with Frances E. W. Harper writing the earliest novel, *Iola Leroy* (1892) and Connie Briscoe writing the final work, *A Long Way Home* (1999). Throughout the various chapters, female writers delineate how slavery operated on a group who lacked the political and economic power of white males.

In order to be a historical novel, the books chosen for this study had to be written after slavery was abolished. A historical novel attempts to recreate a bygone era, not serve as social protest contemporaneous with slavery. This dissertation focuses on novels written from 1875, ten years after Emancipation, through 2000. Since slavery lasted more than 200 years in the U.S. and had regional variations, some may wonder if a great cache of novels is not being ignored. Frankly, there are roughly eleven novels that predate 1875, of which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is the most notable yet contemporaneous with slavery.

The primary focus of the dissertation, the historical novels about slavery, will be organized and grouped by author in chronological order since the research intends to show how the depiction of slavery changed over time. The historical novels will be categorized by generation, roughly thirty-year periods. A scholarly consensus exists that a novel is sufficiently "historical" if it depicts life in a previous generation. Each chapter will note the changes from "generation" to "generation" in perspectives on slavery, and each chapter speculates about the contrasts.

The dissertation is organized as follows: *Chapter 2* (1875-1905) examines novels by Katherine Brown, Frances E. W. Harper, Pauline Hopkins, George Morgan, and Thomas Nelson Page, most of whom had first-hand experience and knowledge of the antebellum South, having lived on plantations and survived the Civil War and Reconstruction. Few novels portray the daily routines of slave life, preferring to conflate racial struggle with love stories. Frances Harper, Pauline Hopkins and Thomas Nelson Page emerged as dominant voices, fighting the Civil War all over again in their novels. Years later, the works by the African-American female novelists, Harper and Hopkins, have been rediscovered by a new generation of literary scholars and critics. World War I and the Depression probably diverted novelists and readers away from historical fiction about slavery in the next chapter, *Chapter 3* (1906-1936). Only seven authors, Arna Bontemps, Roark Bradford, John S. Cochran, Sallie May Dooley, Howard Odum, John Paynter, and Evelyn Scott examine America's slave past. They are largely escapist fare for white readers and recreate heroic episodes in African-American history for black readers. In *Chapter 4* (1937-1967), with novelists Alston Anderson, Henrietta Buckmaster, Willa Cather, Elizabeth Coker, Julia Davis, Frances Gaither, Anne Parrish, Janet Stevenson, Waters Turpin, Margaret Walker, Robert Penn Warren, and John Weld, a distinctly uniform portrait of plantations emerged, depending on the race of the novelist. There are "good" plantations and "bad" ones, but all fixate on the mulatto characters. Abolitionists tend not to be demonized but appear as family members with conscience. *Chapter 5* (1968-2000) focuses on novels by Connie Briscoe, Octavia

Butler, Barbara Chase-Riboud, John Ehle, Charles Johnson, Toni Morrison, Sherley Anne Williams, and Frank Yerby. Novels by African-American writers dominate the chapter with only one white novelist, a male Southerner, having anything to say about “the peculiar institution”. The African-American male novelists create black male protagonists who, through their own efforts and talents, triumph over slavery, going so far as to be free sexual agents, selecting their own partners, something that rarely happened according to historians. The African-American female authors each give voice to the predicament of the female slave mother in particular, with Toni Morrison receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature upon publication of *Beloved*, perhaps the capstone of all the literary works examined.

The final chapter, chapter 6, will briefly discuss whether the historical novel about slavery has changed over time, and if so, in what ways, before suggesting possible avenues for future research.

In American Studies, examining historical novels is not a popular research choice. Chronicling the thirty-five novels that focused on American slavery is a singular decision. The closest cousin to this thesis is Joyce Owens Pettis’ 1983 dissertation on eight historical novels written by African-American authors. Her dissertation did not focus on any particular subject for the historical novel, preferring to focus on the writers. Back in 1983, recovery work had not been done on the novels of Frances E. W. Harper or Pauline Hopkins, so the Pettis dissertation begins with John Paynter’s *Fugitives of the Pearl*. Another work that showed a way to discuss the characteristics and themes in a large body of literature is Wendy Griswold’s *Bearing Witness*

(readers, writers, and the novel in Nigeria) (2000) in which she "...explores how global cultural flows and local conflicts meet in the production and reception of fiction" in 400 novels (back cover). It has been a joy breaking new ground, having these historical novels, perhaps for the first time, to be seen in relation to each other.

Slavery remains the largely silent, ubiquitous ghost throughout many, if not most, American novels and certainly all "southern" ones. Given the enormity of the American literary canon, and given the enormity of slavery's impact on practically all aspects of American life, few novelists, regardless of racial pedigree, break an almost ominous silence on the subject. The ones who do deserve special attention.

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Chapter 2: 1875-1905

Persis, a former slave, after being set free at 50 years: “You-all tell me that you come over yere you’s’e’fs ter git ‘way f’om bein’ slaves in you’s own country.

Seems like you’d unnerstan’ bes’ of anybody what I mean” (Brown 91).

In 1619, a Dutch frigate left twenty Africans at Jamestown, Virginia (Franklin 71). For twenty-five years these Africans held the same status as indentured servants. Yet, by 1640, servanthood had become slavery for those captured people (Quarles 35), and this country’s long, torturous racial nightmare had begun. When slavery ended is more difficult to pinpoint. In 1807 the federal government passed a law abolishing slavery, but the law “was so weak and enforcement so lax that a repeal was unnecessary to reopen the trade [...]. Thus, for all practical purposes, the trade was open in the last decade before the Civil War” (Franklin 182-183). The next attempt at ending slavery was the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863 that freed the slaves in some parts of the South (but not in others nor in the North and West) (Franklin 283). Not only was the Proclamation an imperfect document in its intent but communication was so slow-moving that all U.S. citizens did not hear about emancipation in the winter of 1863. The African-Americans in Texas didn’t receive word of emancipation until 1865; they celebrate Juneteenth in Texas to this day in tribute to finally receiving freedom’s herald. The final attempt at halting slavery, the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution of 1865, officially abolished slavery in the United States. Yet noted scholar W. E. B. DuBois, the first African-American to

receive a PhD from Harvard University, entitled his doctoral dissertation, “The Suppression of the African Slave Trade, 1638-1870” in which he chronicles that the slave trade continued for some time after it had been abolished (Franklin 410).

Such a peculiar institution as chattel slavery would fire the imaginations of historical novelists. As noted in the first chapter, this dissertation will examine the depiction of slavery in American historical novels written between 1875 and 2000. In order for a novel to be considered “historical,” it must illustrate a time in the past not contemporaneous with the author. Despite the difficulties of pinpointing exactly when American slavery ceased, this dissertation uses 1865 and the Thirteenth Amendment as the end point. Nevertheless, many historians and historical novelists observe that the failures of Reconstruction left African-Americans almost in virtual slavery again. Yet after 1865, no one in the U.S. had the legal authority to own another person as property although wives and children of white men came perilously close to the same status as slaves.

For the purposes of this dissertation, ten years will lapse after 1865 before slavery can be considered historical fact. Novels will be examined in chronological order in thirty-year periods, so this chapter will focus on historical novels written between 1875 and 1905 and set prior to the Civil War. Recovering from the Civil War was so large an enterprise that by 1875 no historical novels about slavery were written. In fact, no historical novels about slavery were published between 1875 and 1892. Perhaps Americans were holding their collective breaths after the Civil War ended to see if the country could reunite. Given the physical and emotional cataclysm of civil

war, American novelists may have lacked the heart and mind to go back and look at all of that pain. Then again there was a nation to rebuild. So for a spell there was silence—until Frances Harper published *Iola Leroy* in 1892. Long considered the first novel written by an African-American (Graham, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*), *Iola Leroy* is the earliest of all the novels this dissertation will examine. Thomas Page's *Red Rock: A Chronicle of Reconstruction*, published in 1898, surfaces as the only other nineteenth century historical novel depicting slavery in the antebellum South. Then, at the turn of the twentieth century, there was a small publication flurry of historical novels about slavery such as *Hagar's Daughter* (1901) and *Winona* (1902), both by Pauline Hopkins; *Diane* (1904) by Katherine Brown; *The Issue* (1904) by George Morgan.

Who would have guessed that the first person after the Civil War to write an American historical novel about slavery would be an African-American female? Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825-1911) spent a lifetime doing the improbable for her race, gender and class. The author of eleven books of poetry and prose, she avoided slavery, by being born free in September 1825 in Baltimore, Maryland (Graham xxxiv). She was orphaned at an early age and raised by her uncle, Rev. William Watkins, who founded and directed the Academy for Negro Youth, a school for free blacks in Baltimore (Graham xxxiv).

Since educated free blacks were expected to teach, they were “[...] trained in the classics, rhetoric and the Bible. Harper was no exception. And as was the custom for free, young Northern black women, she took a position as a live-in maid with [...]”

the Armstrongs, who owned a bookstore. Fourteen-year-old Frances was given access to the library after doing household chores (Graham xxxiv). She began writing poetry as a teen while holding down jobs as a nursemaid, sewing instructor, and elementary school teacher (Robinson, “Harper” 938; “Frances Harper”). Eventually she made her way to Ohio where she became the first female faculty member at Union Seminary (Graham xxxiv). For Harper, education was more than an expectation of her caste; it would also be a *political* act and an illegal one in Southern states for blacks to learn to read (Franklin 202). From the start of her life, Harper knew her intellectual quests, the life of the mind, were ways of fighting racial oppression.

Never was education an end in itself. Education must be put to use, and it is not at all surprising that Frances Harper joined the abolition movement. While in Ohio, she first became enthralled with the abolitionists (Graham xxxiv-xxxv). By 1854 Frances lived with William Still whose home was part of the Underground Railroad in Philadelphia (Robinson 938), and 1854 marks the start of her political agitation for black civil rights that would continue until her death (Graham xxxv). For six years Harper traveled the antislavery lecture circuit through Canada, the Midwest and New England. She was a popular speaker (Robinson 938) whose “[...] eloquence was so unexpected by her audiences that they sometimes claimed she must be a white woman, or even a white man, in disguise” (Graham, *Dictionary*).

The only respite from political activism during her adulthood occurred when, at the age of 35, she married Fenton Harper, a farmer and widower with three children.

They lived on a farm in Ohio and had a daughter, Mary (to whom *Iola Leroy* is dedicated) (Robinson 939). Unlike many of her generation, marriage was not an ambition of Harper, who left the abolitionist lecture circuit for only four years. When her husband died in 1864, she was ignorant of how indebted he was—until the creditors descended to “claim everything they had jointly owned.” More than anything, Fenton Harper’s death “[...] reconfirmed Harper’s stated belief that women should not be solely dependent on men” (Graham, *Dictionary*). Harper’s bitter economic plight as a widow prompted her renewed activism in the women’s rights movement.

When Frances Harper died on February 22, 1911, this tribute appeared in the *New York Age*, a leading black newspaper: “Her passing ‘brings to a close a life of self-sacrifice and public usefulness covering a period of more than seventy years. [...] her consecrated espousal of every cause for human betterment made her the leader and inspirer of thousands of men and women who came within the ever-widening circle of her influence’” (Graham, *Dictionary*). No less than the dean of black intelligentsia, Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, lauded Harper in an editorial in the *Crisis* magazine:

[F]or her attempt to forward literature among colored people that Frances Harper deserves most to be remembered. She was not a great singer, but she had some sense of song; she was not a great writer, but she wrote much worth reading. She was, above all, sincere. She took her writing soberly and earnestly; she gave her life to it, and it gave her fair support. She was a worthy member of

that dynasty, beginning with dark Phyllis in 1773 and coming on down past David Walker, Wells Brown, Neil, Whitman and Williams, down to Dunbar, Chesnutt and Braithwaite of our day. (DuBois 20-21)

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper is the author in this small group of American novelists who wrote about slavery who lived the longest in the nineteenth century. By age, race, gender, and class, she should have had a unique perspective about slavery in America. How did these qualities synthesize into fiction in *Iola Leroy*, published in 1892? Harper, sixty-seven years old at the time of publication, focused on the future and need for uplift of the downtrodden for “[B]y 1892, the year Frances Harper published *Iola Leroy*, national concern for the plight of freed blacks was rapidly declining, and in the South, it was virtually nonexistent” (Pfeiffer 22). Harper’s goal in writing *Iola Leroy* was to show how to unshackle the mind, largely through education. To demonstrate that freedom was launched first from within, even while still captive, Harper created intellectually sophisticated slaves. The author attempted to understand the essence of slavery in order to understand the nature of autonomy.

Iola Leroy follows the lives of several mulattos through slavery and into a tenuous freedom as they find useful work and whole lives. The novel begins in the midst of the Civil War with slaves still on a plantation in North Carolina. While mulatto Iola Leroy is cited as the title character, most of the novel centers on the life journey of Robert Johnson, also a mulatto (and unknown to both him and Iola, her uncle). Several love interests and marriage sub-plots surface and sink as the plot resolves;

clearly marriage is *not* the goal of the women in this novel. Honest, socially uplifting work is the goal of these characters' spirits. The middle of the novel depicts Iola's parents' courtship and marriage in the 1850s and her childhood and education in the North. (Harper generally avoids explicitly detailing the settings, preferring "North" and "South" as locations. Likewise, readers approximate the timeframe by proximity before or after the Civil War. The novel concludes around 1880.) Depicting the reunion of the black families fractured by slavery is an equally passionate goal of the author. The primary themes that emerge from the novel are: how the vestiges of slavery can be vanquished from the spirit; the role of the mulatto in black society; the reunion of black families after the Civil War (and the function the church in those efforts); most of all, how the black female can transcend her slave past and become a whole, healed, and productive member of her race and American society.

Unlike the few novels that end up being about the institution of slavery, *Iola Leroy* begins with a focus on a slave, Robert Johnson. None of the other historical novels in this time period of 1875-1905 make the slaves and slave life central in the first chapter. Harper focuses on communication between the black characters in the midst of a hostile environment. The slaves update each other on the progress of the Civil War by seeming to discuss eggs, butter, and other groceries. The slaves converse about the Civil War in code so that the white characters nearby cannot detect their subject matter. Here Harper depicts the double lives and double-entendres in which the slaves had to engage. The author shows black characters who are not jokes or caricatures; instead *they make jokes* about their white owners'

ignorance about the slaves' true thoughts and feelings. Hence, at the novel's start, the most emotionally resilient slaves interacted with each other and with the slave owners with the rich complexity that only human communication provides. Such conversation suggests a mental and spiritual equality with other humans that reject slave status. These slaves had already reclaimed perhaps the most essential human trait, their own speech.

As the Civil War intensifies and the Union army approaches the plantation, Robert Johnson organizes the slaves on his plantation to run for the Union lines. Johnson, along with several others, joins the Union army and they prove their courage in many battles. Not until chapter five does the title character, Iola Leroy, "appear." Readers *hear* about her physical beauty and her dire situation as a house slave to a dissolute master, and we are told what the Union officer who orders her capture thinks of her. While in the Union army camp, one ex-slave tells Robert Johnson of "a mighty putty young gal" at a nearby plantation that he would like to rescue. She's been sold many times and her current owner can't handle her "spunk." She is supposed to be a housekeeper but her hands reveal that she is not used to working. Tom Anderson, the ex-slave, wonders aloud why none of the women on the plantation could be the housekeeper; why did the owner have to buy this woman with "beautiful long hair comes way down her back; putty blue eyes, an' jis ez white ez anybody's in dis place'" (38). Here readers get their first glimpse of the slave, Iola Leroy, while being introduced to a major theme in the novel, the life of the mulatto who chooses to help black people. Tom Anderson used "coded communication" to make Robert Johnson

aware of this woman's situation. Without saying it directly, Tom intimates that Iola was bought to be a concubine for the white owner, a common occurrence.¹ After her rescue from an abusive slave owner, Iola becomes a consummate nurse to Union soldiers. The white soldiers she treats and especially Dr. Gresham, a Union medic, believe her to be a beautiful, white nurse. Dr. Gresham is amazed by her courteous and loving treatment of the black soldiers, but he chalks that up to her eccentricity and refuses to allow her interaction with black people stop his affection for her. Dr. Gresham falls in love with Iola and proposes marriage. At Gresham's proposal, the narrative abruptly stops—supposedly giving Iola time to decide what to do—and readers are thrown into a flashback of Iola's parents' history, courtship and marriage, deep into the heart of slave territory.

The only chapters in the novel set in antebellum America, chapters nine to twelve, could have offered readers the first fictional treatment of American slavery by a black author. The "slavery" chapters begin with Eugene Leroy of French and Spanish descent, who was orphaned at an early age and educated in the North. After graduating from college, Leroy "found himself in the dangerous position of a young man with vast possessions, abundant leisure, unsettled principles, and uncontrolled desires" (61). He tells his slightly older cousin, Alfred Lorraine, that he has decided to get married (62). The wedding will be private because "The lady whom I am to marry has Negro blood in her veins." Leroy has educated her and freed her—since she was his slave. Leroy's cousin does not understand. With what the law already

¹ "...the subjection of Negro women to the whims and desires of white men" produced "extensive miscegenation." It was common practice in the South for rich men to keep concubines on their plantations (Franklin 204).

allows, Marie, the mulatto in question, is considered his property. Why marry? (65). Eugene Leroy feels beholden to Marie since she nursed him back to health after he became deathly ill from his dissolute life in Europe (68). Impressed with her mind, Leroy sends her to school in the North where no one knows “she has one drop of Negro blood” (69,66).

After Marie’s graduation from a northern school, they marry and return to his plantation in North Carolina. “[...] Marie returned as mistress to the plantation from which she had gone as a slave. But as unholy alliances were common in those days between masters and slaves, no one took special notice that Marie shared Leroy’s life as mistress of his home, and that the family silver and jewelry were in her possession” (76). In fact, the momentous question facing the mulatto characters in the antebellum chapters is: will the larger white society detect their black identity? Some of Leroy’s friends would visit on occasion, and although they admired Marie’s beauty, they thought the marriage to a former slave was a mistake (76). The Leroy family produce three children (Iola, Harry, and Gracie) in short order. Both the elevation of Marie from slave to wife and the creation of the Leroy family are protected by rich, white male privilege. No one can stop or prevent Eugene Leroy from doing whatever he wants on his isolated plantation. There is no law higher than he.

For her part, Marie yearns for the end of slavery, even the tepid version of it that has befallen her, especially when she considers that it may befall her children upon Leroy’s death. In the South, the racial pedigree of the mother is everything, for the mother determined her child’s slave status. Marie, both as daughter and parent,

knows and has lived this reality yet does not move her children permanently off the plantation. It is not clear what future the parents envisioned for their children. The Leroy's decide not to tell their children of their Negro heritage, but neighborhood gossip has reached the children's ears (80). The Leroy children are home-schooled and isolated. "[...] there were no companions except the young slaves on the plantation, and she [Marie] dreaded the effect of such intercourse upon their lives and characters" (82). The two oldest children are sent to Northern schools and they never vacationed at home but at a summer resort (84, 87).

As the Civil War approaches, Eugene Leroy continues his ambivalence about the institution. He "[...] did not believe in the rightfulness of the institution. He was in favor of gradual emancipation, which would prepare both master and slave for a moral adaptation to the new conditions of freedom." He was a lenient slave owner compared to others but he did nothing to end slavery (86).

While vacationing in the North, Eugene Leroy dies of yellow fever before the two oldest children join the vacationing parents. (By killing Eugene Leroy with yellow fever, is Harper suggesting that his cowardice about the abolition of slavery was fatal?) He is buried far from home and Marie and the youngest child return to the plantation (92-93). Marie faints while writing a letter to Iola telling her of her father's death (94). The loss of white male protection signals the dissolution of this mulatto family.

Upon Eugene Leroy's death, distant, white relatives (led by cousin Alfred Lorraine) appear on the plantation, get the marriage annulled and take over

everything (95). Marie and the children are remanded to slavery by a local judge, which causes Marie and the youngest child to be stricken with “brain fever” (96). Meanwhile, Lorraine’s attorney tricks Iola into returning home—without knowing of her father’s death (99). Arriving home, Iola discovers her father is dead and her mother and sister are ill. Marie reveals to Iola that they have Negro blood and that Alfred Lorraine wants to sell them into slavery (105). Iola wants to die upon hearing the news, but Marie advises her to be a Christian. Iola reminds her mother that these Christians have enslaved them. Marie tells Iola to believe the black Christians and the Bible itself (107). Gracie, the youngest, dies after seeing Iola. Their brother never returns from the northern school and Iola is sold into slavery (108).

After witnessing how Iola becomes a slave upon the death of her father, yet without ever seeing her work as one, the main narrative resumes. Readers saw how Iola’s mother Marie acquiesced to the Southern status quo by marrying a slave owner. When the plot resumes, Iola has decided to *reject* Dr. Gresham’s proposal. Iola cannot contemplate loving a white man after what she knows of slavery, nor would she marry and hide her racial identity. Plus she needed to locate her mother (Harper 111). Iola tells Gresham her family story (Harper 113-114), and Gresham still wants to marry her, thinking they could settle in New England (Harper 116). Iola notes that even in New England they would encounter racial prejudice. She asks him what he would do if one of their children showed “unmistakable signs of color.” Dr. Gresham falls silent. Iola continues that she will not be happy until she finds her mother (Harper 117).

Another major theme in *Iola Leroy* is the reunion of separated families. When questioned by an older slave who doesn't want to leave the plantation why Robert Johnson would want to betray a "good owner" by escaping, Johnson replied: "...I ain't got nothing 'gainst my ole Miss, except she sold my mother from me. And a boy ain't nothin' without his mother....But if she were the best woman on earth I would rather have my freedom than belong to her'" (Harper 17-18). Robert Johnson is a slave but has mentally achieved an independent thought life. In one short vignette, the novelist introduces readers to one of the most horrific aspects of American slavery, the separation of families, a ubiquitous feature of American slavery, according to historian John Hope Franklin:

Since the domestic slave trade and slave breeding were essentially economic and not humanitarian activities, it is not surprising to find that in the sale of slaves there was the persistent practice of dividing families. In justification of the separation of families it was argued that family ties among slaves were either extremely loose or non-existent and that slaves were, therefore, indifferent to separation. This does not at all seem to have been the case. (Franklin 178-179)

After the Civil War ends in the novel, all of the mulatto characters scour the country for family members from whom they have been sold. In *The Negro in the Making of America*, Benjamin Quarles details the monumental and often heartbreaking efforts of all black people, not just mulattos, to reunite with family members from whom they had been separated by slavery (127). Despite the slave

owners' myths that black people lacked emotional attachments to family, Harper illustrates the opposite. Robert Johnson will tell anyone who will listen about his devastation when his mother was sold away from him. Iola rejects Gresham's marriage proposal because she would rather search for her mother. The characters in *Iola Leroy* meet with 100% success in their reunification efforts. They attend church conferences where the miraculous does occur; missing loved ones attend the same conference and they leave to live together forever more. Iola reunites with her mother and brother while Robert Johnson discovers that he is Iola's mother's brother (Harper 148-149, 182-183, 194-195). The novel concludes by depicting all the successful reunions the newly freed slaves have with their almost-destroyed families.

Frances Harper has penned a novel of a transcendent black female, one who manages to work her way from the unspeakable horrors of a slave past to a prosperous future filled with family and friends and political unity. For former slaves, the future held the promise of more work, but at least the work was for self-improvement and racial uplift. Throughout the novel, Iola Leroy cultivates her mind in an effort to win the contest over possession of her body (whether through slavery or marriage). In *Iola Leroy*, Harper proclaims that black women can be made whole and healed through the power of their own work.

The novel, dedicated to Harper's only child, her beloved daughter Mary, and written at the end of a Harper's long, fruitful life embodies a love letter to black women of her present and the future. Although Harper herself was born free, she understood that the female slaves' bodies in many ways were the foundation of the

slave system; in the field and in childbirth, her labor remained essential for slavery's success. Harper wanted those who had been slaves and those caught in the almost virtual slavery of the sharecropping system to realize that in the hands of capable nurses, as represented by many characters in the novel (such as Iola's mother Marie and Iola herself), broken, sickly bodies—both black and white—can be made whole and functional. In the novel, during slavery and after, physical restoration was delivered through the hands of black women.

By making mulattos the main characters of her novel, Frances Harper transformed the living, breathing physical evidence that white men raped black women, the mulatto, into a symbol of resurrection and hope. All of her characters rejected identification with the white rapist and clung to their black identity. They embrace their black mothers and never mention their white fathers. Of course, the word, “rape,” is never used in the novel, yet there was nothing in American society that would protect Iola Leroy from violation. How would Iola resist rape by her seven different owners? The possible, if not probable, rape of Iola during her enslavement would not be a subject that Frances Harper, steeped in the church, would address in print. Iola's repeated and vehement resistance and rejection to all white males' attention certainly could be read as her emotional response to what had happened to her during her days of powerlessness as a slave. The mulatto characters, and their torturous origins, would need no explanation for Harper's readers; the sub-text of rape and its resulting evidence, the mulatto, would never be directly addressed by that generation of black novelists, according to Professor Sandra Grady (interview).

Harper's choice of mulatto characters was a way of presenting a taboo without ever mentioning its name. But what was obvious to past generations of readers is not obvious to contemporary readers and critics of *Iola Leroy* who may be puzzled by the mulatto character and oblivious to the rape sub-text².

However, modern literary critics are puzzled also by the novel's exclusive focus on this sub-group, the mulattos. In other words, why would Harper, who was not a mulatto, write a novel that is so disconnected from the "real" concerns of "real" African-Americans at the turn of the century (Foreman 328)? In the world of the novel, the mulattos are all mistaken for white people *by* white people, so for Harper how are these characters "black"? They are "black" through *conscious decision*, a choice to be black. Who are these characters who appear to be white yet identify with and live as black people? Harper's characters, in many ways against all logic, *choose* to be black, with all the burdens and challenges that entailed in such an intensely racist atmosphere. Harper saw them as heroic and perhaps Christ-like by choosing to suffer. Other literary critics speculate that *Iola Leroy's* intended audience included white readers, not black ones (Christian 235) and perhaps whites would empathize with a person who appeared white, and thereby enlarge the readership for the novel.

² Nevertheless, some modern literary critics, such as Elizabeth Ammons and Claudia Tate, speak of the rape sub-text in *Iola Leroy*. Ammons believes *the* sub-text of *Iola Leroy* "is a parable about surviving rape..." and "...that Harper speaks in reticent code to communicate Iola's having suffered the sexual abuse—rape—that typified the condition of enslaved women." Claudia Tate believes that "...Ammons's reading is credible especially given the routine sexual abuse of young bondwomen and Iola's circulation among several owners," but Tate would have liked more support in "specific textual evidence" other than the "direct coding" in the novel's opening pages (Tate, *DAPD*, 262). Harper's defenders argue that her goal was to show how mulattos did not succumb to shame about their origins but worked to overcome stigma and actively resisted those in power.

The white political structure may have been the one Harper was more interested in swaying towards enfranchisement for blacks at the turn of the century by portraying the diligent, decent, and thoughtful mulatto characters in *Iola Leroy*. Critic Jane Campbell agrees; Harper's "characters are extraordinary mulattos created to transform whites' notions of blacks" (24). Then again, whereas modern critics see the prevalence of mulatto characters as puzzling, at the end of the nineteenth century that population may not have been liminal at all. Out of a slave population of 3,900,000, some 411,000 were mulatto in 1860 (Franklin 205). In short, Harper chose to focus on the mulatto character because she may have admired their brave choice to live as black people in a hostile, racist atmosphere, and such a character may have attracted a broader readership for *Iola Leroy* since the mulatto population was a numerically significant, often educated sub-group of African-Americans who would purchase and read the novel. Finally, white readers may have empathized more with the mulatto characters who resemble them and these characters may increase readership among whites.

It is also likely that Harper was trying to erase the most prevalent fictional portrait of black females of her day, the slave Mammy—sexless, boisterous, with only white people's comfort in mind. Both at the time of the novel's completion and certainly during the time in the novel, "...most African-American women were utterly excluded from the ideals white Americans invoked to define womanhood. They might be wives and mothers...but the arduous work that most black women performed, combined with the low status of their race, exempted black women from

fulfilling the 19th-century ideal of true womanhood” (Bay 40). In the creation of the character, Iola Leroy, Frances Harper attempted to define what a black *lady* was and how she behaved.

Iola Leroy, Harper’s major character, does not attempt to understand either herself as an individual or black women as a group. Rather Iola Leroy is a version of the ‘lady’ Americans were expected to respect and honor, even though she is black. By creating a respectable ideal heroine, according to the norms of the time, Harper was addressing not herself, black women, or black people, but her (white) countrymen. (Christian 234)

In *Iola Leroy* Harper attempts to unchain the image of slave women from their past.

Perhaps Harper’s goals of racial uplift caused her to suppress a vivid depiction of slavery in the novel. Chapters nine through twelve, the flashback to slave Marie and Eugene Leroy’s courtship and marriage, could have been portrayed but it was not.

What did Frances Harper (nee Watkins) know of slavery since she was born free in a city, not a rural place, albeit one with slave auction blocks at the Baltimore port?

Certainly slavery permeated her society but her personal experience, even observation of it, may have been from a certain remove. This question is raised here because in her novel there is precious little description of the daily life of the slave.

In a monumental evasion of the slave experience, Harper describes the lives of the plantation owners and their mulattos as physically and culturally isolated from the slaves. There are no black people sweating in the sun under the whip of slave drivers, no slave cabins at night, no bloody horror, *no direct indictment of slavery*. The novel

addresses slavery obliquely, not looking at its horrors squarely. Why wouldn't Harper, the former abolitionist, use these chapters as an opportunity to condemn the institution? Did Harper feel uncomfortable in writing about what she had not experienced first-hand; there's no evidence she had ever visited a plantation. In addition, her major purpose for writing remained steadfast throughout her career. She writes: "I belong to this race, and when it is down, I belong to a down race; when it is up, I belong to a risen race" (Graham xxxiii). Harper intended to show a black female triumphant over slavery, not wallowing in a past she could not change. Indeed, Iola does not make the same decision her mother had made (in marrying a white man) but forges a new identity. Critic Kathleen Pfeiffer contends, "Frances Harper viewed her role as an artist to be an expression of political agency; insofar as the need for black America's political representation was dire in the early 1890s, her goals in composing *Iola Leroy* stood high. [...] Harper aimed for more than critical acclaim; indeed, she hoped the popular appeal of her novel would assuage the danger of racism as it expressed itself following Reconstruction" (20).

It is clear that Frances Harper wrote the novel in the hopes of instilling race pride. Not one black character behaves dishonorably. The characters always seek mates among other mulattos who identify with black people and this choice demonstrates racial respect and honor. Just in case readers did not interpret her work correctly, the last page of Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy* reads:

From threads of fact and fiction I have woven a story whose mission will be in vain if it awaken in the hearts of our countrymen a stronger sense of justice

and a more Christlike humanity in behalf of those whom the fortunes of war threw, homeless, ignorant and poor, upon the threshold of a new era. Nor will it be in vain if it inspires the children of those upon whose brows God has poured the chrism of that new era to determine that they will embrace every opportunity, develop every faculty, and use every power God has given them to rise in the scale of character and condition, and to add their quota of good citizenship to the best welfare of the nation. [...] (282)

Harper intended for her fiction to serve a social good in America with respect to the former slaves. In many ways Harper is typical of black intellectuals of her era in arguing for the “moral supremacy of black people” (Bay 50). She challenged her black brothers and sisters, especially her sisters, to use their freedom for the building up of the black community. The prevalence of the many mulattos in the plot may have been an appeal to white readership to see these “blacks” as themselves, productive humans. Frances Harper believed that writing could help hasten that “brighter coming day” (282) with all of that phrase’s connotations of the New Jerusalem implied. Harper had lived through most of the nineteenth century and had seen the ravages of slavery, the brief halleluiahs when it ended, and the “virtual” re-enslavement of black people with the collapse of the Freedman’s Bureau, the rise of the Black Codes, and disenfranchisement of the freedmen. Harper’s long life had shown her that all political moments were precarious for black people, yet she believed in the power of each individual’s work, the power of the mind, and ultimately in spiritual transcendence of Earth’s woes. *Iola Leroy* is as much a

statement about Harper's politics and values as it is an act of her imagination. She envisioned the rising of her people.

In contrast to Frances Harper, Thomas Nelson Page (1853-1922) attempted a ringing defense of the antebellum plantation system, hoped that the Northerners would see the nobility of the former landowners (along with the lack of character in poor whites and all blacks), and re-establish the displaced gentry in positions of authority in the new South. In all of his works, but especially in *Red Rock* (1898), Page vigorously defended his class interests.

Thomas Nelson Page's life can be characterized as a long ascent through privilege. Born to a wealthy, "old Virginia" family in 1853 (Gaines 328), he understood firsthand how much one could gain from a slave system, so even after its demise, Page defended it on the national stage, having befriended President Woodrow Wilson in law school and marrying into greater wealth. Since he was born in 1853, "[...] he was old enough to remember both his family's antebellum plantation and the war itself. [...] For Page the Old South became a retreat into an idealized childhood..." (Martin). Thomas Page was born into a world in which "Southern intellectuals" had "...presented black deficiencies as a justification for slavery, arguing that black people were unfit for freedom" (Bay 31). After attending the University of Virginia Law School, Page practiced law in Richmond (Gaines 329). He had befriended Woodrow Wilson while attending the University of Virginia and was quite active in Democratic Party politics. When Page married wealthy widow Florence Field in 1893, he abandoned his law practice, concentrated on his literary career and moved to

Washington, D.C., where their home became a social center. Thereafter, President Wilson appointed Page as ambassador to Italy from 1913-1919 (“Page”). In 1910 Page received “ [...] an honorary degree from Yale along with other national leaders, among whom were President Theodore Roosevelt, Mark Twain, and John Hay”. By birth and marriage, Page became the representative Virginian aristocrat to the rest of the country and the world (Gaines 328-340).

Just as Frances Harper wrote with a political agenda in mind, Thomas Page intended *Red Rock: A Chronicle of Reconstruction*, published in 1898, to affect U. S. politics. His biography reveals a lifelong political instinct and interest. Through his fiction, he attempted to resurrect what Harper wanted to remain dead: the plantation system. Critic Earl Bargainnier believes Page had a dual purpose in writing *Red Rock*:

The first was practical: he wished to write a novel of sectional reconciliation, almost a necessity if a Southern novel was to have wide readership outside of the South in 1898. He had already used reconciliation as plot resolution— marriage of Northerner and Southerner—in his short stories and knew its popularity with readers. Much more important was the second purpose, for it has had a longer lasting effect. Page was creating a myth of what he considered a great lost civilization, and the myth was stronger than fact. (45)

The novel begins with an idyllic portrait of plantation life in an unnamed Southern state in the mid-1850s. Readers are introduced to the protagonists, Jacquelin Gray and his younger brother Rupert, Stevenson Allen, and Blair Cary, the female

protagonist, as children. Even in their play they exhibit the qualities of nobility and leadership that they will use during the most challenging times of their lives during the “Northern invasion,” (i.e., the Civil War and Reconstruction). The main conflict in the novel centers on whether the Gray family will keep and control the Red Rock plantation that they had owned for six generations. When the men go off to war (with their slaves in tow), the white women are left to defend their homesteads, which they do brilliantly, but none of the protagonists is a match for Northern greed in the form of Union soldiers, federal administrators, and a nefarious mulatto, all of whom covet Southern plantations. Although the Grays are temporarily tricked out of ownership of Red Rock after the War, they manage, through a dramatic murder trial, to reclaim the plantation and marry at the novel’s end. The black characters are slaves before the Civil War, they go off to war with their owners, and they remain in virtual slavery to their former owners after the War has ended. The one or two blacks who are given political encouragement by the Yankees are run out of town by the Ku Klux Klan, whose creation in the novel by Stevenson Allen was a practical joke, a stunt to keep blacks from hurting themselves. In short, the economic and social status of the black characters never changed in time.

One of Page’s goals is to show how slavery benefits everyone, even the slave, and he begins doing so at the outset. Jacquelin Gray, the hero, “grew up to be just what most boys of his station, stature, and blood, living on a plantation, under similar conditions, would have been.” He played with black children, often pretending they were horses, and naming them after the horses in the stables or his bedtime stories.

“But if he drove the black boys in harness, it was because they let him do it, and not because he was their master,” the omniscient narrator explains (3). At the outset Page establishes that slavery was harmless to the blacks; it was a child’s game, and most importantly, the slaves themselves permitted themselves to be used like work animals.

Class distinctions between whites are maintained throughout the novel. Jacquelin dislikes the overseer’s son, Wash Still, and attacks him because he had twisted the arm of one of Jacquelin’s little black companions (3). The antipathy between Jacquelin and Wash Still as children foreshadows the class warfare they engage in as adults. Always Jacquelin Gray is the protector of the blacks from Still’s cruelty. The novel never explains why Gray considers Wash Still’s interactions with slaves abusive but Gray’s similar behavior is not cruel.

Wash Still becomes Gray’s nemesis when Still, a poor white, takes advantage of the chaos after the Civil War to grab land and become a politician (and as an adult, again forcing blacks to do what he wants).³ Thomas Page can be credited with accurately suggesting the economic class tensions between the poor whites and the planters. The poor whites and slaves never come to appreciate the planters' nobility, however.

The novel begins with a group of visitors, including a Massachusetts clergyman, being shown the plantation (29-30). “The plantation surpassed any [the visitor] had

³ Indeed, historian John Hope Franklin noted, “It was on plantations where there were overseers that the greatest amount of cruelty and brutality existed. Since overseers came from a non-slaveholding and frequently landless group they had no interest in the institution except of a most temporary nature.” Often they blamed the slaves for the overseers’ poverty (193).

seen. It was a little world in itself—a sort of feudal domain [...].” The other visitor “was taken to see the servants’ quarters, the hands working and singing in the fields [...].” The rector who lived nearby thought that the Garden of Eden wasn’t far from Red Rock “[...] and certainly within the limits of the State.”⁴ The rector also “began to speak earnestly of the blessings of Slavery” as they walked by the “Negro quarters”, “the clean cabins with yards and gardens, laughing children and smiling mothers curtsying from their doors” (29).⁵ The rector mentioned that slavery has a Scriptural basis (“A servant of servants shall he be”).⁶ The Yankee doesn’t dispute the Bible but believes that slavery is an “economical sin” and that it was fated to pass away. Another character claimed, “We interfere with nobody; all we demand is that they shall not interfere with us.” “[...] You interfere with everyone—with every nation [...].” was the reply (29-30).⁷ The dispute within the church about slavery is

⁴ Historian Franklin observed: “Owners of slaves almost always sought to convey the impression that their human chattel was docile, tractable, and happy. This effort became part of their defense of the institution [...].” (205).

⁵ Compare this portrait with historian Franklin’s: “No more clothing was furnished than was absolutely necessary [...]. In a system as harshly materialistic as plantation slavery there was little or no inclination to indulge in any expenditures for slaves that were viewed as unnecessary for increased productivity [...]. Housing for slaves was especially poor” (195).

⁶ Professor Mia Bay in *The White Image in the Black Mind* asserts: “Distinguished Southern intellectuals touted the scriptural, economic and moral virtues of slavery, taking on its defense as a ‘sacred vocation.’ Slavery was ‘an institution of divine origin,’ these thinkers proclaimed, ‘manifestly designed and used by an all good creator to forward his beneficent purposes.’ Proslavery thinkers insisted that slavery was an ideal institution that served the interests of both the masters and the slaves. In return for their labor, slaves were guaranteed food, clothing, and shelter under the stewardship of a benevolent master” (55).

⁷ Here we see how the “fetish of states’ rights” and the phobia of meddling “outsiders” prevailed before the war and long after Reconstruction (Quarles 147).

given voice and the injustice of Northern interference in “everyone’s” way of life is condemned.

As the Civil War becomes imminent, a community meeting is held to debate military action. Since there is no place in this culture where slaves are not present, personal slaves also attend the meeting with their owners. A few citizens have heard that one reason the North wants to fight the South is to free the slaves. Dr. Cary asked “his old body-servant, Tarquin,“ if he wanted to be free. “‘Lawd Gawd!’ exclaimed Tarquin...’Me! Free?’ ‘If you do I will set you free, and give you money enough to live in Philadelphia.’ ‘No, suh; Marster, you know I don’ wan’ be free,’ said Tarquin” (41). Readers should be able to see that the North is just meddling into Southern affairs and that the slaves honestly do not want freedom. Everyone can see it.

When the Civil War arrives, the slave owners do not shirk their duty; they go to war—with their personal slaves (50-51). (Thomas Page’s slaves did not run away during the battles and join the Union army as do Frances Harper’s but returned to the plantation after Emancipation.)⁸ In *Red Rock* no character acknowledges that the Civil War is fought to free the slaves. According to this novelist, it was fought to repel the Yankee invasion.

When the War ends—never, ever does Page write that the Confederate army was defeated or that the North won—the War apparently ran out of steam and Dr. Cary returns home with his personal slave. Then readers are treated to one of the more astonishing scenes in all of the novels: Dr. Cary *inexplicably* sets his personal slave

⁸ During the War, slaves performed as mechanics, cooks, and hospital attendants (Franklin 287).

free! He, not the Emancipation Proclamation, sets Tarquin free; Dr Cary never mentions the Emancipation Proclamation or that he is being magnanimous because the Confederacy lost the War. Dr. Cary sets Tarquin free and gives him the horse he had ridden throughout the War as payment for Tarquin's sacrifices. "Tarquin, you are free. I present you the horse you rode home. Take the saddles off, and turn them out.' And he walked into the house, shaking by the hand the servants clustered about the door" (58). Tarquin, although a freedman, still gets to work without salary. Presumably the other blacks on the Cary plantation are still enslaved. Although Tarquin is nominally "free," he still follows Dr. Cary's commands as a servant. Precisely what Tarquin is free to do even he does not know. Tarquin makes no response to his freedom; he may not have had time since he had to tend to the horses. What Tarquin's freedom means to him, to Dr. Cary, or to the other slaves remains an enigma. Critic Karen Keely notes that *Red Rock*

[...] has very little plot that is separable from the history of Reconstruction itself, or at least one version of it. We follow characters in an unnamed Southern county through the soldiers' return from battle; the early days of peace, in which *it seemed as though Southern life would continue as it had for generations* [emphasis added], the only difference being that former slaves would now earn wages [...].

The day after Dr. Cary frees Tarquin, he mentions to the other slaves that they too are free "and they could leave, if they pleased. But if they remained, they would have to work and be subject to his authority.... The next day there was a good force at

work in the fields [...]” Although a few had slipped away in the night, “[...] most of them remained [...]” (61-62). The little Dr. Cary pays them does not come out of his empty pocket, despite his continued authority. He gets a loan from the federal government to pay his slaves. The only difference between before and after the Civil War in the lives of the black characters is the dispensing of coins into their hands; Dr. Cary, now penniless, still maintains his control and authority over all, apparently by behaving as if he is still in charge, by not acknowledging any change in his status.⁹

The horror of Reconstruction from the planters’ point of view is detailed in a series of incidents. The narrator explains, “The next few years which passed brought more changes to the old country than any years of the war. The war had destroyed the Institution of slavery; the years of the carpet-bagger’s domination well-nigh destroyed the South.” Former slaves were given the ballot and it was taken from white aristocracy (198-199). For Thomas Page and other displaced, rich Southern families, such a reversal of political fortune could scarcely be believed and should never have happened.

Thomas Page’s purpose for writing *Red Rock* was to revise the historical record by replacing it with a mythology about the antebellum South. To that end, he invented two kinds of white men, neither of which are multidimensional. All the protagonists are slaveholders whose every thought and action is portrayed as the epitome of grace, culture, and nobility. Even the start of the Ku Klux Klan by one of the heroes is painted as a practical necessity since blacks had been given guns by Leech, a poor

⁹ In reality, the federal government failed to redistribute land to the freedmen, so many never left the plantations. They “resumed work under circumstances hardly more favorable than before the war” (Franklin 311).

white who rises in politics during Reconstruction. Stevenson Allen, cousin to Jacquelin Gray, organized the first raid of men in white sheets who visited all the armed black men and confiscated their weapons “with little violence”. Most of the blacks believed the white-sheeted figures were ghosts and were terrified (233-239). Page never explains why blacks cannot own weapons which he needs to do given how contented the slaves are in this novel. Given how happy they were to be slaves, what harm could come to the planters? A gun in happy hands is not a threat, is it? Since *Red Rock* never mentions the names of Nat Turner or Denmark Vesey or Gabriel Prosser, insurrectionists all, or the many mysterious, violent deaths of slaveholders, since resistance is nonexistent, armed ex-slaves should not be a problem.

Red Rock had a brief, but important, minor character appear during Reconstruction. Dr. Moses, a mulatto, is first seen by Ruth Welch and her father outside a country store, announcing, “I’m goin’ to marry a white ‘ooman and meck white folks wait on me [...]” and he is described as a wild beast, a hyena, a reptile (291-292). Critic Judith Berzon states, “In the novels of the Negrophobes—writers like Thomas Dixon, Robert Lee Durham, and (sometimes) Thomas Nelson Page—the mixed blood combines the worst traits of both races” (59). In *Red Rock* Moses befriended Northern carpetbaggers and rose to some political prominence before meeting with a violent end; he is lynched in a nearby town for insinuating himself into the white world. Professor Mia Bay explains that “[B]lack males, in particular, were routinely depicted as sexual predators whose lust for white women both

necessitated and justified a variety of repressive measures against them—up to and including lynching” (94-95).

In his characterization of the mulatto, Page could not be farther from Frances Harper. For Page, the mulatto has an “intrinsic, genetic flaw of character” that leads to disaster whereas “...in pre-Harlem Renaissance African American fiction the passers are rarely tragic figure, and even when tragedy does befall them, it is most clearly indicated to be the result of virulent prejudice and discrimination” (Fabi 3). Obviously Thomas Page was quite nervous about the possibility of male mulattos “intermingling” with the white female population during the freewheeling Reconstruction period when not only was there a sexual competition but a very pressing political one.

Why was Thomas Nelson Page popular with consumers and publishers in the 1890s? First, the novelist capitalized on the “northern craze for southern romance” now that the South was “no longer a political or economic threat.” The fantasy of lost Southern civilization was harmless to the North (Martin). “By the 1880s ‘the South was the most popular setting in American fiction,’ and ‘the recipe for southern romance still fascinated publishers’” (Keely). *Red Rock* “was fifth on the bestseller list of 1898” (Keely) and was widely reviewed at publication (Bargainnier 44). According to critic Earl Bargainnier, “The attention it received is understandable, for by any standard Page was the South’s leading literary figure at the time” (44). Page had established a

nationwide readership and his long novel of Reconstruction was bound to be a

literary event. Almost single-handedly he had created the moonlight and magnolias school of Southern writing [...]. Yet Page is nearly forgotten, or perhaps it is more accurate to say that he is deliberately ignored. The principal reasons are his dismissal by critics for his sentimentality and the anger, or at least unease, that his overt racism creates in modern readers. (44)

Earl Bargainnier presents a fine critical summation of *Red Rock*:

Red Rock presents the collapse of a traditional society, a society that is seen by its survivors, and the author, as a golden age. Published a generation after that collapse, it continues its author's creation of a myth. [...] Except for the first three chapters, however, the novel uses the contrast of the deprivation of the South during Reconstruction and the survivors' *memories* of that golden age. Their sense of loss and their condition after the War hallow the past, rendering it 'richer and mellower' than it could ever have actually been and more in keeping with the myth. At the same time, Page was also for reconciliation between the sections and thus had two incompatible aims: to glorify the South in a myth of gentility and greatness, while presenting reconciliation as a desirable goal. To bring the two together, he was forced to resort to stereotyped characters, episodic structure, and melodramatic ignoring of cause and effect, as well as giving 'good' Northerners Southern attitudes and sympathies, essentially transforming them into good Southerners. In spite of its success with readers of the 1890s, *Red Rock* is not a great novel. On the other hand, it is an important cultural document as one of the principal works

to imprint an image of the Old South upon the American consciousness, an image that has yet to disappear. (52)

In short, Thomas Page gave Southern whites, especially those who had not lived through the era, an idealized history. He presented Northern whites, especially those removed from the Civil War, with a romance to embrace. There was no one else, such as a black readership, about whom to care.

Another historical novelist who wanted her fiction to have political impact was Pauline E. Hopkins (1859-1930), born in Maine and raised in Boston. She won an essay contest at 15 and received a \$10 prize from abolitionist William Wells Brown (Robinson, "Hopkins" 965). Hopkins graduated from Girls High School in Boston, the only information known about her formal education (Campbell, *Dictionary*). As a young adult, she worked as a singer, actress, and playwright with her family, the Hopkins Colored Troubadours. Seeking a steady income, she took a government exam and worked as a stenographer during the 1890s (Robinson 965), including four years in the Bureau of Statistics (Campbell, *Dictionary*).

The start of Pauline Hopkins's writing and editing careers began in 1900 with the founding of the *Colored American Magazine*. Her first short story was published in the first issue of the magazine to which she became a major contributor (Robinson, "Hopkins" 965). In addition to short fiction, the *Colored American Magazine* serialized three of her novels between 1901 and 1904. Her work appeared in the magazine so much that she used her mother's maiden name, Sarah A. Allen, "as a pseudonym to prevent her own from appearing too often" (Robinson, "Hopkins"

965). Allied with W.E.B. DuBois and William Monroe Trotter, “she helped set the *Colored American’s* tradition of racial uplift and protest literature” (Robinson, “Hopkins” 965). She embraced DuBois’ Talented Tenth ideology that the best of both races would be the agents for cultural change (Campbell 39-40). She had hoped that *The Colored American Magazine* would “attempt to create a cultural renaissance that would not be limited to a Northern black elite but that would encourage the flowering of any black talent which had been suppressed by a lack of encouragement and opportunity to be published” (Carby xxxi-xxxxii).

Typical of Hopkins’s ideals and aesthetics is her article, “Heroes and Heroines in Black” that “appealed to her readers to exhibit a ‘wild courage.’ Fiction, she thought, needed to be of ‘cathartic virtue’ to stimulate political resistance [...]” (Carby xlviii). Throughout her life, she saw the need for black solidarity among people of African descent (Campbell 39-40). Hopkins was one of the first black intellectuals to defend the black race on ethnological grounds. Ethnology is “the now discredited, science of the human races” (Bay 14-15). Hopkins reviewed the origins of Africans in the

Primer of Facts Pertaining, to the Early Greatness of the African Race and the Possibility of Restoration by its Descendants...Compiled and Arranged from the Works of the best known Ethnologists and Historians, rehearsed arguments long traditional to black ethnology. The races descended from the same parent stock, she argued, and owed their distinctive complexions to the different environments that had nurtured their biblical ancestors, Ham, Shem, and Japhet. The first work of ethnology by a black woman, most of Hopkins’s

Primer was similar to ethnological works written by her male counterparts. Interestingly, however, it broke from the all-male world of black ethnology by closing with a lengthy attack on the political writings of a white Southern woman named Mrs. Jeanette Robinson Murphy, who bemoaned the end of slavery and described the abolitionists as ‘emissaries of Satan.’ (Bay 192)

However, her strong racial identity never developed into black supremacy, thinking that black people are inherently morally better than whites (Campbell 39). As evidence of her racial militancy, Booker T. Washington’s accommodationist policies proved unpalatable to her, and when Washington’s supporters bought the *Colored American Magazine* in 1904, Hopkins resigned a month later (Robinson, “Hopkins” 965).

By 1916 Pauline Hopkins, no longer working as a professional writer, resumed her career as a stenographer at M.I.T. until her death in a fire at her home (Robinson, “Hopkins” 965). “She died ‘on August 13, 1930 when the liniment-saturated red flannel bandages she was wearing to relieve the neuritis she suffered were ignited by an oil stove in her room’” (Campbell, *Dictionary*). With her death, the literary world had lost “...the most prolific African-American writer at the turn of the twentieth century” (Robinson, “Hopkins” 965). *Africana* encyclopedia summarizes her work in this manner:

During her lifetime Hopkins was never as well known as black male contemporaries such as Charles W. Chesnutt and Paul L. Dunbar. But as an editor and a writer, she used literature to spread her ideas as often and as far as

she could. Her novels are available in new paperback editions, and with the resurgence of interest in early black women writers, Hopkins is receiving the recognition she deserves. (Robinson, "Hopkins" 965-966)

The popular novel, *Hagar's Daughter*, was originally published as a serial in the *Colored American Magazine* in 1901 (Hopkins N. Pg). In *Hagar's Daughter* the narrative builds around interwoven family stories. The main conflict arises between Ellis and St. Clair Enson, sons of a wealthy Maryland plantation owner in the 1850s. Ellis is an angel and St. Clair is a "debbil" from birth as Aunt Henny describes him. Both men are wildly handsome. Their main conflict is over possession of the Enson plantation that has been left to Ellis; St. Clair has been left nothing, completely dispossessed because of gambling. Turned out of the house, he travels south and falls into partnership with a slave trader, Walker. Meanwhile, Ellis marries a lovely, intelligent young woman (and neighbor) with a drop of Negro blood in her heritage. At the time of the marriage, however, both are ignorant of her racial heritage. The new friend of St. Clair, slave trader Walker knows the true identity of Hagar (no one ever questions her name connoting Africa; in Scripture Hagar is the Egyptian who bears Ishmael, Abraham's first child, and is turned out of the house by Sarah). In time Ellis and Hagar have a daughter who also marries a rich white man, and again, the newly-wed couple is ignorant of her racial heritage. The villains, Walker and St. Clair, end up dead or imprisoned; the good, Ellis and Hagar, have a measure of peace although the title character, Hagar's daughter, Jewel, comes to a tragic end, separated from her husband because of his race prejudice. More than a story about friendship

between the enslaved and the free, *Hagar's Daughter* is a love story which suggests that a happy marriage is possible between a beautiful mulatto and a rich, white man—but only if the husband does not first know of her heritage.

Perhaps Hopkins could see that she was not adequately challenging slavery in the plot and characterization of *Hagar's Daughter*, so she would periodically stop the narrative and insert an essay. The entire first chapter presents her views on the causes of the Civil War. Unlike the white historical novelists from 1875-1905, Hopkins places the blame for the War on the South's allegiance to a slave economy. For example, the novel begins:

In the fall of 1860 a stranger visiting the United States would have thought that nothing short of a miracle could preserve the union of states so proudly proclaimed by the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and so gloriously maintained by the gallant Washington. The vast wealth of the South made them feel that they were independent of the world. Cotton was not merely king; it was God. Moral considerations were nothing. [...] the authors of the Rebellion...dreamed of perpetuating slavery, though all history shows the decline of the system as industry, commerce, and knowledge advance. The slaveholders proposed nothing less than to reverse the currents of humanity, and to make barbarism flourish in the bosom of civilization. But, alas! the supreme error of this anticipation was in omitting from the calculation the power of principle. Right still had authority in the councils of nations. Factories might be closed, men and woman [sic] out of employment, but

truth and justice still commanded respect among men. (Hopkins 3-5).

Another issue Hopkins explores: the white males attracted to the beautiful mulattos—and that is practically each one—wrestle in dialogue with their racist upbringing vs. the desire to marry mulattos. Hagar's first husband, Enson, and Cuthbert Sumner, Jewel's fiancé, in particular, argue over why love should overcome politics (Hopkins 265-271). The novel ends: "The holy institution of marriage ignored the life of the slave, breed [sic] indifference in the masters to the enormity of illicit connections, with the result that the sacred family relation is weakened and finally ignored in many cases. In the light of his recent experiences Cuthbert Sumner views life and eternity with different eyes and thoughts from what he did before he knew that he had wedded Hagar's daughter" (Hopkins 284). Hopkins's work as a journalist may have prompted her to insert these asides throughout the narrative.

The scene in which Hagar is unmasked and revealed to be a black person tells much about Pauline Hopkins' racial values. A year after Hagar and Ellis marry, a daughter is born and "Ellis' happiness was complete" (39) until the appearance of the slave trader Walker at the estate. Walker tells Ellis: "Fourteen years ago I bought a slave child from a man in St. Louis, and not being able to find a ready sale for her on account of her white complexion, I lent her to a Mr. Sargeant. I understand that you have her in your employ. I've come to get her"—Walker confronts Ellis as soon as they meet (52). Ellis can't comprehend what Walker means. Walker explains that Mr. and Mrs. Sargeant lived in St. Louis: "[...] they took a female child from me to bring up—a *nigger*—and they passed her off on the commoonity here as their own,

and you have *married* her. Is my meaning clear now, sah?” The slave trader is, from Hopkins’ view, the lowest of all characters, not only for trafficking in human beings, but for ruining the Ensons’ happiness with the revelation that Hagar is black although she appears white. Ellis is astonished at the revelation and fights for his wife:

“There is, there must be some mistake here. My wife was the daughter of Mr. Sargeant. There is not a drop of Negro blood in her veins; I doubt, sir, if you have ever seen her. [...]” (52-53). Walker believes Hagar will remember him. She enters the room, “a fair vision in purest white.” Hagar faints when Walker confronts her (53-54). Walker says, “[...] The only man who could prove the girl’s birth is the one I took her from, and he’s dead.” Ellis’s lawyer looks over Hagar’s bill of sale and pronounces it legitimate. Ellis is willing to pay Walker any amount to get him out of his life. Walker wants \$5,000 for Hagar. “As for the pickaninny—” (55). Ellis is dumbstruck that Walker wants his daughter too. “In course, replied Walker, [...] ‘the child follows the condition of the mother, so I scoop the pile.’” He wants \$1,000 for their daughter. “I would willingly give the money twice over, even my whole fortune, if it did not prove my wife to be of Negro blood,’ replied Ellis [...]” “The money was paid, and within the hour the house had resumed its wonted quiet and all was apparently as before; but the happiness of Enson Hall had fled forever” (56). Hagar falls on the floor sobbing at the prospect of being considered black and a slave. “Vaguely, as in a dream, she recalled her stay in Rose Valley and the terror of her childish heart caused by the rough slave-trader. ‘Her mother a slave!’ She wondered that the very thought did not strike her dead” (56-57). After all, “Slavery—its

degradation, the pining and fretting of the Negro race in bondage—had always seemed right to her.” Now she is no longer a white wife but Ellis’ slave and concubine (58).

Ellis does not see her for a whole day. The servants bring the child and Hagar refuses to open the door. Finally, Ellis visits, saying that he has bought her from Walker. He announces:

I have thought the matter over and much as I wish it might be otherwise, much as I would sacrifice for you, I feel it my duty as a Southern gentleman, the representative of a proud old family, to think of others beside myself and not allow my own inclinations to darken the escutcheon of a good old name. I cannot, I dare not, and the law forbids me to acknowledge as my wife a woman in whose veins courses a drop of the accursed blood of the Negro slave. (59)

Hagar does not blame Ellis for being horrified. Ellis decides that he is “going away”—maybe forever, but he will provide for the family. When he leaves the room, his feet pause before the nursery (60). He realizes he cannot leave his child, so Ellis “outlined a plan of life abroad. They would be remarried, and sail from a Northern port for Europe; there, the shadow of this crime could not come, they would begin life anew. [...] as she listened she was convinced—it was feasible; it could be done” (61). Ellis leaves home to make arrangements for their life abroad, and soon after his departure, a dead man is found on the plantation, shot in the face. The unrecognizable dead man is assumed to be Ellis Enson, a suicide because of his wife’s and daughter’s newfound slave status. Hagar accuses St. Clair of killing Ellis,

but St. Clair is not concerned about a slave's accusation. He tells Walker to sell mother and child as soon as possible (62-71). Hagar and the daughter manage to escape from Walker by jumping in the Potomac River (73).

The next chapter begins twenty years later. Hagar marries a second time (after fleeing enslavement) to Zenas Bowen, a Senator who also does not know her true identity. Senator Bowen and his first wife had already adopted Hagar's daughter. The daughter becomes engaged to a rich, white New Englander (79-84). In the climatic scene, all disguised identities are revealed in court, and a newspaper editorial from the next day presents public commentary about mulatto women. Jewel reads the editorial in that day's newspaper about her mother, Hagar/Mrs. Bowen. The editorial said that upon leaping from the bridge, Hagar was presumed drowned but "was picked up by a Negro oyster-digger and concealed in his hut for days." When the Civil War began, she traveled to California and married Zenas Bowen. The newspaper editorial concludes,

'This story, showing as it does, the ease with which beautiful half-breeds may enter our best society without detection, is a source of anxiety to the white citizens of our country. At this rate the effects of slavery can never be eradicated, and our most distinguished families are not immune from contact with this mongrel race. Mrs. Bowen has our sympathy, but we cannot, even for such a leader as she has been, unlock the gates of caste and bid her enter.

Posterity forbids it. [...]' (Hopkins 266-267)

In many ways, *Hagar's Daughter* posits that racial prejudice, not slavery, is the

tragedy. Of slavery, we see very little. Chapter two describes, in such brevity that sensitive readers may feel the author's repugnance at the scene, a slave auction. The slaves pray for death; none know their ages; they mourn the separation from family; they are asked to dance to show how limber they are. The auction scene ends with the appearance of a minister, coming to buy slaves. Mr. Pinchen, the minister, says: "Religion is a good thing to live by, and we'll want it when we die. And a man in your business of buying and selling slaves needs religion more than anybody else, for it makes you treat your people well." Pinchen converted another slave trader whose heart has softened; now he won't separate husbands and wives "if he can get anyone to buy them together" (7-13). Then the novel swings its focus to a plantation on Maryland's eastern shore and the lives of the white slave owners and those presumed white (mulattos). These five pages of the slave auction scene are all readers ever see of the most brutal aspects of slavery. The heart of the novel begins after 1882 and focuses on the presumed whites' interactions with rich whites.

The sale of anonymous slaves is one thing, but the sale of the title characters of the novel, mulatto characters of great beauty and intellect and depth, is meant to wrench the heart. There is the suggestion that the crime is bigger because these characters are not physically black; the white characters cannot detect that Hagar and her daughter have "a drop of Negro blood". Both Hagar and her daughter were *so* close to fitting in to white aristocracy. The shame, for them, is the drop of black blood that precludes the ascendancy, rather than the horrors of slavery. Giving Hopkins the benefit of doubt, readers might decide that to demonstrate the unquestioned humanity

of the slaves, Hopkins created the mulatto heroine who appears indistinguishable from the white characters who are highly valued. Perhaps white readers are more able to identify with characters “raised as white women” who “discover their Negro blood as adults” (Berzon 100). After all, the “discovery of Negro blood in one’s veins would be a shattering experience for most white Americans” (Berzon 119), and the racial caste system would seem, upon such discovery, “horribly unjust” (Berzon 120). But how would the presumably black readers of the *Colored American Magazine* respond to this “passing” serial? Poet Langston Hughes “observed in a 1958 *Chicago Defender* column, stories of passing might be sources of enjoyment and gratification to African-American readers who could imaginatively revel in the prospect of ‘fooling our white folks.’ [...]As Hughes observed, ‘Most Negroes feel that bigoted whites deserve to be cheated and fooled since the way they behave toward us makes no sense at all’” (Wald 8). Since the novel was serialized in a black newspaper, we must assume that African-Americans were the intended audience to whom Pauline Hopkins asserted that whites’ racial prejudice, more than the slaves’ past, prevented blacks from marrying into the power elites in this country.

Readers are also shown that friendship can blossom within the slave system between the slave and slave owner. St. Clair Enson, the evil brother, gets along swimmingly with his personal slave, Isaac. He and Isaac are said to have similar dispositions. Isaac knows how to play along whenever his master loses possession of him in a card game; he knows to run away and return to St. Clair the next morning (25-28). Isaac’s final stunt for St. Clair (after slavery had supposedly ended) was to

“cut his way through solid masonry” of St. Clair’s prison cell and to lie in St. Clair’s bed during the prison break. St. Clair was shot and killed in the escape attempt (272-273). It is never said what becomes of Isaac for breaking into a prison. This particular master-slave relationship runs through the novel as comic-relief—with the joke on Isaac, the slave. Since he is not a mulatto, Hopkins has no interest in exploring the tragedy of his slave circumstance.

When Hopkins considers slavery, she is transfixed by one situation only: the plight of the female mulatto. Did Hopkins gravitate toward this character because the mulatto often had the opportunity to choose her racial identification? At the turn of a new century, as in the past, race played a huge role in determining one’s chances, choices, and destiny. In the female mulatto, Hopkins had a character that could change economic class in ways a male mulatto could not. *Hagar’s Daughter* does not accurately reflect that historically, “more men passed than women” and “most passing as white was done in order to get a better job[...].” (Davis 56). Hopkins may not have included male mulattos because they could not scale the economic ladder as a female mulatto could. Obtaining a better job, say going from assistant bricklayer to bricklayer, is not the same as jumping from slave to a member of the leisure class. The advantage for the female mulatto, with an unrevealed past, lies in the possibility for marriage to a rich white man. In short, a female mulatto with only a drop of black blood is the easiest type of character to insinuate into a melodrama about the white aristocracy. Professor Hazel Carby offers this explanation: “At the height of the era of Jim Crow, narratives of ‘passing’ appeared to offer the only fictional mechanism

that could enable representation of the relation between the races” (xxxviii-xxxix). Only in “passing” narratives could a black (who is presumed white) achieve social equality.

In *Winona* (1902), Pauline Hopkins continues her exploration of a slave passing for a white person. Published one year after *Hagar’s Daughter*, it is the only novel in this chapter completely set in antebellum America. The title character is a gorgeous, apparently white girl raised on an island near Buffalo, New York in the 1850s by White Eagle (who is in truth an Englishman posing as an Indian). White Eagle adopts a black orphan, Judah, who is raised with Winona. When White Eagle, the white father, dies, all protection for his mulatto daughter and black son disappears. (In *Hagar’s Daughter*, with the death of the white father, the mulatto children are instantly sold into slavery.) Here too the children are sold into slavery by two slave hunters to a distant English relative of White Eagle, but they are rescued by an English lawyer and John Brown himself. Both children migrate to England where Winona marries the English lawyer who had rescued her and where she discovers she is an aristocrat via her father’s title. Judah tags along to Britain and also manages to marry into British aristocracy after being knighted. The main conflict centers on possession. To whom does Winona belong—as slave, as family, and finally, as wife?

In *Winona*, Hopkins manages an even greater evasion about slavery than we see in *Hagar’s Daughter*. By setting the children of slaves on an island in a lake in Buffalo, New York, the children, raised by an Englishman posing as an Indian, avoid slavery in all of its aspects. Although both children were born in free territory, “the child

follows the condition of the mother” under the Fugitive Slave Law passed in 1850. Both children are born to runaway slave women. The kidnapping of supposedly free blacks reflects the reality that a black person was safe nowhere since slave traders kidnapped even free blacks and sold them (Franklin 176, 218). The children are sold to Magnolia Farm, outside of Kansas City, Missouri (Hopkins 314-315). Winona becomes a maid to a kind-hearted girl her own age, but Judah suffers physical brutality (320). Because of his physical strength, intelligence, and amazing talent as a horse trainer, Judah is made assistant overseer. Yet his sunny disposition bridles under the harsh working conditions. The other slaves respect him so much for taming a wild horse that his owner puts him in slave prison and gives him forty lashes for thinking of himself too highly and for not saying “massa” when he was called (327-328). After Judah and Winona have been slaves for several years, a British lawyer visits the plantation. Judah enlists the lawyer’s help in escaping from the plantation since the children are slated for sale within a week. Judah admits to Warren Maxwell, the lawyer, “If help does not come I have sworn to kill her before she becomes slavery’s victim...a beautiful female slave on these plantations; the torture of hell cannot surpass it” (334-335). Maxwell helps the two escape from a riverboat before they were sold and they are delivered to abolitionist John Brown who is in Kansas with the Free Soil conflict (344, 358-359). The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 brought abolitionists and pro-slavery proponents together to decide whether Kansas and Nebraska would become slaveholding or free. Why did Hopkins subsume the children’s freedom struggle under the national conflict about slavery? She saw them

as one and the same.

The lawyer is captured by a mob for freeing the children and is thrown into jail (rather than be lynched because he is a British citizen). Beneath Maxwell's cell is a lock-up for slaves. "Many heart-rending scenes were enacted before his sight in the lower room" (Hopkins 384). That is the last sentence in the novel that hints at the life of the slave. Hopkins tells readers that the scenes are "heart-rending," but she never, ever rends our hearts with the real life, daily drama that was slavery.

In a way, one could argue that *Winona* is a despairing novel in that the only hope for freedom for blacks is life in England (that is depicted as being entirely free from prejudice—although the distant relative who was a slave owner also hailed from there) and marriage to a white man is the only hope for Winona. Judah's love for Winona completely disappears from the plot when the white Maxwell arrives. Judah seems to understand that Winona would prefer the British lawyer over a slave who saved her life several times and someone she has known from birth who is described as a "lion of a man".

To read several hundred pages of *Hagar's Daughter* or *Winona* is to see that only the white and nearly-white characters are of importance to Pauline Hopkins. Female mulattos are almost an obsessive interest to the author. The violins played too long and too loudly for the stunningly beautiful, intelligent, tragic mulattos who, because of America's sinful color prejudice, cannot marry the rich white men who are attracted to them. The horror, according to Hopkins, is that one drop of black blood keeps them out of the aristocracy (*Hagar* 266-267). She attacks the racial prejudice

that impedes the social progress of mulattos while leaving unassailed the racial prejudice associated with slavery. The disconnect may be rooted in self-hatred. “To this day, all-but-white characters are considered to be strangely ‘over-represented...in black narratives’ [...], and this overrepresentation has often been read as a symptom of self-loathing” (Fabi 2). Where is Hopkins’s avowed race pride and political militancy in *Hagar’s Daughter* and *Winona*? In both novels, the females’ black identity is best kept a secret for if it becomes apparent to the white world, the women are punished for it (Carby xxxvii). Hopkins’s characters do not interact with more than one black character nor do her mulattos seek out the black community, which historically has always accepted the mulatto.

Critics ponder whether the prevalence of mulatto characters in the novels of Pauline Hopkins was an appeal to a white audience or the author’s concession to white hegemony (Campbell 39-40). Hopkins may have thought she was reclaiming a common symbol for “[i]t is well known that mulattos and mulattas were popular literary figures before antebellum African-American novelists appropriated them” (Fabi 2). According to “Pauline Hopkins” in Contemporary Authors Online, “Throughout her career Hopkins protested the inequities suffered by her race, advocating assimilation and integration with the white community as a remedy to racial injustice. Hopkins’s presumptions of the superior value of white culture and her advocacy of assimilation have been of particular interest to modern critics.” Yet in her daily life and political actions she aligned herself with radical and progressive African-American causes. Her espoused radicalism and the plots and characters in

her novels do not mesh. For modern critics like J. Saunders Redding and Sterling Brown, it is “difficult to reconcile the militancy of 19th century black writers with their focus on passing” (Fabi 118). Some accounting must be made for her artistic choices. Since both novels were serialized in the *Colored American Magazine*, Hopkins must *not* have assumed she was writing for a white audience that was sympathetic to the mulatto cause. Why would Hopkins think that her African-American audience would be concerned with the plight of these exclusively female mulattos? Yes, there were large numbers at the turn of the century. In other words, Hopkins may have decided that passing from black to white was a widespread and common occurrence to her readers.¹⁰ It is also possible that Hopkins, in her fiction, viewed the mulatto as the quintessential African-American since the “vast majority of Americans defined as blacks are not pure descendants of the slaves from Africa but racially mixed” (Davis 18). The female mulattos’ condition stands as a metaphor for being African-American.

As a contemporary of Thomas Page and other apologists for the Confederacy, Pauline Hopkins sought to counter the nostalgia rampant in the early 1900s for a return to a slave economy. She did not have the ear of the President, as did Page, nor were her novels popular by standards of the time. (Indeed, one could argue that she self-published her work as editor of the *Colored American*.) Black authors Paul Laurence Dunbar and Charles Chestnutt eclipsed her in sales during her lifetime.

“Hopkins remains an obscure figure in American literature,” states Contemporary

¹⁰ According to F. James Davis in *Who Is Black*, “The peak years for passing as white were probably from 1880 to 1925, with perhaps from 10,000 to 25,000 crossing the color line each year, although such estimates are most likely inflated. By 1940 the annual number had apparently declined to no more than 2500 to 2750 a year” (22).

Authors Online. “The critical neglect of her work has most often been attributed to her unexceptional narrative technique, although the relative unavailability of her works and the general neglect suffered by female authors has also been cited as reasons for her obscurity” (“Pauline Hopkins,” Contemporary Authors Online). One gets the sense from *Hagar’s Daughter* and *Winona* that Pauline Hopkins would rather describe anything and everything except chattel slavery. Perhaps she recognized that black readers at the turn of the twentieth century, a moment of hope and promise, yearned to put the slave past behind them. Hopkins has written two novels ostensibly about slavery that never get around to the details or to a large-scale portrait of the plantation system, to the dismay of readers in the past or current readers who expect or need an aggressive stance against the horrors of slavery. The rape of the black female slave is never even whispered among these pages. For these evasions, some readers, both then and now, believe that Pauline Hopkins betrayed her black readership without gaining the acceptance of a white readership.

Compared to Pauline Hopkins’s works, novelist Katherine Brown challenged the status quo in more fundamental ways. Perhaps Brown first got the idea for *Diane* (1904) while completing research in American history at Washington University and the University of Michigan (“Brown”). What were her cultural influences? Little evidence answers that question. Presumed white and a Northerner, the briefest kind of biographical data surfaces in only two sources: *Who’s Who in America, 1906-1909* and *A Dictionary of North American Authors Deceased before 1950*. Neither provides her birth date, mentioning place of birth as Alton, Illinois (Wallace 63). She

died in Orlando, Florida on June 2, 1931. Unusual for a woman of her time, she attended Washington University and the University of Michigan, where she worked as an editor and researcher in American history (“Brown”). Katherine Brown was known primarily as a short story writer (“Brown”), which makes her sole 400-page novel even more remarkable.

Katherine Brown’s education in American history may have led her to create a novel that examines the tension between the concept of social and political equality vs. personal property rights. By setting a commune, an attempt at social equality, in the heart of slave territory, a clash of values is unavoidable. Brown created characters based on real life events, who recreated the communal life of French immigrants along the Mississippi River. Were the French immigrants bewildered by the existence of slaves in their neighborhood in “the land of the free”? Out of these contradictions was born the conflict between Persis, the slave, and Pere Cabet, the commune leader (the term itself an oxymoron that raises questions about power).

Diane: a Romance of the Icarian Settlement on the Mississippi River is a novel with two plots: one involves a family who lives on a steamer that travels the Mississippi River and the tensions within the family about slavery, specifically about Robert Channing’s participation in the Underground Railroad, contrary to his slaveholding relatives; the other plot focuses on the fortunes of an utopian, French immigrant commune based on a novel with similar ideas. Whether on water or land, the characters must make a decision about the ownership of black human beings. By setting the story in 1856 on the Illinois side of the Mississippi River, the author

weaves the Underground Railroad traffic into the plot.¹¹ Slaves coming from the South must somehow navigate the Mississippi River and cross over to the "slave-free" Illinois territory before making their way to Canada. Both sub-plots meet in the main characters, Robert Channing, a steamboat engineer who becomes indispensable on land and river to the Underground Railroad and to abolitionist John Brown and Diane Lahautiere, the title character.

Since *Diane* predates the Civil War, it depicts the schism in one family that was symbolic of the nation's division over slavery. Although Robert Channing works with abolitionist John Brown on the Underground Railroad, his uncle, who raised him from the death of his parents, is completely sympathetic to the plantation system. Channing's uncle believes Robert inherited abolitionist tendencies from his father, a "Yankee abolitionist" (Brown 226-227). The tensions in this family are portrayed as being typical of many. A civil war should have come as no surprise given these conditions nationwide.

Novelist Brown also injects the horrors of the Fugitive Slave Law into the plot. Robert Channing and a Quaker comrade often discuss how free blacks are kidnapped and sold into slavery. The Fugitive Slave Law made the abolitionists' work on the

¹¹ The Underground Railroad began operation in 1804 and continued until the Civil War. The name was coined when a slave escaped from his Kentucky master in 1831, crossed the Ohio and disappeared completely. Despite being close to capturing the slave, all traces of him disappeared at the river. The owner, confounded, "declared the slave must have 'gone off on an underground road.' That was entirely possible, for by 1831 there were plenty of 'underground' roads on the Ohio River, and they had stations, conductors, and means of conveyance" (Franklin 254-255). There were several whites who dedicated their lives to working on the Underground Railroad. John Fairfield, the son of a Virginia slave owner, renounced his heritage, lived in a free state and was one of the most daring white conductors on the Underground (Franklin 257-258).

Underground Railroad even more necessary (Brown 38-42). *Diane* has the most extensive portrayal of the Underground Railroad of any of the novels in this chapter, which points to Katherine Brown's professional career as a historical researcher and her Northern abolitionist leanings.

The main black character in *Diane* is Persis, a conductor on the Underground Railroad. Her name itself connotes "persistence," a positive quality, and her manner, gestures, attitude, and most of all, her speeches, display the generous humanity of a true heroine. Yet her physique is described in typical racial stereotypes—much time is spent on her body width, booming voice and turbaned hair. Although 50-year-old Persis was freed by her owners, the Mandersons, she refuses to move away from them, despite the fact that her work with the Underground Railroad has put her life in the South in grave jeopardy. She prefers to stay near the white people she has served (173-182). As with other Mammy-figures, Persis is unmarried with no family of her own, adopting instead her owner's family. Even this dynamic character who actively works for the abolitionist cause, often conversing with John Brown himself, remains emotionally wedded to her enslavers, readers are led to believe. Since the novelist did not know how to merge her sub-plots, Persis, the black character, drops from the final third of the novel despite her fearlessness and selflessness. The abolition movement becomes conflated with the romance of the white couples. Katherine Brown loses control of the plot, and all the conflicts about slavery's abolition vanish as Robert Channing pursues Diane, now that her father-protector Cabet has died, and the commune disintegrates because of a power struggle.

The climatic scene in the battle about principles is the scene between Persis and Cabet. Persis, “the only coloured woman in the town; her skill in simple medicines and in nursing had tided them through many an anxious hour,” speaks to the commune assembly. She tells of her life as a slave under relatively tolerant conditions, and then she describes the incomparable feeling of being set free at 50 years. ““You-all tell me that you come over yere you’s e’fs ter git ‘way f’om bein’ slaves in you’s own country. Seems like you’d unnerstan’ bes’ of anybody what I mean,”” Persis challenges the immigrants. Five runaways—two women and three children—hide at her house, waiting to go up the river. But they must hide for two to three weeks before the boat comes. Because of her reputation, Persis fears hunters searching her house first and she can’t hide them in the woods. She asks the commune to take them since they have room and no one will suspect them since they’re French and they don’t interact with the neighborhood. Persis will repay the commune for hiding the runaways by sewing and nursing (91-94). Cabet replies, “It was their place to help those who would escape from the tyranny of law and property, not those held in servitude.” Then he adds that the Underground Railroad is not the commune’s concern. Americans started slavery; Americans should end it. Thirdly, since slaves were property, the commune shouldn’t despoil their neighbors’ property rights. The commune should be intent on staying free from “outside institutions”. Finally, Cabet argues, Persis was not the average slave, “...but the mass, he was assured, were ignorant and brutal.” Until they could prove themselves worthy of freedom, slavery was fitting. Here Cabet’s degeneracy from freedom’s principle

comes full flower; his values had been portrayed as suspect from the start (because he was always “more equal than others” as *Animal Farm* would describe him and profited from others’ hard work without doing any himself) and now he gives his vices voice. Cabet in essence sides with the Southern planters; only Katherine Brown refuses to apologize for their behavior as does Thomas Page. In *Diane*, none of the main characters, including John Brown himself, agree with Cabet’s reply to Persis (94-95).

Abolitionist John Brown first appears in *Diane* as a frontiersman who rebuts Cabet’s refusal to engage the commune in anti-slavery activities. He supports Persis’ plea to the commune council to take in five runaway slaves (96-98). Brown becomes a mentor to Robert Channing, writing to him and talking Channing into joining the battle to keep Kansas free of slavery. As a result, Robert Channing goes to Kansas and rides with John Brown for a while. Most of the chapter is spent with John Brown explaining his background and passion against slavery and his newfound opinion that violence is the solution to stopping slavery (253-280). John Brown, leader of another commune, stands not merely in vocal opposition to Cabet, but as an alter ego. The abolitionist represents a character who will live out his ideals and sacrifice for them as opposed to Cabet who will abandon his dream when challenged.

The inclusion of such a vibrant characterization of John Brown is only one sign of Katherine Brown’s serious intentions. *Diane* set out to be a brave book that meant to examine the key principles of American political philosophy, freedom and equality. Sadly, this short story writer lost control of such an ambitious plot and collapsed the

novel's political theory into a vapid love story. Diane's love for Robert Channing becomes the panacea for America's ills. Together, the couple continues to work for a better life out West (439), but that denouement disconnects from the previous 400 pages. Persis, John Brown, the Underground Railroad, and the commune drop from the plot as Diane and Robert Channing glide toward marriage.

Like Pauline Hopkins before her, Katherine Brown made unusual choices for a woman of her generation. She was more educated than the average white male of her time and certainly more academically inclined than the average woman. Then there is the artistic daring of writing a 400-page novel, after publishing short stories. The novel's length suggests that she had much to say about economic class conflict (primarily slavery), race relations, and women's role in society. Through the main plot and various sub-plots, readers may note how the novelist is fascinated by the actions of the outsider, the rebel. By novel's end, any reader awaiting strong condemnation of oppression languishes, disappointed. All political problems are subsumed by the love of the two protagonists, who marry and move out West to frontier America. *Diane* is a novel that literary critics label an "interesting failure" due to the incoherent conclusion.

The final novelist in this chapter, George Morgan (1854-1936), is of the same generation as Thomas Page, Pauline Hopkins, and Katherine Brown. A white Northerner, Morgan grew up in Delaware (Wallace 315) and graduated from Delaware College ("Morgan"). He worked as a journalist most of his life, editing three different Philadelphia newspapers ("Morgan").

A real historical slave revolt led by Nat Turner serves as the catalyst for events in *The Issue* (1904). *From Slavery to Freedom* describes Nat Turner's insurrection:

Upon the occasion of the solar eclipse in February, 1831, Turner decided that the time had come for him to lead his people out of bondage. He selected the Fourth of July as the day, but when he became ill he postponed the revolt until he saw another sign. On August 13, when the sun turned a 'peculiar greenish blue' he called the revolt for August 21. He and his followers began by killing Turner's master, Joseph Travis, and his family[...]. Within twenty-four hours sixty whites had been killed, and the revolt was spreading rapidly when the main group of Negroes were met and overpowered by state and federal troops. More than one hundred slaves were killed in the encounter and thirteen slaves and three free Negroes were immediately hanged. Turner was captured on October 30 and within less than two weeks, on November 11, he was executed.

The South was completely dazed by the Southampton uprising. (212-213)

Here is how George Morgan interprets the same event in *The Issue*: "There is a belief among the 'cotton-heads' of the South that on the thirteenth of August, 1831, God put his eye to the place where the sun should have been and watched the black people all day long" (Morgan 11). The "cotton-heads," of course, is a reference to the superstitious slaves who saw an omen in the sky on the day Nat Turner planned his insurrection. This is merely the first of many casual, racist descriptions throughout the novel. From the start, no motivation is given for why Turner killed; the most important consideration is the white children who almost died...for an unknown

reason.

Like the other novels in this chapter (*Red Rock*, *Diane*, *Hagar's Daughter*, *Winona*), George Morgan couches the political problems of slavery in terms of a love story between two white characters. The plot of *The Issue* focuses on the plight of two white children made orphans by Nat Turner's revolt. However, in 1904, the time of publication, George Morgan probably would have been considered quite liberal given his depiction of slaves. He does individualize them and recognizes that some are good and others, bad. Both white children have intense, lifelong attachments to their personal slaves who have as many adventures as the white characters. Just as Po and Pasque Le Butt, the white children and protagonists, are not affected by their near-death experiences, the slaves are not affected by enslavement. The two slaves given the most individual attention and the source of some plot action are Jule and John Peter, personal slaves of Po and Pasque. Jule is the nurturing, mother figure who will make any sacrifice for Po. Indeed, the most wrenching portrait of suffering is provided of her at a slave auction. (She was sold from Po twice by Po's unscrupulous grandfather.) A slave auction block is described:

'Fetch out the cattle...' 'Strip them,' demanded a dealer; and the men were laid bare...' Step up, gentlemen! Come, look them over! [...] Feel the muscles. Why they're ropes, gentlemen. Just thump that man's chest, if you please.'

Then came Jule. She was cut and bloody, and could walk only with the help of the jailer. She was still gagged. (135-136)

How does this scene affect any of the characters? Amazingly, no one—not even Jule

herself—reacts. No one sheds a tear for Jule; no attitude changes—*not even Jule's*. The narrator focuses on the fake auctioneer who has no claim to her sale as property. Jule's agony is effectively described, but no character within the text reacts to it. The dialogue centers on the uncaring white slave dealers. It is difficult to decipher the author's intention in this scene.

In *The Issue* George Morgan introduces readers to a male mulatto, a charming rascal. John Peter remains an enterprising character; much like Robert Johnson in *Iola Leroy*, he has a sharper business sense than his white owner. He is the only slave who makes money off of the Civil War, acting as a double agent for both armies (381). He marries a beautiful mulatto slave whose sale makes him run away from his owner, Pasque Le Butt. Le Butt gets him back by buying John Peter's wife for him (152). This marriage story is notable because it is the only one in all of the novels where a slave leaves a white owner for a love interest. Most of the slaves never leave their owners for any reason, and they have no lovers. Given the transitory nature of most slave unions (thanks to slave owners), and given the popularity of the myth that slaves had no emotional ties to family, the author challenges Thomas Page's views. Still, the protagonists never object to the buying and selling of black human beings, nor do they free them.

In short, what is the issue in *The Issue*? Lacking other obvious candidates, "slavery" appears to be the answer. Yet Morgan's advocacy of its existence or demise is ambiguous. The novel does not press the need for abolition; none of the characters are crushed by slavery—the slaves are enterprising survivors as are the

whites. Even Nat Turner's massacre is not cause for condemnation or celebration. As in the resolutions of *Diane* and *Red Rock*, the Civil War becomes the obstacle the white protagonists must overcome in order to marry and live in peace, but there is a curious silence about slavery's effects at the heart of *The Issue*.

Conclusion

Throughout *Iola Leroy*, slavery is held at some remove. The first glance at slavery is given in Uncle Daniel's slave cabin as the slaves plot to run to the Union army; the slaves *talk about* some of the horrors they have experienced but the scenes themselves are not dramatized. In chapters nine through twelve that take place on the Leroy plantation, the slaves are kept outside both of the mansion and the family drama. There is no interaction between the black slaves and the mulattos who were their owners and living as white people. In short, there is no full frontal exposure and condemnation of life on the plantation.

Harper's reticence about chattel slavery can be attributed to two factors, her target audience and her purpose for writing the novel. Harper expected *Iola Leroy* to be read by a black audience. Among African-Americans, the ex-slaves had little literacy rates and did not want to read about slavery, especially from an author who had been born free. The African-Americans born after 1865 had no nostalgia for a depiction of slavery; they were fully focused on a future without chains. Finally, mulattos had higher literacy rates than other blacks and would read such a novel, but they would be most interested in an encouraging tale, not one of degradation. In terms of a white readership, it would not include Thomas Page's fan club, the Southern apologists. A

white target audience would include those already sympathetic to black freedom struggle. Harper may have been trying to convince whites of blacks' humanity and therefore the need for black political equality. In terms of purpose, Harper remained steadfast throughout her life; she wrote to uplift African-Americans. She had written: "I belong to this race, and when it is down, I belong to a down race; when it is up, I belong to a risen race" (Graham xxxiii). From that standpoint, there is nothing to be gained by recreating slavery, and again remember that her fiction is competing with the autobiographical works of Frederick Douglass and other nonfiction slave narratives. She may have been intimidated to place her imagined world alongside such powerful reality. Most of all, Frances Harper wanted a novel to focus on the glorious possibilities of a new century.

Both white male novelists considered in this chapter were born prior to the Civil War also, and one had vivid recollections of antebellum life. Thomas Page and George Morgan were born in 1853 and 1854, respectively and Page especially was a staunch defender of the "Southern way of life". In contrast, George Morgan lived his life in the North, largely in Delaware and Pennsylvania, but racist attitudes know no borders. Although *The Issue* contains numerous racist pejoratives sprinkled throughout the narrative, such usage would not be unusual in the popular culture of 1904. On balance, Morgan demonstrates ambivalence towards slavery. *The Issue* also contains affecting portraits of white and black poor women. Morgan's Northern upbringing may have made him less insistent on the benefits of slavery. As the new century dawned, both Page and Morgan chose to turn "...back to the antebellum

period” when “...southern writers metamorphosed the planters into aristocrats whose lineages could be traced back to kings in Scotland and Ireland. To these literary glorifiers, the Civil War became a ‘lost cause’ which deserved a better fate, and Reconstruction became a wailing wall” (Quarles 147). Particularly Thomas Page, born into a wealthy Virginia family in 1853, may have had the most legitimate basis for nostalgia. He actively defended the southern aristocratic class, his class, to his powerful, Northern friends who included President Woodrow Wilson. His political goal was to have the planters restored to economic, social, and political prominence in the South while fending off incursions of power from poor whites and blacks. *Red Rock* became a bestseller. There was an enormous appetite for “moonlight and magnolias” and for reading about happy darkies who love being enslaved. Between the two white male novelists in this chapter we see one vigorously support the slave system while the other expressed more ambivalence.

Lastly, both Pauline Hopkins and Katherine Brown had novels published in 1904 and both supported abolition in their novels. The black female novelist, Hopkins, was obsessed with female mulattos and their quests to be accepted into white aristocracy. (Unlike Frances Harper’s mulattos, Hopkins’s never identified with slaves or black characters.) The white female author, Brown, spent much effort establishing the heroism of the blacks and whites who conducted the Underground Railroad. Neither author exposed the full dimensions of the horrors of slavery or gave more than a glancing indictment. It was easier for both novelists to conflate the slavery issue into love stories. Still, bestsellers were not produced.

What do readers see of slavery in this first generation of historical novelists? All spend little time in the antebellum South or portray the daily routine of slavery, the deadening, brutal work, the alienation from family, the beatings, the rapes, the deaths. Neither black novelist, both born in antebellum America, vividly describes slavery. Frances Harper is not interested in slavery as much as freedom, while Pauline Hopkins is not interested in slavery as much as beautiful mulattos being permitted to marry into white wealth. Both white Northerners, George Morgan and Katherine Brown, describe black characters in racially stereotypic terms, yet neither staunchly supported slavery. Brown, in fact, had strong abolitionist sentiment in *Diane*, whereas Morgan did not support or condemn abolition. The most popular during his lifetime, Thomas Page, almost single-handedly invented the myth of the happy slave plantation. The myth is dead and no one reads him now. Nevertheless all of the novelists felt the need to employ a love story that eclipsed all mention of slavery. Most reveal that more than a semblance of slavery survived decades after the Emancipation Proclamation.

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Chapter 3: 1906-1936

“Humph!’ grunted Crimp. ‘Seem like de 800 dollars you paid for free didn’t buy you nothin’ but trouble.’

...’Ah Lawd, honey, she said, ‘hit already been worth de price, jest knowin’ I’m my own’” (Bradford 49).

Whereas most of the first generation of American historical novelists who depicted slavery were born prior to the Civil War, this second generation of authors, publishing from 1906 to 1936, most likely learned about slavery from others who had lived through antebellum America. Their knowledge of slavery is second-hand and this difference affects how they write about the peculiar institution. In many ways, most of these novelists fully engage slavery, not timidly sketching over misery, as the first generation of authors. Yet, ironically, as a group, they experienced it less. Perhaps they permitted their imaginations to compensate for their knowledge gap and thereby created portraits of more depth, breadth and substance. Unlike the novelists in chapter 1, who may have been emotionally paralyzed by their burden to defend what they themselves *did* in antebellum America, these writers (except the first two) can be more objective about what had happened to ancestors. And when in doubt about the facts, they simply invented what they did not know.

In addition, the novelists in this chapter faced unique, momentous transformations in the U.S. and realignment of alliances internationally. Major events included

population migration from the South to the North (usually from rural to urban), World War I, the Harlem Renaissance artistic movement, race riots across the nation, and the Great Depression. Such profound changes affect what gets written and what gets read. These events diminish the need to look back at slavery through a fictional lens. Certainly fighting a global war focuses citizens on present dangers instead of past difficulties. Hence, in this 30-year period, only seven novelists look back at the slave past. Two novels were written in the first decade of the twentieth century, the first, *Dem Good Ole Times* by Sallie May Dooley was published in 1906, followed by *Bonnie Belmont* by John Cochran in 1907. Twenty years—and a world war—intervene between *Bonnie Belmont* and the publication of *Migrations* by Evelyn Scott (1927). The 1930s, the Depression years, saw a small flurry of fictional publications about slavery with *Fugitives of the Pearl* by John Paynter (1930), *Cold Blue Moon* by Howard Odum (1931), *Kingdom Coming* by Roark Bradford (1933), and *Black Thunder* by Arna Bontemps (1936).

From all evidence, *Dem Good Ole Times* is the sole publication of Sallie May Dooley. While the facts about her life remain otherwise elusive, the novel, published in 1906, reveals that her worldview is that of the rich, white, Southern aristocracy. She would have admired and may have been influenced by fellow Virginian Thomas Nelson Page who created the same grotesque myth in *Red Rock* published only eight years earlier. It is quite possible that Dooley is of the same age as Page and may have some slight childhood memory of plantation life. Both *Dem Good Ole Days* and *Red Rock* share a scene that is critical to their argument: slaves do not want freedom. In

Red Rock, Tarquin rejects his owner's offer of freedom and money to live in Philadelphia. Likewise, in *Dem Good Ole Days*, the slave owner is so grateful to Granddaddy for saving his child's life that he offers the slave his freedom plus "something to start on." The slave would rather remain with his owner (Dooley 24-25). Dooley extends beyond *Red Rock*'s reach in years, showing how black people were hurt by freedom. Granddaddy and his family suffer more physical privations—most notably, hunger—when they are cut loose from the plantation economy. Sallie May Dooley's purpose for writing the novel is crystal clear: because slave owners were decent people, enslavement of blacks did not hurt one bit.

Dooley's work is not so much a novel as much as it is a string of vignettes. A white female author assumes the voice of a male former slave in order to let the readers hear the "truth" from the slaves themselves. Another unique feature is the illustrations throughout: "Each of the eleven chapters is accompanied by a dainty full-page picture in colors, the work of Miss Suzanne Gutherz; and each is introduced by a decorated title-page and an appropriate heading in black and white by Miss Cora Parker," states the unsigned *Dial* review (457). In addition, it lacks plot and character development. Each chapter begins with a child asking her grandfather, an ex-slave, about life before the Civil War. Back then, he tells her, everything was a thousand times better; hence, the title, *Dem Good Ole Times*.

Like Thomas Page's *Red Rock* the novel has a bifocal vision, with one eye on the current political moment (circa 1906) and the other on the past (the antebellum South). According to Granddaddy [sic], if only "Mr. Roosumfeltum un dem folks in

Washington” would take the advice of the displaced Southern planters, the country would be fine (“Dooley” 457). The reference to President Theodore Roosevelt and Booker T. Washington (Dooley 26) sets the novel’s present time between 1901 and 1906. Granddaddy tells his granddaughter, “Dem wuz times to live in; dese de times fur free niggers to strut bout wid a empty stummuck doin noth’n...” (Dooley 3). Because of freedom, “niggers” feel bold, but all freedom provides is hunger. During slavery, “Evy fambly had a nice cabin to deyself, wid a yard fur chickens, un a little garden fur vegables. We had a plenty to eat [...].” Presently, however, blacks have been driven insane by their independence. “Now de country is full on um; pears to me like dey all crazy.” On the plantation, everyone was so happy that they laughed and sang all day (Dooley 5). Granddaddy laments, “Now dey done sot us free, pears like dey doe know what to do wid us, no mo’n we know what to do wid ourself.” The only positive result of freedom *might* be education for blacks. “Mebby it do some good to larn de cullured people fur to read un write, so’s dey can’t cheat un squingle one a nur [...].” Education might restrain black criminal behavior but evidently these same educated blacks will never realize all the ways whites have robbed blacks. For an unexplained reason, education will appeal to a precious few, like Booker T. Washington who will be “[...] powerful lonesome, caze dey ‘bove dey own culler un ay nigh retch up to de white folks” (26). Clearly, education for blacks is of less importance than being happy with other ignorant people. Granddaddy also begs his granddaughter, “don’t you niver low nobordy ‘suade you to go Norf, fur to live. Mebby you gits mo wages, but you ay niver know what a day’s wuck is,

ontwell you draw de Yankees' money.'" Yankees are stingy, the climate is horrid, and she'll freeze. "'De Souf is de place fur quality white folks, un fus-class darkies [...].'" Virginia is the only heaven on earth (26-27). The South's perfection contrasted with the North's inferiority is the only thing that will not change over time.

The antebellum South was paradise because of the angelic slaveholders, particularly "ole Missus." When the slave master brought his bride to the plantation, the slaves assembled on the lawn to pay their respects. She was dressed in white, as was her soul, and determined to make the slaves happy (3). Whenever the slaves got into trouble, they were to come to her first and she always resolved the difficulty (4). True to her angelic persona, Ole Missus conducted Sunday school for the slaves where all enjoyed themselves (41). Each day in slavery was filled with countless enjoyments for everybody; the "Marster's sons" were hilarious and chapter 11 is spent detailing their pranks, which were all good, clean fun. No mulatto babies appear in this novel. Granddaddy had heard that all slaves did not have such a rollicking good time: "' Cose dar wuz some bad Marsters; but whar dar wuz one bad one, dar wuz mo'n a hundred good ones....'" Granddaddy is upset that currently "...cullured folks ay got no notion how things use to wuz, when de bes white folks in de worl wuz we-all's friens.'" (149). That is why he passes his insights onto his granddaughter after supper every evening.

Dooley's romantic vision of plantation life must have been what she wanted; she wanted slaves to be content with their lot. Indeed, it refuses to foreshadow the Civil War at all. If the slaves were so passionate about remaining slaves, wouldn't they

have fought off the Union army? *Dem Good Ole Days* never hints at the degradation of slavery: the murders, beatings, rapes (and the resultant mulatto issue), the brutality of ceaseless work, separated families—in short, the exploitation. Granddaddy has no opinion about the Ku Klux Klan nor does the novel suggest that any slave desired freedom; no runaways or insurrectionists appear here despite Gabriel Prosser and Nat Turner being Virginians too. Most of all, Granddaddy cannot acknowledge in “dem good ole days” the existence of any free black success stories such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, or even Frances E. W. Harper.

While *Dem Good Ole Days* was not a bestseller like *Red Rock*, its one-paragraph review, in *The Dial*, was favorable. Many wanted the myth of the contented slave to be true to the point of turning back the clock and reinstating slavery.

A year after the publication of *Dem Good Ole Days*, a novel was published, *Bonnie Belmont*, that was similar in construction but a polar opposite in its politics. Novelist John Salisbury Cochran was born in Colerian Township in Belmont County, Ohio on September 9, 1841 and died on March 26, 1926. As a white male of some economic means, Cochran became a lawyer and was a judge by the publication of *Bonnie Belmont* (Coyle 124). Prior to 1900, Cochran had written “Farm Scraps,” a collection of notes about his childhood, and friends loved it so much, he said, that they pressed him to self-publish it, which he did (Cochran N. Pg.). In addition, the lawyer in him appeared uncomfortable with casting his memoir as fiction: “There is nothing related in this book that is not founded upon facts. Though the names of some of the characters are hidden, they are all real” (Cochran N. Pg.). In his preface,

Cochran sought to establish his motives for writing *Bonnie Belmont* and that he was not exploiting his town or his memories for cash.

Cochran never sought to be a novelist and his lack of intention shows in lack of plot over the course of the book and in his lack of paragraphs. Remember: Cochran's friends had prompted him to self-publish; publishing houses did not seek this work. A series of scenes and descriptions of Bonnie Belmont County, Ohio begin the book; one to two pages in length, the "chapters" describe log cabins, schooner wagons, the author's parents, a stagecoach, his first love, and his early education in a one-room schoolhouse. Seventeen chapters elapse before the book's central concern emerges, slavery and the abolition movement in which Cochran participated as a young man in the late 1850s. The second half of *Bonnie Belmont* does have a narrative based on the true events of how slaves' lives became entwined with the Cochran family.

Judge Cochran remains pleased with the personal roles he played as an abolitionist, and he remains proud of the sacrifices his neighbors made to end slavery. Published when he was 66-years-old, *Bonnie Belmont* proclaims that the Civil War was not a regional struggle for over economic dominance as Southern apologists insist, but it was fought over the *personhood* of the slaves. The idea that slaves were first human beings motivated young Cochran to fight slavery. Cochran casts himself as an observer and participant as a first-person narrator, a child who witnesses a slave auction. The chapter "The Slave Auction Block" begins on a Saturday morning in June in Bonnie Belmont County, Ohio when the author, then a boy, and a neighbor witness a slave family being sold to different owners (Cochran 50). The slaves in

question included an older mulatto woman, her beautiful mulatto 20-year-old daughter, her dark son, and another white-looking man. Since the young narrator cannot understand how the brother and sister can have such different color complexions, he asks an elderly neighbor, a miller and a Quaker, who explains, “This daughter was possibly the result of a forced co-habitation of some rich slave owner with his slave, a thing too brutally common in those days, as the sale of this three-fourths Anglo-Saxon child gave evidence.” The narrator does not understand why the beautiful young slave was crying, and the neighbor explains that the slaves are sad because the family had belonged to the same owner and would now be sold to different owners to pay creditors (51). The Quaker, Joshua Cope, then describes the brutality of slavery—the inhuman workload and conditions, the continual beatings, the rapes of the female slaves, the separation of families. As the young narrator and his neighbor converse, the 65-year-old slave woman is examined by a prospective buyer who runs his fingers along her teeth and punches her side and back to see how fleshy she is. The boy admits that he would hate to see his mother treated that way (53). The Quaker neighbor wins the bidding war for the older woman by paying \$125--to set her free. Matilda Taylor is overjoyed at her good fortune; Matilda’s daughter begs Joshua Cope to buy her too, which he attempts (55).

As the auction proceeds, the slaves’ backgrounds are given for the benefit of prospective buyers and, of course, the readers. “Aunt” Tilda’s children are Lucinda and Mose and all three were described as “good, obedient, and industrious.” They had belonged to a rich woman in Virginia who had died. They were bought by

another man who had to sell them also. Sam Alexander is the fourth slave who belonged to a neighboring plantation. Sam too is a good worker and well educated, having kept his owner's accounting books, "[b]ut gentleman, he is a hard nigger to keep your eyes on. He has run away twice..." (56). Needless to say, the auction breaks apart the family and the lovers, Sam Alexander and Lucinda Taylor.

Although Joshua Cope tries to outbid Maxwell, a notorious gambler who intends to use Lucinda as a concubine, Cope loses at \$2100, lacking the resources. Little John Cochran buys Lucinda gingerbread in an effort to stop her tears and gives her directions to his house if she wants to run away (58). Still, the two others in the group are auctioned to plantations in the Deep South. Lucinda's brother, Mose, is sold for \$900 and Lucinda's lover, Sam Alexander, is put on the same boat. No sooner than the ship departs, Sam, an excellent swimmer, jumps overboard; the dangerous river and the night help him elude his captors. Young John Cochran on his way to Sunday school alone discovers Sam hiding in a cemetery and helps Sam to safety on an abolitionist's farm. Mose disappears from the plot until the novel's end.

It is "The Auction Block" chapter that separates *Bonnie Belmont* from *Dem Good Ole Times* and the first generation historical novels. (Only George Morgan's *The Issue* contains a scene a half page long where Jule is on the auction block.) John Cochran uses the auction block as setting, the moment and place when white owners become inhuman or saints in the case of Quakers. The auction block symbolizes the barrier of separation for parents from children, siblings and spouses from each other, lovers and friends. Family histories and even personal identities are transformed the

minute a slave is led off of the block. Despite these dire consequences for the slave, an auction is a capricious affair. The price of the auctioned object is not fixed as in a store; a slave's worth is guessed at and determined by the money in the bidders' pockets. Historical novelists of various races, ages, and genders have avoided depicting the auction block. This novel is one of two in this chapter that dramatizes a slave auction.

Maxwell's triumph at Lucinda's purchase is short-lived. When he leaves her to attend another auction in a nearby town before heading to Mississippi (63), Lucinda is ferried across the Ohio River and is hidden by the Underground Railroad. The abolitionists believe they have won an important victory with Lucinda's escape. When Maxwell returns from the slave auction in the neighboring town and discovers Lucinda has escaped, he enlists the help of a deputy marshal to track her with a bloodhound (75). The bloodhound runs directly to her garret hideaway and they tie her up and argue over whether she should walk behind the horses or ride. During the slave hunters' argument, Lucinda decides to make a run for it. She realizes that the bloodhound may attack her, but when she considers her future, life as a concubine in Mississippi and never seeing her loved ones again, she leaps over a grassy bank, pulling the deputy out of his saddle and breaking his arm. The bloodhound follows but he is axed by one of three men hiding in the bushes. Sam Alexander and two abolitionists had been following Lucinda's journey. One abolitionist fights Maxwell, breaking his jaw. The other abolitionist holds two horses for Sam and Lucinda to ride to Quaker Cope's farm and hide (82). There, Lucinda is secreted in a comfortable

room built into a hillside while Sam flees to Oberlin, Ohio via the Underground Railroad. In two days Lucinda will follow him. In the interim her mother still lived with the Copes (83-85). Slavery had almost separated this family, but three of the four were reunited at the Cope farm, albeit briefly as it turns out.

At this point, Cochran stops the narrative and reprints a portion of Lincoln's second inaugural speech (86), presents a brief overview of the history of American slavery (155), and the history of the abolition movement with national and local leaders listed (156-159).

While in college, the author joined the Union army (175). Before leaving for the war, Cochran strolls by a church "Where a wedding of colored folks was taking place" (176). Cochran recognizes the extraordinary-looking couple, Lucinda Taylor and Sam Alexander, and after the ceremony reminds them of his role in their escapes. Eight years has changed Cochran and they don't recognize the former little boy, now a man (177). They tell Cochran of their future plans: they will visit Aunt Tilda before returning to their home in Cleveland where Sam heads a church. Also, they provide a recap of their lives since fleeing slavery. After leaving Belmont County, both Lucinda and Sam arrive in Oberlin and are cared for by Friends. Sam is educated in the ministry and Lucinda becomes a teacher. Fearing capture, they change their names, leaving Aunt Tilda no way to trace them. Nor do they inquire about Aunt Tilda for fear of recapture. As the war begins, they feel free to marry "under their true names" (178).

The last third of the novel focuses on what became of Tilda's son Mose. He was

sold to a sugar plantation in Louisiana and earns the respect of his owners and other slaves. When the civil War begins, slaves on the sugar plantation leave for New Orleans, despite the benevolent care of the owners: “It was singular how quickly many of the plantations were depopulated and left desolate, with not a soul on them. Many of these afterward returned to the more humane masters and took employment under the wage, or cropping system, which followed the war. The more inhuman masters were abandoned altogether by their slaves and were compelled to sell out, or were eventually broken up financially” (211). Mose joins the Union army, comes across a dying Confederate Capt. Maxwell, former slave trader, and asks about Lucinda’s whereabouts before giving Maxwell a drink. Maxwell tells him that Lucinda had escaped (211-212). After the war, Mose returns to the run-down Copeland plantation, now only inhabited by the owners who are delighted to see him (213).

The sharecropping system is then described. Mr. Copeland wants to start farming again but he needs workers. Mose tells him that most of his former slaves live in New Orleans, so Copeland pays Mose to go bring the ex-slaves back to the plantation to work. Copeland will supply seed to put down the crops and he will split the profits with the workers at harvest as compensation. Mose returns from New Orleans with half of the former slaves and becomes a foreman on the reconstituted plantation (214).

In the final section of *Bonnie Belmont* that focuses on Mose, we see that sharecropping is difficult but possible with honest planters. The novelists who are

slavery's apologists usually have the slaves never leaving the plantation during the Civil War and essentially willing to remain slaves after it. The Copelands, who had proven themselves as "benevolent" owners to Mose, were deserted by all slaves during the war, yet Mose, who was highly respected by fellow slaves, went to New Orleans, and even he could convince only half of the slaves to work for wages, under "the new contract system," for "good owners". Cochran implies that splitting the profits worked because Mose stayed to harvest two crops before searching for his family. Honesty and equitable dealing in work, something not tried in slavery, paid off for all parties.

In the interim, when John Cochran, narrator, returns from the war, he finds his home mortgaged because of his father's death and his mother's and sisters' inability to work the land (215). The author loses much of the family farm and decides to study law (230). During his second year of law school, a dying Aunt Tilda, mother of Lucinda and Mose, summons him home (243).

Aunt Tilda has never stopped grieving over being separated from Mose, and the arrival of Lucinda and Cochran do not lessen her grief at not seeing her son before she dies (244). While praying, Tilda exclaimed, "'Dar is my Mose! He am come at last!' Mose had indeed come. She at last beheld him in the flesh, as she had so faithfully declared she would." Tilda dies while hugging Mose (245). Mose had harvested two crops for Copeland under the "new contract system" before seeking his mother and sister in Ohio. After Aunt Tilda's funeral, Cochran let Mose know that his mother never wanted him to return to the South (246).

The novel ends with the “Death of Mose.” John Cochran observes, “Recently, as I was standing one beautiful autumn afternoon in the City of Martins Ferry, I observed an unpretentious funeral cortege slowly wending its way up the street toward me.” He was told Mose Taylor had died and “I took off my hat and stood with bowed head and meditative silence as they passed by to lay him beside ‘Aunt Tilda,’ who had been peacefully resting for forty years.” Onlookers were puzzled about his reverence toward a former slave because they had no idea of “...what scenes, pleasant and sorrowful, were passing in rapid panoramic view before my memory’s vision.” He revealed that both mother and son were reunited in heaven (291).

Bonnie Belmont contains the most humanizing portrait of slaves and the most ardent abolitionist sympathies of any novel perhaps with the exception of Harper’s *Iola Leroy*. It certainly stands as an alternate universe to Dooley’s *Dem Good Ole Times* published the year before.

Although *Bonnie Belmont* condemns all aspects of slavery and provides a human portrait of the slaves, the book could have had little impact. Undoubtedly distribution was limited as a self-published work. Not one review exists, and few copies of the novel are available today in libraries.

After *Dem Good Ole Times* (1906) and *Bonnie Belmont* (1907), no novelist appears to have written about slavery for twenty years. Most of this fictional silence about slavery between 1907 and 1927 can be attributed to the entrance of the United States into World War I in April 1917. Postwar America became more conservative in outlook, desiring “a return to ‘normalcy’” as Republican presidential candidate

Warren G. Harding explained. According to Historian Benjamin Quarles, “Harding meant that the country needed a rest from international involvements and from domestic reforms, a return to the good old days” (191). For too many Americans a return to “dem good ole days” meant a return of the KKK:

Of all the expressions of postwar intolerance, the one that afflicted the Negro The most was the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan. The new Klan had been organized late in November, 1915, near Atlanta, Georgia, by William J. Simmons. Until the end of the war, its numbers were small, but it then grew rapidly, until it had a membership of 100,000 by the end of 1919. The new Klan, unlike the old, did not confine its activities to the South but operated from Maine to California. For a few years in the mid-twenties, the Klan was powerful. Its revenues, coming primarily from the initiation fees and dues of more than 4,000,000 members, made it a wealthy organization [...]. In 1925, with the government’s permission, it paraded in the nation’s capital, marching down Pennsylvania Avenue and past the White House. But its decline was soon hastened by the uncovering of extensive fraud by high-ranking officials. (Quarles 192)

But the “new” Klan was not clashing with unarmed slaves; they encountered returning black soldiers from World War I. Many black soldiers who had gone abroad to fight in segregated units for their country had great ambivalence about even returning to America (Franklin 477). Not accidentally, the returning servicemen’s intolerance of overt racism played a part in the more than twenty race riots that broke

out in the summer of 1919 from Omaha, Nebraska to Longview, Texas (Quarles 192-193). The nation had changed dramatically in the twenty years between *Bonnie Belmont* (1907) and *Migrations: an arabesque in histories* (1927).

Some people seem born to rebel against the status quo—no matter what period in history they appear—and Evelyn Scott is one of these. Born Elsie Dunn in Clarksville, Tennessee, on January 17, 1893, Evelyn was born into a “family with wealth and aristocratic, artistic inclinations [...]. With her social background and striking physical beauty...she was abundantly equipped to play the expected role of Southern belle. She revolted” (Contemporary Authors Online; Welker). Private tutors educated Scott until she was sixteen; she then attended Newcomb School of Art and Tulane University (Carrigg). From the start she was in “...rebellion against the South in which she grew up, criticizing the effect of the cultural and social conditions on the blacks, the poor whites, and especially the young women of her own class” (Carrigg). At twenty, Elsie Dunn changed her name to Evelyn Scott when she left New Orleans with Frederick Wellman, then a married dean at Tulane, who had changed his name to Cyril Kay-Scott. The couple lived in Brazil, Algeria, France, Portugal, Spain, Canada, and England. She divorced Kay-Scott upon returning to the United States in 1919 and then married John Metcalfe of Britain (Carrigg). Scott received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1932 (Welker). A prolific author of twenty books, she began publishing short stories at fourteen years and her novels received favorable reviews despite her experimental, stream-of-consciousness technique (Carrigg; Contemporary Authors Online; Welker). Her popularity waned with the

years nevertheless.

By the 1950s, Scott had apparently been forgotten by the reading public, and the literary projects of her final two decades went unpublished; she died in obscurity in New York with her second husband, the writer John Metcalfe. In the years since her death, particularly in the 1970s, a few of her novels returned to print, signaling a partial return to favor of a woman once hailed as the author of *The Wave*, considered by some to be the most important novel ever written on the American Civil War. (Contemporary Authors Online)

She died on August 3, 1963 (Contemporary Authors Online).

Migrations: an arabesque in histories (1927) lacks a conventional plot; instead, three sub-plots entwine in a fictional arabesque. Two brothers fight over the last remnants of a dying plantation as the patriarch's health declines. The patriarch has a child with a house slave that the family never acknowledges. The second sub-plot involves the brothers who vie for the affections of two sisters. The book's title derives from the third sub-plot, the fact that all main characters wander, to escape the past and create new identities in a new place, California.

The novel opens with Edwin George ruminating about his family's desperate financial straits in Tennessee in 1850. His father, Capt. George, runs a country school to support the family because the tobacco plantation makes no money. Capt. George has remained a ne'er-do-well who acquires land in Tennessee after losing his party's nomination for governor of Virginia; he obtains land given to white males with money (Scott 3). Edwin is also disgusted with his older brother Thomas, who

successfully courted and married Melinda McGuire, the woman Edwin had wanted to marry. As the eldest, Thomas was given a medical school education and will inherit the plantation. Thomas has offered to establish Edwin in a drugstore after their father dies since Edwin has not been educated in any trade (1-3).

As Edwin stumbles around the dilapidated plantation in a funk over his stunted future prospects, he wanders into the slave quarters and was greeted by "...Fanny, a young mulatto, eighteen or nineteen years of age, who nursed a baby.... The infant, though woolly-headed, protruded a smooth little pink-white face which suggested, upon the paternal side, a pale parentage." Edwin instantly suspects that the baby's father is the overseer's or his own father's. He marvels at the possibility: "...Fanny did not look depraved, and she was a negress. How were such intimacies effected...How could Father have done such a thing...." (12). Fanny realizes that Edwin suspects the baby is his father's. "O! Massa know straight along Ah ain't tol nobody, she comforted herself. Later, she had been consoled by the advice of her mother, who had called her 'lucky.' She could not but take pride in an offspring so begotten, and she hoped that the Captain's toleration of her would secure her an easier existence." Fanny had hinted to the overseer that she expected privileges (13).

Life is complicated on the plantation. Fanny admires the "type of white man" the Captain is. He avoids her publicly and "... had approached her only a few times in the year past, and always covertly" since he respected his wife (17). Capt. George understands that "[i]t was not lust that had driven him to Fanny [...]. Rather it was Fanny's adolescent admiration of his character. He had not been able to resist her.

Looking back, he was ashamed to recognize the value he had set on such simple tribute.” He found no reason to admit the baby is his although the baby resembled him (18). The Captain believes, “Negroes, notwithstanding the white influence, retained the unmoral outlook of savagery” (27).

Readers cannot help but see slavery as a destructive force that does not help anyone, white or black. The main characters, those who do not just drop out of the narrative, die a slow death due to efforts to profit from ill-gotten gains. When the novel starts, none of the characters engage in productive work. The George family patriarch teaches Latin, a dead language, to country boys since the plantation’s tobacco crop was not profitable despite constant work by slaves and overseer. Capt. George’s sons largely are waiting for their father to die although they know already the plantation will not be a boon. Inheritance of the plantation and the accompanying slaves create an intense sibling rivalry; the mortgaged land is left to the eldest son, who was already advantaged by receiving a medical school education and the wife that Edwin, the rejected one, had pined for. Because of Edwin’s disillusionment with his family, he quickly assumes that Fanny’s baby belongs to Capt. George—something that the oldest, privileged son never accepts. Edwin thinks the worse of everyone always, and his attitude never helps him.

For the slaves, this “arabesque in histories,” as the subtitle suggests, is also deadly. Prior to her pregnancy, Fanny had been promised in marriage to Silas, a favorite slave of his owners because of his powerful physique yet docile nature. Fanny’s mulatto baby drives Silas insane. He obsesses over finding the father and killing him—even

though he knows that murder of a white man means death for him. Eventually he runs away from his marriage. With Silas' rejection and disappearance, Fanny eventually loses her mind and neglects the baby until it dies. Since Fanny is of no use insane, she, along with her elderly mother and another decrepit man, are the only slaves not given to Judge Gilbert upon Capt. George's death when the sons lose the mortgage. In time Edwin sells Fanny in New Orleans to buy his fiancée a wedding trousseau. Fanny's interaction and intermixture with his family over the years or his family's responsibility for her family's dissolution means nothing to him.

The mulatto baby, never named, has no real home during its brief existence. Capt. George, Sara George, and Thomas George ignore the baby, as if it didn't exist. Edwin suspects who fathered the child but his belief does not create a family tie or responsibility. For Silas the existence of the mulatto baby meant that he could have no relationship with a black woman that a white man would respect and it unhinged a heretofore alpha male. In contrast, Fanny's mother, the baby's grandmother, saw the baby only as a possibility for Fanny to receive special privileges during field work; the baby is a pawn in a game even to its grandmother. None of the characters acknowledges truths about their relationships with each other and the entire society sinks under the weight of those denials.

The second half of the novel focuses on Thomas and his wife who travel to Panama and then California to start life anew after breaking up the business partnership with Edwin (191, 207). All the characters we have come to know in the first 50% of the novel disappear. From pages 279-317 new characters are introduced.

One of them is a runaway slave who is lynched (317).

At the time of *Migration's* publication in 1927, Evelyn Scott was in high repute. Lillian Smith, author of *Strange Fruit*, a book about lynching, “referred to Evelyn Scott as ‘the most brilliant and profound woman of contemporary English-American letters.’” Critics heralded her Civil War novel, *The Wave*, in particular. Joseph Warren Beach thought the second and third novels in her historical trilogy about American life between 1850 and 1914, the “most monumental, and in many ways, the most serious of such composite views attempted in our time” (Carrigg). Yet *Migrations* received mixed reviews. For example, Mary Ross writing in the *New York Herald Tribune* states: “To readers in search of a ‘story’ with a beginning, middle, end and moral, ‘Migrations’ will be disappointing and sometimes confusing. It is frankly fragmentary; it gives only glimpses, and broken glimpses, of an America two generations ago” (“Scott” 666). Likewise, the *Boston Transcript* faults *Migrations'* structure:

The book is remarkable in many ways, but it contains three long stories rather than a carefully planned novel. Mrs. Scott manages to illuminate the past. But there arises often in the minds of her readers some uncertainty as to her reasons for telling her story in such a wandering manner. Possibly her method of narration is intentional. It suggests research, the study of old diaries and papers, and is not in actuality a novel. Rather it is a very interesting historical account of journeys and arrivals. (“Scott” 666)

The lack of a conventional plot, where one event leads to another, makes *Migrations*

a muddled character study that was disliked by critics and the general readership alike (Carrigg). If, by writing *Migrations*, Evelyn Scott is suggesting that “human life” is *not* like the plots of typical novels but is more circuitous than linear, she should be pleased with her work, although her readership was not as appreciative of this insight.

Like John Cochran who published before him, John Henry Paynter (1862-1947) wrote a fictionalized family history in *Fugitives of the Pearl* (1930). According to the family’s genealogy, he is a grandchild of John Brent and Elizabeth Edmonson, slaves in Washington, D.C. who eventually bought their own freedom (Paynter 4-6).

Elizabeth Edmonson is one of fourteen children who are hired out as slaves to various rich white people in Washington. After John and Elizabeth marry, they function as accountants to the younger Edmonson siblings, helping them save their money to buy manumission (Paynter 37). The goal of the Edmonsons and Brents is always freedom. To that end, many in the family participated in a real-life escape attempt on the Pearl, a schooner docked in the Potomac. Before some attain freedom, half the family witnesses the horrors of slavery in the Deep South.

In *Fugitives of the Pearl* (1930), readers get to witness, through the travails of the Brent and Edmonson families, the differences between urban and rural slavery and the differences between slavery in the North and the South. John H. Paynter, grandson of John and Elizabeth Brent and longtime resident of Washington, D.C., begins this tale in the nation’s capital, a city built by the toil of slaves. The enslaved Brent family, an extension of rich white British immigrants, lives as neighbors of George Washington’s Mt. Vernon plantation, which suggests again how the start of

this family, the start of this novel, and the start of this country is a slave past.

Slavery operated differently, depending on the region, and by 1835, when John Brent was an adult, he could hire himself out as a slave, keep a small portion of the proceeds, and give the lion's share to his owner. This custom seemed prevalent in the Baltimore-Washington urban centers. In *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Douglass worked as a ship's caulker on the docks in Fells Point, Baltimore and divided his earnings with his owner (Douglass 102). Similarly John Brent, grandson of the Englishman, labored in the War Department in Washington, D.C., and after hours, served at aristocratic parties. By the age of 25, he had saved \$600 to buy his freedom. Then he saved and bought his elderly father for \$800 (Paynter 4). When he fell in love with Elizabeth Edmonson, he sawed wood at night in addition to his day jobs in order to buy her freedom before marrying her (6). Indeed, Mother Edmonson counseled her eight daughters never to marry until they were free and could have complete control over their children's lives (6). Because of their industriousness and business acumen, John and Elizabeth Brent become leaders of Elizabeth's fourteen siblings.

The saga begins on April 13, 1848 in Washington, DC when three male slaves hear celebratory talk about liberty at a rally in honor of the French Revolution (17). The slaves yearn for freedom and want "to do something" but not like Nat Turner in Virginia (24). One of the trio, Daniel Bell, has met the captain of the Pearl, a schooner docked nearby (25-26). The captain is an abolitionist who is willing to take as many slaves aboard who want to flee (28, 58). Samuel Edmonson, another in the

trio, is excited by the news and tells his parents that he will board the boat for Philadelphia, and he'll be joined by three of his brothers and two sisters (42-43). That night seventy-seven slaves board the Pearl and the ship debarks, but by morning, Washington is in an uproar about the escaped slaves and a posse forms (53, 66). A free black man who had not been paid to help cart the runaways' belongings to the wharf is confronted by the posse, threatened with violence and reveals the slaves' escape plan (68-72). A steamboat is sent to overtake the Pearl with orders to "bring back the fugitives dead or alive, as well as those who had aided and abetted their flight" (74). Meanwhile, the Pearl makes very slow progress to the open sea due to a storm. The steamboat overtakes the anchored Pearl and all on the schooner are arrested and many are beaten (85-89). Samuel Edmonson wants to die for leading his family to such misery (114).

Reactions to the escape attempt and capture vary according to race. The black community gathers at the Brent house to decide what to do next and figure out who betrayed the escape (100). Among whites, the fugitives were discussed in every house. The whites could not understand the slaves' flight and thought the slaves should be sold south as punishment. The grand talk of liberty at the rally a few days earlier had been forgotten (105).

The ship's crew is imprisoned for four years before being pardoned by President Fillmore after Charles Sumner pleads their cause (115). Since slaves had no legal recourse, being property, their punishment for escape was sale. At least forty of them are shipped south to be sold in New Orleans (132). Bruin and Hall, slave traders from

Alexandria, Virginia who set their price at \$4500, consider all six Edmonsons as a bundle. The Edmonsons' former owners could not raise that amount and the traders will not sell them for less (112). The entire Edmonson family are beside themselves with grief (130).

The fugitive slaves of the Pearl attract national attention, particularly in the abolitionist movement. William Lloyd Garrison at the American Anti-Slavery Society wants to challenge the runaways' capture in court by questioning the legality of slavery in Washington, D.C. (125-126). Only the Anti-Slavery Society and the fugitives seem sensitive to the irony of slavery's existence in the nation's capital.

However, the family would soon discover that slavery in the nation's capital was a pale comparison to the horrors experienced "In the New Orleans Slave Pen," chapter 18. The Edmonsons see a side of slavery that they never have before. Everyday, at 10 am the slaves are led to the show rooms.

Walking out into the yard of the place, Emily was horrified to find herself face to face with men and women of all ages and stages of physical development and every degree of wretchedness. This, the yard of the pen, was a sort of feeder for the showroom and in its function, very much like the stockroom of some large mercantile establishment, through which the goods of the salesroom, removed through the ordinary channels of business, are replenished. (145)

The moment a slave was sold from the showroom, the yard was scanned for another slave whom, "after a scrubbing and polishing, was placed on exhibit to undergo the

preliminary tortures of inspection and the hazard of strange and uncertain ownership” (145-146). “Husbands torn away from loving companions, children, tender and irresponsible, deprived of needed care and protection and forced to spend a novitiate of sorrow and hardship under a system the most accursed and depraved human wickedness can conceive.” One of the sisters comes close to being sold for \$1500 but her sad demeanor made the buyer reject her. The slave trader slaps her for losing a sale (147-148). As for the Edmonson men, on the night of their arrival in New Orleans, their hair and faces were shaved, and they exchanged their clothes for blue jeans (149). The Edmonson brothers looked so different that “their sisters scarcely knew them.” They were made to stand on a porch to attract the attention of pedestrians. After attracting a potential purchaser, the slave “was taken into the showroom and subjected to an examination in much the same way as if they were a horse or cow” (150).

An unknown, unmet brother and slave, Hamilton Edmonson, becomes the younger Edmonsons’ intercessor from the worst aspects of the slave pens. “Hamilton Edmonson had been sold in the New Orleans slave market about the year 1840 when he took the name of his purchaser, and was thereafter known as Hamilton Taylor.” He is a cooper by trade and keeps a percentage of his wages. He had bought himself for \$1,000. “He continued in the cooperage business, was highly respected and became comparatively wealthy, having a place of business on Girard near Camp Street” (151). Hamilton had reached New Orleans in the same manner as his younger siblings. When he had attempted to flee from his owner, he was captured in

Baltimore and sold south (154). When the siblings are reunited with Hamilton, none regret that they had tried to escape slavery (155). Hamilton arranges with the slave trader for the girls to spend the nights at his home. There, they eat and sleep well, unlike in the overcrowded lodging room of the slave pen where “they were forced to sleep on the bare floor, with only a dirty blanket for covering” (157). Each morning, returning to the slave pen, the sisters see gangs of slave women of various ages cleaning the city streets. Hamilton seeks “good owners” for his siblings (159).

Life in the slave pens was brutal for the slaves of all ages. “During this time several persons were whipped to death for various infractions of discipline...” (157). Any slave who fell asleep in the daytime is beaten. The children who had to stand idly for hours were often sleepy. Mary and Emily keep watch and wake them when an overseer approaches. An engaged slave couple is sold to different owners but become so depressed by their separation that they stop working. Both slaves are returned and the owners request refunds. The slave trader was so angry that the male slave was beaten every night for a week and the woman was also whipped upon return (157-158). The dehumanizing slave pens are displayed as the cesspools they were.

Presumably, through stories passed down orally through this family’s generations, readers are taken in to slave pens that the black novelists in chapter 1, Harper and Hopkins, resisted including. Among the white novelists, only Cochran in *Bonnie Belmont* and Morgan’s *The Issue* mentioned slave auctions at all. None revealed what it was like to live in a hog-pit for weeks, awaiting sale. “Mr. Paynter dramatizes

one of the incidents of the heartless separation of children from their parents and husbands from wives who were later compelled to accept other mates purely in the interest of slave breeding” (“Book Review” 242). Knowing that many of his family members endured such events may have emboldened John Paynter. Perhaps, he thought, “If they can live through it, I can at least attest to their sufferings,” a suffering ignored by many novelists then and now.

After three weeks in New Orleans, the slave trader sends the slaves north to protect his property from a yellow fever epidemic (160). The Edmonsons arrive back at a Baltimore slave pen where the Edmonson parents and the Brents spend day and night with the two Edmonson sisters in the pen (176-177). In the interim, Bruin and Hill, the slave trader partnership, dissolves, and they tell the Edmonson parents that they will sell the sisters for \$2250 after a month (180-181). Because Bruin’s little daughter befriends Mary and Emily Edmonson, the Edmonson women are not sold south despite the family not collecting enough money by the deadline (184).

The contorted logic by the Christian slave traders is also illustrated. For example, Bruin, the last owner of Emily and Mary, does not sell them despite the family not raising the money by the deadline. He postpones sale for his little daughter’s sake; she had come to like the Edmonson women. Although Bruin claims to be a Christian, his religion was not the catalyst for mercy. His conscience was not troubled by his occupation because “[t]he highest authorities on Christian ethics in the land had justified the slave traffic, and not only so, but were in many instances its direct beneficiaries and the recipient of its profits...” (Paynter 193).

Paul Edmonson, the sisters' father, appeals to the Anti-Slavery Society in New York City (187). The Society does not have the money to give him but they send him to Rev. Henry Ward Beecher who assembles his congregation that very night and in a half an hour \$2200 was raised for the Edmonson sisters' liberation (188-189). The sisters were freed within the week (191) and their brothers eventually make long journeys to freedom also.

The novel poignantly illustrates what it must be like to be a slave, by definition a person who owns nothing, not even self, and then to be told the price of freedom. When one does not have one dollar, how does it feel to be told that for six hundred of them, one could be free from enslavement? Imagine the grief that propelled Paul Edmonson to abolitionists in New York City to rescue his daughters for \$2250. And imagine his amazement when Rev. Beecher's congregation raised the amount in half an hour and then sent a white representative with Edmonson to pay the money or negotiate release of the women.

Fugitives also reveals that all churches were not in collusion with the slave trade. The national abolitionist movement included not only Christian clergyman like Rev. Henry Ward Beecher, but politicians like Charles Sumner, who wrangled a presidential pardon for the Pearl's crew. Frederick Douglass, Lucretia Mott, along with William Lloyd Garrison spoke at the American Anti-Slavery Society's convention that debated the legality of slavery in the nation's capital itself (Paynter 125-126). After Emily and Mary Edmonson's release from the slave pens, abolitionists paid for the young women's education at Oberlin. Mary, always of

delicate health, died in her freshman year from the effects of the slave pens and Emily, heartbroken, returned to Washington, DC (Paynter 200).

Most of all, *Fugitives of the Pearl* presents a portrait of the strength and cohesion of slave families, functioning to stay together when everything in the culture seems intent on pulling them apart. The novel presents children who will hold down many jobs at once to buy the freedom of elderly parents or siblings or spouses. Family unity is evident. When Samuel decided to run away to Philadelphia, he would not go alone but urged two brothers and two sisters to come with him (and their parents gave their blessing). Even a brother that Mary and Emily had never met (since he had been sold to New Orleans for fleeing from his owner before their birth) came to their aid and arranged for them to sleep and eat at his house every night now that he had bought his freedom. He also tried to find “good owners” for his brothers also captured and sent to the pens in New Orleans. The Edmonson parents, along with the oldest sister and her husband, sit daily with Mary and Emily in the Baltimore slave pens where they were shipped to avoid a yellow fever epidemic in New Orleans. Although slave traders insisted that family relations meant nothing to slaves, the Brent and Edmonson families shine as real examples of the opposite. Years later a great-grandson would dedicate his novel about their lives to “...the memory of those Negro mothers and fathers who, through the long night of slavery, kept aglow the torch of Hope and Faith and whose service, suffering and sacrifice were the frightful cost of Freedom, this volume is dedicated in love and gratitude” (Paynter vii). *Fugitives* “... offers an example of a family united in its strategies and resources to

free its members, for freedom had become a tradition in the family” (Pettis 12).

Fugitives of the Pearl was not widely distributed or reviewed at publication (Campbell xii). *The Journal of Negro History* called its style “entertaining” in its brief, unsigned review in April 1931 (241-242). Critic Hugh Gloster in *Negro Voices in American Fiction* credits Paynter as the first black historical novelist (Pettis 2). AMS Press reprinted the novel in 1971, undoubtedly due to interest in black history sparked by the civil rights movement.

However, John Paynter is not a professional writer; indeed, he seems uncertain about the need for paragraphs, a group of related sentences. He only focuses on his family’s adventures, ignoring the other seventy-two slaves who were captured on the Pearl. Even if a character is an Edmonson, he can drop out or into the plot, magically. Brother Ephraim is never again mentioned after boarding the Pearl. Hamilton, the brother in New Orleans, is first mentioned on page 151. Why wasn’t his memory kept alive for the younger siblings? Despite these lapses, Paynter went on to write another book, a travelogue, *Joining the Navy or Abroad with Uncle Sam* (1895). In her doctoral thesis, “The Search for a Usable Past: A Study of Black Historical Fiction,” Joyce Pettis argues that Paynter’s stylistic failures have to do with not knowing how or when to fictionalize his family’s saga:

Paynter’s vision might have been somewhat encumbered by his closeness to his subject matter. Since his text has pictures of the Edmonson family and a chart of the descendants of Paul and Amelia Edmonson, it is

apparent that Paynter wanted his book to depict its events as they actually happened. Authors of successful historical fiction, however, like writers of biographies, must know when to make artistic decisions that may loosen their rigidity to the true order of events. (Pettis 14)

Paynter lacked the technique to meld his family history with fictional elements.

Howard Washington Odum (1884-1954), known primarily as a sociologist, added to American historical novels that depict slavery with *Cold Blue Moon* (1931). Dr. Odum was born on a farm near Bethlehem, Georgia on May 24, 1884. He graduated from Emory College in 1904, took an MA in classics at the University of Mississippi in 1906, and earned two doctorates, one from Clark University in psychology in 1909 and the other from Columbia University in sociology the next year (Tindall 286). Early in his academic life, he was fascinated by black folk life. His dissertation from Columbia was entitled “*Social and Mental Traits of the Negro*”. While it attempted an objective view of the black masses, “[i]t is on whole a grim and discouraging picture of Negro shortcomings” (Tindall 286). He founded the Department of Sociology at the University of North Carolina in 1920 where “...he emphasized community research, race relations, statistics, regionalism, population, rural studies and adult education” and authored 22 books and 200 articles (Ogburn 237). Odum was a white Southerner who created the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (Tindall 302). On November 12, 1954, a few months after retiring at age 70, Dr. Howard Odum died. Because of his leadership on so many fronts of Southern culture, the *Washington Post* in an editorial, upon his death, stated: “Howard W.

Odum was the Eli Whitney of the Modern South. He inspired a revolution. Certainly there was no one—unless it was Franklin Roosevelt—whose influence was greater than Odum’s on the development of the region below the Potomac” (Ogburn 237). Four years after his death, in a preliminary evaluation of Odum’s work, George Tindall thought Odum’s reputation would continue to grow throughout the twentieth century (285). Tindall concludes, “Howard Odum was a scholar in a grand manner. In him the folk heritage of the New South coalesced with intellectual insights into new concepts of universal import. He was a rare academic specimen whose scholarship had practical implications which he himself sought to apply in social action” (Tindall 307).

When Dr. Odum, sociologist, became Howard Odum, novelist, he drew on folklore he had collected as a social scientist. Three of his 22 books were a trilogy, *Rainbow Round My Shoulder* (1928), *Wings on My Feet* (1929), and *Cold Blue Moon* (1931) (Ogburn 237). The novels’ narrator is Black Ulysses, “...a figure inspired by a Negro folk character known as Left-Wing Gordon, who had been found by Odum in a crew of highway workmen” (Tindall 292). Of the trio, only *Cold Blue Moon* focuses on the antebellum South.

What do we learn about slavery from *Cold Blue Moon*? Since Odum was one of America’s early folklorists and ethnographers, the narrator is based on Odum’s conversations with Left-Wing Gordon, found in a crew of highway workers (Tindall 292). Hence, *Cold Blue Moon* is much more a catalogue of the slave names, jobs, songs and ghost stories than it is a unified novel. The interior lives—the thoughts and

feelings—of the slaves are seldom hinted at; readers glimpse only the artifacts that spring from slave labor, the stories and songs. The sheer magnitude of the plantation system, how many slaves it took to keep a big plantation operational, is also suggested. However, little discontent among slaves is evident in the songs and stories. There are songs about the white owners, but no songs about running away or black insurrectionists—at least none that Left-Wing Gordon, black bard, would mention to Howard Odum, white folklorist.

The novel begins on a stormy night with black people gathered around telling and listening to ghost stories. The setting, in terms of time and exact place are unstated; the black folks are not slaves but they sit in the shadow of Big House Hall and their shelter has a “rotting roof”. Readers sense that life for these descendents of slaves has not improved. The narrator of *Cold Blue Moon* is part of this group, and he is not impressed with the tame ghost stories being told. The narrator is “...old John Wesley Gordon, nicknamed Left Wing Gordon, self-styled alias of ‘Wing,’ back again from another Odyssey...” Black Ulysses, who “...can tell it the way it was told to him, and he can tell more” (Odum 17-18).

Black Ulysses begins with three stories about preachers in haunted houses (19-26) before moving on to stories of black cats that kill the lone person to venture into a haunted house (26-30). Black Ulysses’ specialty is telling the ghost stories his slave grandmother had told him (30-41). The entire seventh chapter, “Roll-Call of Ghosts and H’ants,” describes this alternate universe, a lively spirit world that is “[p]art and parcel of the Negro heritage. More than Africa, part of slavery, part of freedom,

magic thread in the fabric of his cultural background. Told in story, not read in books” (220).

All the tales are set in or near Big House Hall, “...a red-gray-white weathered mansion, it was, ghost house of a perfect past which could not endure because of its imperfections” (11). Like other “great southern houses,” such as Tuckahoe, Pharsalia, and Burleigh, Big House Hall stood as a phantom, a testament to memory. The omniscient narrator recalls what became of these places:

Some burned in the wake of Sherman’s March; some hazards of fire over the years; some reputed as burned by ghosts of ancestors restless under the cold blue moon....Some made over by new southern blood; some bought by northern and western folk; some restored for the glory of their architectural patterns. Some turned in Ku Klux headquarters; some into local social and sporting clubs; some still owned by valiant stalwarts holding on; and some occupied by descendants of former slaves. (15)

Now, Big House is reconstructed “in song and story, ghost episodes and slave tales” by an old man, Black Ulysses (18).

Through story, Black Ulysses chronicles slaves’ lives. He recounts the various colorful slave names and the numbers of people needed to run the plantation. Forty to fifty slaves are necessary to harvest wheat, but “shuckin’ corn” requires 1200 or 1300. Slaves from nearby plantations are brought over to help (115, 54-55). These are honored by a descriptive roll call:

A roll-call of American slaves, early progenitors of Black Ulysses and all that

throng of black folks now grown to 12 millions of people. Roll-call of the faithful serving old marsters. Roll-call of the errant, easing along. Roll-call of craftsmen, skilled in their art....Roll-call of saints, mammy and maid....Lovers of the white folks, masters of the marsters, loved by white folks....Stubborn in their loyalties, powerful in self-control, proud of marster, proud of the big house, zealous and jealous of quality folks. Scornful and condescending, shrewd and discriminating, perfect simulation, mastering of manners, ancient of ways. (113)

The slaves are permitted to have their own little gardens to grow cotton or vegetables and sell things to make money for themselves. Nights, Saturdays, or holidays are the only times they had to tend their own gardens (122). The treatment of slaves varied with generations. The founder of Big House Hall "...worked very hard.

Howsomever, old man made slaves work mo' harder than hisself and treated slaves mo' severer than Old Colonel [...]," his son. If Old Colonel had a good year and felt well, he would treat slaves fine. Otherwise, Old Colonel "...was mighty roughish with slaves...." Old Mistis was the opposite of her husband and she ran the plantation and kept it a showplace. She "...wus mo' wonderful lady than Old Colonel was man." Old Colonel was respected throughout the white community throughout his life, "even after he be lonesome old man in house wid ghosts an' maybe some colored children to take place of his family done dead an' gone" (49-51).

Only apparitions are left from the former time. For example, the ghost of Miss Amy, the Colonel's daughter, remains near. When Miss Amy got married, she took

her personal slave, Corinthy, with her to Mississippi to live on her husband's plantation. Corinthy was married to Brown Boy whom Miss Amy refuses to buy, so Corinthy kidnaps Miss Amy's baby to force Old Colonel to sell Brown Boy. Old Colonel counters by beating Corinthy with a whip and tells her to return the baby. Corinthy accidentally drops him and the baby dies, hitting his head. Corinthy, frightened, knows "she can't go back to Colonel an' Miss Amy, neither can she git away. So she goes to river an' throws baby in an' jumps in herself. Never found bodies for two days." Big Brown Boy, her husband, became so uncontrollable after his wife's suicide that he was chained and sold to Georgia. Miss Amy, the baby's mother, mourned powerfully then catches yellow fever in Mississippi and dies. Because of quarantine, her parents did not attend the funeral nor "bring Miss Amy back to family cemetery." Miss Amy's ghost, looking for her baby son, haunts her parents' house (180-182). There's more evidence about how destructive slavery was to the slaves and owners in the Corinthy story. The white owners suffer for their refusal to acknowledge the marriage of Corinthy and Brown Boy and the white family is destroyed *because* the slave family's was.

Black ghosts return to Big House Hall also. For example Uncle Wailes is still around. Uncle Wailes is put in charge of the plantation when Old Colonel leaves for the Civil War. The slave hides all the plantation's valuables and tells no one where they are hid (202). In addition to the "valuables," he hides food, cotton, and a horse in the swamp (203). When a Yankee gang arrives to steal, they get angry, not finding any plunder. They cook all the pigs and chickens left on the plantation then kidnap

Uncle Wailes to interrogate him. When some slaves find him, he had been tortured with legs set on fire, back bloodied by beating and one eye poked out (204). Old Mistis is furious. Uncle Wailes soon dies but nobody can find the treasures that Uncle Wailes hid. Old Marster and Marse James, returned from the war, assume the Yankees made Uncle Wailes confess the hiding place, but Uncle Wailes as a ghost visits his daughter and shows her where the valuables are hid (205-206, 208). Only phantoms claim the plantation now.

Readers can sense the racial divide within the stories also. In the Uncle Wailes story, the slave guards Old Colonel's "valuables" from the Yankee invaders. Since the hidden materials are never found, Old Colonel believes Uncle Wailes confessed under torture and the Yankees found the goods. However, the slaves believed Uncle Wailes never confessed and returns as a ghost to tell his daughter where the valuables are hid. The whites don't consider that Uncle Wailes was stalwart under torture to benefit *his daughter*, but the slaves see heroism, even after death.

Not only does the plantation still live in the ghost stories told, but it lives through song. The songs slaves sung at the many horse races on the plantation are provided by Black Ulysses (87-110). Then the slave songs about their owners are sung again (124-127). Slave songs about hunting are provided (170-173). Practically every aspect of slave life is documented through song.

At the end, Old Colonel and Old Mistis outlive all their white children and the one grandchild, so hope for a continuance of tradition, hope for a future, is dead. Old Colonel dies last, a "...lonesome old man in a house wid ghosts an' maybe some

colored children...” (Odum 51), hinting at Old Colonel’s mulatto children conceived with his own slaves. Ironically Old Colonel’s genes live only through those he denied as heirs. The little that is left of the plantation after the Civil War is left to the slaves’ descendents so there too the slaves triumph over the owners. Still they are haunted by stories from their past.

Odum was enough of a nationally known scholar to have his works widely reviewed, and *Cold Blue Moon* was no exception. Several critics were distracted by the endless listing of names, songs, jobs, stories (“Odum” 799). Although few reviewers commented on *Cold Blue Moon*’s structure or lack thereof as a novel, all debated whether Black Ulysses, the narrator, is “authentically Negro” or not.

Jonathan Daniels in the *Saturday Review of Literature* (April 25, 1931) writes:

Like all of Mr. Odum’s books about the Southern Negro this volume is not only authentic but rich and vivid as the Negro’s own life, sensuous but also full of hilarity, and full of pain. Although there is sometimes a fatiguing element in Mr. Odum’s verbless and impressionistic cataloguing, the book has much beauty. Always when Black Ulysses is speaking there is a fine true rhythm in his words, authentically Negro and yet not too heavily loaded with dialect.

(“Odum” 799)

The reviewer for *The Nation*’s disagreed: “...the manners related all have a blurred, sentimental, unauthentic Negro air about them. The language of Black Ulysses has certain richness, but there might have been more rigorous selection from among the occasionally interesting stories and episodes” (“Odum” 799). Since the staffs of most

periodicals in 1931 were not racially integrated, readers can presume that all of the critics are whites, debating whether Odum, also white, has produced a fictional work that is “authentically Negro”. None wonder about, pause over, or consider that no black writer or critic is included in the debate about black “authenticity”. What makes for “authenticity” in a fictional work is the subject of another doctoral thesis, but what gives these white critics the temerity to judge blackness astonishes today. Sensitive, contemporary readers may also note the lack of slave anger and rebellion in the stories in *Cold Blue Moon* which signals to Howard Odum’s remove from the slaves he catalogued and/or created. Contemporary ethnographers would be more self-critical about the racial dynamic between a black man on a chain gang telling stories to a white folklorist in the South.

Another Southern author who was well regarded by the wider American society, Roark Whitney Wickleiffe Bradford, was born on his family’s cotton plantation near the Mississippi River in Tennessee on August 21, 1896 (Bain, Flora & Rubin 44). Despite little formal education in Tennessee and Arkansas country schools, he started writing at a young age. He often traced his literary career “[...] back to his childhood attraction to bizarre versions of biblical stories he heard from a plantation Negro minister” (Bain, Flora & Rubin 44). Like Howard Odum, Bradford collected black folk songs and sermons (Kunitz & Haycraft 177). He became a newspaper reporter for Atlanta’s *Georgian* and the New Orleans’ *Times-Picayune* after being discharged from the army (Kunitz & Haycraft 177; Bain, Flora & Rubin 44). Bradford won the O. Henry Prize for Best Short Story of 1927 and authored five novels. He was

awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1930 when his novel, *Ol' Man Adam*, was adapted for the stage as *Green Pastures* (Bain, Flora & Rubin 44). From 1942-1946 he served in the naval reserve and died in his home in New Orleans on November 13, 1948, from an infection contracted on a navy mission (Bain, Flora & Rubin 44). His passing was noted in *The Saturday Review of Literature* (Canby 20-21).

Kingdom Coming (1933) begins with eight black people debarking from a steamboat as it docks in Shreveport, Louisiana, in 1850. One is a free elderly woman, Dahlia Jones, whose freed son has bought her. She intends to see her son in the Territories (Bradford 9). The rest are slaves bound for various owners. Three slaves are an intact family headed for Judge Wilkins' expanding inland plantation. The father, Messenger, is a famous jockey who was named by his previous owner after a racehorse. That owner, Major Harris, traded Messenger for a chestnut mare (6-9). The other members of Messenger's family include Crimp, his expectant wife, and Telegram, nicknamed Grammy, about 7-years-old. The author, a white Southerner, makes an atypical choice by making the story Grammy's. The point of view is limited omniscience, sticking close to only vantage point and thoughts, without resorting to first-person narration. The result is that readers get the vicarious experience of growing up a slave. Judge Wilkins has already sent a letter ahead to the overseer, Egbert Tobin, about how the family should be employed:

They are especially valuable Negroes, being healthy of mind and body and minutely trained....The man should not be used in ordinary field or clearing work, but should be employed about the stables. The woman, who is heavy

with child, should not be worked at all until after her delivery, about two months hence, I believe.... (13)

Tobin is a 12-year veteran overseer who “had carved a profitable plantation from dense jungle and he had done it at minimum expense” (14-15). Messenger is being sent to look after all the livestock on the Wilkins Bend plantation (22).

“Aunt Free” Dahlia arrives at the Wilkins Bend plantation a few days after the main characters. When she debarked from the steamboat, she is turned over to the sheriff who had to obtain “verification” of her situation; her manumission papers are not sufficient proof of her freedom. She stays at the sheriff’s house, *as a servant*, while her papers are verified (49). Dahlia wants to get to the Territory to see her son, but no boats are going upriver until autumn because the river dries up in the summer. She decides not to walk the 100 miles to the Territory but stay on at Wilkins Bend, supervising “de gals at de spin-wheels.” Judge Wilkins has approved her job (50). When Crimp sees Dahlia on the same plantation as she, despite Dahlia’s free status, Crimp is astonished. Crimp is even more surprised that Dahlia will work for Judge Wilkins as a free woman (52). Crimp comments, “Seem like de 800 dollars you paid for free didn’t buy you nothin’ but trouble.” Nevertheless, Dahlia is satisfied with owning herself (49).

“Aunt Free” Dahlia, whose son himself freed and given money upon his owner’s death, pays \$800 to liberate his elderly mother. Her freedom in the South means little in practical terms. Her manumission papers never defeat the doubts of the whites she encounters. She is the only black passenger stuck in port as she debarks the ship at

novel's start. While she awaits approval of her manumission papers, she must work for the sheriff and payment for her services is not mentioned. When she is permitted to leave the sheriff, she lands on a plantation, again to work as much as the slave characters. Fortunate for her, Dahlia believes that the only freedom for blacks exists in heaven, not anywhere on Earth so she remains consistently unsurprised that her "free" life is not different from her slave past. (She never reunites with the generous son who lives in the Territories; apparently she loses interest in finding him.)

Dahlia isn't the only one interested in freedom. Before Messenger married Crimp, he had accumulated \$600 towards his \$1,000 price tag (so high because he is a skilled worker). Messenger had been promised that he could buy his freedom for \$1,000 if he had won a certain horse race, but his owner traded him before he could buy himself (53). Although Messenger's money is earning interest in his owner's bank, he believes, he knows he doesn't have enough yet to buy three highly valued slaves—with a fourth on the way (54). His money sits in his owner's bank, drawing interest, he hopes, but he can't protect his money any more than he can his life. The probability that his owner will cheat him looms large. In Dahlia's or Messenger's lives, they have found that buying freedom is precarious business.

When the story begins, Crimp is near the end of her pregnancy. However, the baby's birth destroys the family's unity. "Crimp's new baby was yellow [...]. Messenger wanted to kill the baby, and Crimp too [...]" but Aunt Dahlia suggests that Messenger and older son Grammy stay in another cabin for awhile. Messenger demands to know who the father is (56). Crimp is not quite sure. The baby's father

is either master's son James or a Northern friend of James who visited New Orleans last autumn (58). Aunt Dahlia explains to Messenger the mentality of "a gal in de big house." Such a gal sees what a wonderful life whites have and then she thinks of her black child, whose future will be just like hers "jest 'cause de baby's skin is black like hern." She can't change her skin or her baby's skin, but she can get another baby with lighter skin. "So she sets her mind on lightenin' up de color in de next baby." Messenger suggests that some women can't keep their dresses "down when dey's mens about black or white." Dahlia admits that Crimp is a good worker "but she a no-good in her heart. Only beatin' her won't he'p none.... From that day Messenger never again spoke to Crimp. He and Grammy live in Luther's house, and Aunt Free Dahlia stays with Crimp, nursing her, and taking care of the housework for the master" (59-60).

Probably the riskiest method for obtaining a measure of autonomy is for a slave to give birth to a mulatto baby. Crimp's pregnancy by Judge Wilkins' son or the son's friend is a prime reason her family was moved to Wilkins Bend. In *Kingdom Coming* there's no such thing as the rape of a female slave. When Crimp first arrives at the plantation, Crimp asks what happens when a yellow baby is born to a black-skinned woman. The answer: talk—and there was less and less talk as more and more "bright" babies were born to black women. These women *want* to have the owners' babies to get a few days off from fieldwork. In addition, the mothers and their mulatto children may get special privileges also. At Wilkins Bend, Crimp replaces Sookie, the cook; Sookie has given birth to a "bright" baby too. Eventually Crimp

will move off the plantation property and get a cabin by the river—after having two more mulattos by the overseer.

Messenger cannot live with the idea of his wife having mulatto babies and makes inquiries in town about the Underground Railroad. He's to follow the North Star for two days until he finds a shack on the river (64-65). Messenger would like to take Grammy with him but children do not make good runaways. The father promises to buy him out of slavery or send word on how to escape when he's older (69).

Messenger flees and the slaves are hopeful about his success since the first search for the fugitive is fruitless; overseer Tobin tries to intimidate Crimp, Grammy, and Aunt Dahlia into confessing. No one talks. Just as the slaves were beginning to relax about Messenger's escape, his body is found in a thicket; his head was bashed in (83). Aunt Dahlia explains to Grammy that his father is "sho-'nuff free" in heaven (84). Indeed, "...Aunt Free Dahlia never tired of telling him of the wonders of Sweet God up in free heaven" (88-89).

The easiest way for a slave to obtain freedom is to run away. All one needs is courage and intelligence in getting directions. Grammy's father, Messenger, asks a white man about following the North Star, believing the white man to be an abolitionist. He is not and Messenger is found murdered. How Messenger is so easily misled is never explained. In other words, why didn't Messenger ask other slaves about escape routes? One slave on the plantation had successfully followed the North Star, but no one else could build on his success.

Life goes on after Messenger's failed escape attempt. The slaves at Wilkins Bend

plantation are satisfied with their lot despite opportunities to rebel against the lone, white overseer. In time, Grammy becomes an expert mule-handler, and by 15, he has supervisory responsibilities (94-95). Aunt Dahlia, who never leaves to find her own son in the Territories, becomes Grammy's surrogate mother. After the birth of Crimp's first mulatto, she has two more by Tobin, the overseer (117). She is allowed, presumably by Tobin, to move off the plantation and do as she pleases. Eventually Crimp lives with a black man on the bayou and has a fourth child, a black one. When the black child was born, she went down to Willow Chute to live with Joe, her new lover, and "Grammy seldom saw her any more" (96). Grammy maintains a curious, impassive distance from his mother, Crimp, for the rest of the novel. He does not miss her or think about her but easily replaces her with Aunt Dahlia, a woman he's just met. In a monumental evasion never does the novelist hint at white responsibility for the destruction of the slave family.

When the slaves hear about the Civil War, Grammy hopes the North will win so he can be free. Aunt Dahlia cautions him that "white fo'ks ain't shootin' and gittin' shot at jest to he'p niggers" (136). As the war impinges on the countryside, the crops remain unharvested. The Confederate army takes most of the cattle and feed. For the first time ever, slaves are free to fish in May while the overseer sits on his porch, drinking (189-190). "More of the Negroes wandered away and didn't come back. Some of them did come back after being gone weeks and months. They were hungry and happy enough to get something to eat." The novelist suggests that slaves, in their heart of hearts, do not want freedom; they merely desire food since evidently these

cooks and farmers do not know how to feed themselves. But the master didn't beat them for running off. "He didn't even notice them" (193).

Yet in the midst of war, love flourishes. Grammy's girlfriend moves in with him and Aunt Dahlia (191). Soon after, she is pregnant and Grammy is very proud (196). When Tobin is drafted into the Confederate army at gunpoint, he leaves Grammy in charge of the plantation (197-198). In June 1864, Penny and Grammy's baby is born; they name him Good News (232).

By autumn, most have left the plantation, and Grammy decides to head for New Orleans where he can train horses and teach his son how to train them too (234). Aunt Dahlia, Penny, Good News and Grammy wander deserted roads in a mule-drawn wagon (236-239). When one mule dies, they decide to sell the wagon and the other mule for a boat ride to New Orleans (243-244). The couple tries to imagine how much their freedom will cost; Aunt Dahlia is willing to pay it with the wages she's saved as the plantation's lone black employee (249).

Arriving in New Orleans, Grammy is disappointed at not seeing fine houses and horses, nothing but soldiers in blue (252). An officer asks them when and where did they cross the Yankee lines for that is the time and place they became free. Grammy doesn't believe their good fortune. They are immediately taken to the "settlement," where they encounter more black people than they ever had seen before (254-258). The family's story is recorded. They are given physicals then shown to a tent with four cots and a pail (260-261). The settlement is crowded, impersonal, but worse of all for those used to working, there is nothing to do. Penny, wildly disappointed in

freedom, cries for three days (266). Aunt Dahlia compares their life to hogs in a fattening pen; she knows the only real freedom is in Jesus (268, 264-265). They discover that Crimp, Grammy's mother, is in the settlement also, cooking for the Yankees (263).

Given their idleness, the delights of a nearby voodoo clan pull in both Grammy and Penny, but especially Penny (279). Eventually, Penny casts spells on their tent, killing Aunt Dahlia and kidnapping her own son, Good News, for a voodoo ritual (296-301). Grammy searches New Orleans for Penny who has changed her name to Madame Mo-ree. When he locates her, he accuses her of killing their child. Penny attempts voodoo charms as protection against his attack, but they don't work. Grammy kills Penny with a brick (308). Soldiers arrest Grammy for the murder, believing the murder to be part of a war between rival voodoo clans (312-313). Grammy is completely ignorant during his court martial and doesn't know what is happening--even as he is blindfolded before a firing squad (316-318). At the sound of gunfire, Grammy "...landed squarely in the middle of Free Heaven, right on the lap of the Sweet God A'mighty King Jesus" (319).

In *Kingdom Coming* Roark Bradford argues in 1933 that the plantation system was and perhaps still is the best way of life for black people. In his choice of point of view, the author suggests a closeness and an affection for black people that Thomas Page or Sallie Dooley lack. The black characters—there's really only one significant white one, Tobin—achieve full humanness, although the young female slaves remain notoriously manipulative of males, white and black, and self-serving of the genial,

good-natured, skillful but thoughtless black men. The black men lack human intelligence and are always compared to animals. Messenger asks an unknown white man for escape directions when other slaves could have provided the information he needed. Both Messenger and Grammy remain surprised and revolted by their wives' behaviors and never have a clue about the wives' betrayal until it is too late. Finally, every aspect of Messenger's and Grammy's existences are associated with the unthinking life of brutes. Like his father and his son, Telegram/Grammy shares a racehorse name, and indeed his family is shipped to the Wilkins Bend plantation in a horse trade. Like his father, he and animals are one, functioning as expert animal trainers throughout the story. Much like a beast of burden, Grammy never expresses dissatisfaction with his lot in life, never attempts to run away and is one of the last to leave the barren plantation during the Civil War. Grammy's sole desire upon arriving in New Orleans is to show his son how to handle fine horses. Throughout the novel, Grammy remains docile with a general contentment with his life, despite his family coming apart at the seams fairly early. Only the elderly woman, who ironically is "free" by slave standards yet lives on a plantation, understands that true freedom for blacks is achieved through death. Despite the tight focus on black life, Bradford shows his hand in the novel's ending. All blacks are expendable as if they are not worth the time spent developing their characters. During freedom after the Civil War, the characters descend into murderous, voodoo madness and literally kill each other: Penny kills Aunt Dahlia and Good News; Grammy kills Penny; Grammy dies for murdering Penny. What causes them to lose their minds? *Freedom* in the settlement

camps and the lack of work. To suggest, during the Great Depression, that slavery was not damaging to slaves was to put forward a jobs initiative. Was Roark Bradford suggesting that bondage be reinstated for black people? It is *something* in the childlike nature of black people that makes slavery preferable *only for them*. Freedom never harms whites, however. This theme is subtly implied over the course of 300 pages of fluid, sometimes compelling, writing.

In terms of critical response, *Kingdom Coming* had favorable reviews overall with many, such as the *New Republic*, proclaiming it “[...] Bradford’s best book” (“Bradford” 109). The *New York Times* declared:

As Mr. Bradford knows his blacks of the deep South better than perhaps anybody else writing today, the reader is assured in advance of a document authentic throughout, however fictional the projected story may actually be [...] Roark Bradford has carved a niche for himself; and whether one likes his books or not, they have no exact counterpart. *Kingdom Coming* is not only uniquely American; it is unique among American books. (“Bradford” 109)

In this review, yet again a white reviewer congratulates a white novelist about knowledge of “his blacks” and conferring the endorsement of authenticity. How the reviewer of a northern newspaper knows enough about Southern blacks to judge Bradford’s replication of their lives is a question worth posing. The reviewer then pronounces *Kingdom Coming* “uniquely American”. Is it uniquely American because of the “peculiar institution,” a slave system practiced here that annihilated traditional black family ties? Is the novel unique because of its focus on the multi-racial

interactions? Or, is it “uniquely American” because only in America is the stereotype of unthinking, childlike, trusting slave employed to justify *never* giving blacks freedom since left to their own devices without white supervision, black people will kill themselves? As for the last attribute of the novel according to the *New York Times*, “unique among American books,” an easy argument can be mounted. Up to 1933, few, if any, white novelists dared assume the perspective of a slave boy as he grew to adulthood within the plantation system. Bradford writes the slave experience from the inside in a way that Odum’s and Dooley’s black narrators do not attempt. The white characters in this long novel can be numbered on one hand; ostensibly the story is not about whites at all despite its white author. It is difficult to name another American novel written prior to 1933 in which a white novelist risks—even in his imagination—losing the privileges that his skin color affords.

Sterling Brown, a poet in good standing of the Harlem Renaissance and armed with a MA in literature from Harvard University, took reviewers to task for believing so passionately in black stereotypes that the “silly” ending is unquestioned.

We are supposed to believe, according to some reviewers, that because one Negro under peculiar circumstances, is shot by a firing squad, freedom for the Negro is a tragedy. This is silly, and if Mr. Bradford intends his book to be allegorical in this fashion, he invalidates a work that does have elements of truth and beauty. (Brown, “Kingdom” 382-383)

Brown draws the analogy that to nullify freedom for slaves because a few freedmen turned to voodoo is like nullifying the New England colonies because some practiced

witchcraft (Brown, "Kingdom" 383). Brown continues:

Kingdom Coming is better read as a good story, spoiled at the end, of two fine, though simple souls, who happened to be married to the wrong women [...]. Slavery, in Mr. Bradford's version, is for the most part easy-going, and heaven knows this isn't new. Some callousness is seen, and some cruelty; almost all of the slaves desire freedom [...]. But they do not understand it, and there is the suggestion that true freedom for them is unattainable, because of their own deficiencies [...]. Mr. Bradford might mean this to prove that the freed Negro is no better off than the slave. In certain sections...this is near to the truth. But the corollary, that these 'poor waifs' are not ready for freedom, hardly follows. Instead of the Negro's unfitness, what such a condition proves is the South's unwillingness to grant freedom in fact, and *its* unfitness to serve as guardian for 'poor waifs'. (Brown, "Kingdom" 383)

Sterling Brown also observes that Bradford

...has nevertheless confined himself to one type of the Negro. There were many others, even on Red River plantations. There were not only bewildered Telegrams and otherworldly Aunt Frees on these plantations; Frederick Douglass had brothers there, Harriet Tubman sisters, who did not have the chances to escape, but who kept their spirit unbroken. And freedom for such as these was no tragedy. (Brown 383)

Although Sterling Brown's critique was not shared by many, judging from the list of

reviews in the *Book Review Digest of 1933*, his analysis has been vindicated over time.

Roark Bradford achieved great popularity with his bestselling novels in the 1930s with the stereotypical comic portrait of southern blacks, "...the only portrait of the Negro accepted at that time by most readers" (Contemporary Authors Online). Today some readers may be impressed "by the force of their vivid characterizations and the uniqueness of the world they reveal" (Hall). According to the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*: "After his death the world of Bradford's fiction ceased to exist, in fact and fiction. Perhaps that is why, except for a handful of graduate-school theses, so little critical attention has been paid to his work" (Hall). The cotton plantation where Bradford was born and grew up and continued to own and operate throughout his life died when he did. Large plantations owned by whites and worked by blacks for subsistence wages were not prevalent in the South by 1948, and from this moment on no other white novelist would write of blacks contented with slavery (Hall). Such a decline reflects at least some change in American society, even as the earlier success indicates the pervasiveness of racism during the first five decades of the twentieth century" (Hall). Bradford's popularity waned, as did the myth of the happy plantation.

Much like Roark Bradford, the last author considered in this chapter also had an illustrious literary career. Arna Bontemps (1902-1973) wrote poetry, plays, short stories, novels, children's literature, biography, history, and criticism while serving as teacher and librarian (James 24). The author of *Black Thunder* was born on October

13, 1902 in Louisiana but grew up in Los Angeles, California. His parents were among the first black converts to Seventh-Day Adventism, which greatly affected his young life. Bontemps and his sister “attended Adventist schools, practiced Saturday Sabbaths and meatless diets and were strictly required to shun works of fiction” (James 25).

Arna Bontemps excelled academically at the Seventh-Day Adventist prep schools although he remained socially isolated as one of two black students. Upon admission to Pacific Union College, an Adventist college, he had intended on entering the ministry until an English professor sparked his interest in writing and reading poetry. He completed college in three years, majoring in English and minoring in history (James 25-26).

His teaching and literary careers were launched simultaneously upon graduating from Pacific Union. In 1924 *The Crisis*, the magazine of the NAACP, published his poem, “Hope,” and he decided to move to New York City and teach in Harlem Academy, an Adventist high school where he met his wife (James 26). Bontemps’ first encounter with life in the South came about while teaching at Oakwood Jr. College, another Adventist school, in Huntsville, Alabama in 1931. The college was racially segregated with a predominantly white staff. After three strained years at Oakwood, the school administrators asked Bontemps to destroy the secular books in his personal library to demonstrate his allegiance to church doctrine. He refused and was fired. He returned briefly with his wife and three children to his parents in California before heading for the University of Chicago. After obtaining a master’s

in library science, he became librarian at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, where he displayed brilliant archivist skills by acquiring the personal papers of Charles Chestnutt and Jean Toomer. For a short time, Bontemps was a visiting scholar at the University of Illinois and director of the Afro-American Program at Yale in 1969. He ended his career at Fisk as poet-in-residence (James 27-28).

During his teaching career, his literary output was nothing short of prolific. The published works, covering a broad range of literary genres, numbered forty at his death (James 24). His novel, *St. Louis Woman*, was made into a Broadway musical in 1946 (James 28). Bontemps wrote poems, short stories, plays, novels, biography, historical fiction, and children's literature that stood as a "testament to a long and energetic career" (James 24).

After Arna Bontemps' death in Nashville on June 4, 1973, a middle school in Chicago was named in his honor while the state of Louisiana has made his former house a museum and the centennial of his birth was celebrated in his native parish (James 28, 24). This teacher, writer, and librarian was renowned at the time of death.

His novel, *Black Thunder*, first published in 1936, was reprinted in 1968 and included an author's preface about how he had come to write it. When Bontemps arrived at Fisk University library, he discovered "[...] a larger collection of slave narratives than I knew existed, I began to read almost frantically [...]. I began to ponder the stricken slave's will to freedom. Three historic efforts at self-emancipation caught my attention and promptly shattered peace of mind. I knew instantly that one of them would be the subject of my next novel" (Bontemps xii).

For Bontemps, Denmark Vesey's insurrection in 1822 never seemed plausible while Nat Turner's confession to a white secretary in 1831 raised more questions than it answered for Bontemps, and he found Turner's mysticism impenetrable. Of the three slave revolts, Gabriel Prosser's reflected "...more accurately for me what I felt then and feel now might have motivated slaves capable of such boldness and inspired daring" (Bontemps xii).

Black Thunder follows Gabriel Prosser, a slave near Richmond, Virginia, from June through autumn 1800. Readers first hear of Gabriel before they see him. At the novel's start, two elderly slaves, Ben and Bundy, discuss the upcoming meeting of a secret society, headed by Gabriel. Ben wants nothing to do with "chillun's foolishness" but Bundy insists that Ben should attend (Bontemps 12-13). Upon leaving Ben, Bundy encounters Thomas Prosser, the owner of a neighboring plantation, who rides over him with his horse and beats him—because he could with impunity (13-15). The attack is told through Bundy's soliloquy:

Yes, suh, Marse Prosser, I'm taking it all. I can't prance and gallop no mo'; I'm 'bliged to take it. Yo' old sway-backed mule—that's me. Can't nobody lay it on like you, Marse Prosser, and don't nobody know it better'n me. Me and my jug has a hard time with you, a hard time [...]. Lordy, me. Ain't that 'nough, Marse Prosser? Ain't you done laid on 'nough for this one time? You see me crumpled up here in the bushes. Howcome you keeps on hitting? Howcome you keeps on hitting me in the head, Marse Prosser? I won't be no mo' good to you directly. Lordy, what was that? Felt like a horse's foot.

Lordy [...]. (14)

Bundy dies a few days later from the attack, which incenses Gabriel who is the murderer's young coachman (33-34).

Gabriel is the "tallest of three uncommonly tall brothers" and "a man of destiny" at 23 years. He had the admiration of all the slaves on surrounding plantations for his courage and command (16-18). As coachman, Gabriel gets to drive his owner into Richmond quite frequently. At that time Richmond is a city of 6-7,000 people, including free blacks and mulattos, poor whites, and French immigrants. As a place of international commerce, many ships dock there including a boat from San Domingo, Haiti that brings news of Toussaint L'Ouverture's successful coup against the French colonists on the island (19-22). Richmond is also the home of Mulatto Melody, a prostitute to rich white men, and Mingo, "a freedman, a saddle-maker... [and] a friend to slaves" who reads the Bible to them on Sunday. All the possible influences on Gabriel's rebelliousness are provided: Prosser's viciousness, Gabriel's natural leadership qualities, the freedom Scriptures that Mingo reads him, and news from a distant land that slaves have successfully revolted against their oppressors.

During the secret meeting held on the night of Bundy's funeral, Gabriel reveals the signal for the revolt: someone, wearing Thomas Prosser's riding boots, will be riding the black colt Araby, galloping hard on the road. That is the sign to report to the captains. Gabriel expects 1100 to join the raid to burn Richmond and overrun the arsenal (54, 60). Two slaves are sent to surrounding towns to recruit for the rebellion (59).

Juba, Gabriel's 18-year-old live-in girlfriend, puts on Prosser's riding boots one night and flies down the road on Araby, Prosser's fastest horse. "They were going against Richmond with 1100 men and one woman" (29, 31, 83). As the men gather, a torrential rain begins, thereby preventing one-third of the insurrectionists from crossing the swollen creek. Gabriel marches on until he realizes that only 200 men are following him; the others deserted because of the storm. He decides to postpone the raid, but he has no way to communicate the news to the messengers who have gone to surrounding towns (109). None of these complications matter because a mulatto slave has run to Richmond to alert whites of the impending rebellion (114). White men and boys arm themselves as Gov. James Madison sends additional militia to Petersburg, Norfolk, and Roanoke (118,123). On September 15, 1800 Ben Woodfolk, a slave, who had remained on the fringes of the secret society but attended important meetings, names all the revolt's leaders before Henrico County justices. He had first told his owner then his owner brought him to court (132-134). The slaves' hopes for freedom die.

As the search for the revolt participants intensifies, mob violence reigns. Any black person—free or slave—could be accosted, dragged off and hanged by vigilantes (143-144). The three top leaders split up to elude capture (150,156, 175). Gabriel hides beneath a ship's deck for eleven days fighting rats the entire time; his cousin brings him food and water periodically (191). Eventually Gabriel comes out of hiding to protect his cousin who is about to be beaten. Gabriel doesn't fight or flee when whites surround him (192). All attempt at insurrection ends with Gabriel

Prosser's capture, but the punishments have only just begun. Thomas Prosser has beaten Juba, Gabriel's girlfriend and the revolt's signal, nearly to death for disappearing from fieldwork for several days (202, 204). She was then auctioned off (224). The slave informers, Pharaoh and Ben, face constant harassment from other slaves and become paranoid to the point of insanity (138, 217). For the slaves, the planned revolt was a disaster. Not only did they not take over Richmond and establish a separate, free state for black people, but also the entire black community—those who participated and those who did not—were under siege and many murdered.

The authorities held Gabriel for about a week to interrogate him, specifically to discover if the French or any other white abolitionists had planned the insurrection. They were incredulous that only Gabriel had organized such a sophisticated military action. No whites were ever implicated. Gabriel is hanged on the same morning as a small herd of anonymous field Negroes. The townsfolk were hardened to the spectacle now. Even the customary eyewitnesses were missing. The word had gotten about that these were not the ringleaders, and the mere sight of slaughter for its own sake was no longer attractive or stimulating. So many little groups like this had come to the scaffold since mid-September—5, 10, 15 at a time—so many. It was a routine [...]. (208)

Gabriel is executed. "They had chosen to bring him without shirt or coat. He stood, naked above the waist, excellent in strength, the first for freedom of the blacks, savage and baffled, perplexed but unafraid, waiting for the dignity of death" (222). Gabriel is asked for last words. "Let the rope talk, suh" is all he says (223).

The idea for *Black Thunder* came from Bontemps' archival work in slave narratives at Fisk University's library. Specifically, Bontemps wanted to explore slaves' desire to be free and how they acted on that desire (Bontemps xii). Therefore, *Black Thunder* does not show a sweeping panoramic view of the plantation system but focuses on three months in the life of a young slave who is determined to be free. Literary critic Ernest Leisy has noted that as a historical romance, "the historical element in the novel is slight" (146), meaning that the focus is more on the heroism of one charismatic leader than on a careful depiction of plantation conditions in Virginia in 1800. Nevertheless, the three aspects of slavery illustrated throughout the novel are: the attempt of slave families to help each other, the complex relationship of mulattos to the slave and white communities, and the common denominator between the slaveholder and the enslaved was terror--constant, unmitigated fear on both sides.

Even on the most brutal plantations, the slaves attempted to maintain family connections. Indeed, the desire for "normal" family relations among the slaves spurred the revolt. The slaves wanted to live in the same locale as parents, siblings, spouses, and children. Gabriel remained in close contact with his brothers Martin and Solomon who were key organizers of the rebellion. Gabriel's girlfriend Juba is committed to him and political agitation. The sight of her riding Araby in Prosser's riding boots is the signal the insurrectionists await. Bontemps includes a freedman, Mingo, in Gabriel's band. He participates because his wife and daughters are enslaved on Prosser's plantation. As he closes his saddle shop, before meeting Gabriel, he thinks:

Nothing was going to be the same in the future, but anything would be better than Julie stripped and bleeding at a whipping post and the two little girls with white dresses and little wiry braids growing up to the same thing. Lord Jesus, anything would be better than that, anything.

Although Mingo is free, his family is not (Bontemps 78).

The rebellious slaves had no desire to run away in order to attain freedom. They wanted to live with their families *and* be free where they were. By employing stream-of-consciousness technique from the moment Gabriel hides on the boat to avoid capture, Bontemps tells Gabriel's story from the inside, from his point of view. Gabriel's thoughts and feelings serve as the focal point before his capture. Bontemps as writer identifies with Gabriel and goes beyond historical record to imagine what he must have *thought* (a terrain most white novelists refuse to tread). As he awaits execution, Gabriel thinks to himself: "...My mind have never told me to fly away. There ain't nothing good for Gabriel nowhere but right here where I was borned. Right here with my kinfolks and all. If I can't be free here, I don't want to be free nowheres else..." (Bontemps 198). Gabriel aspired for a communal life rather than the isolation of the fugitive who never sees parents, siblings, spouses, or children again.

Another aspect of American slavery is the role of mulattos in the black and white communities. *Black Thunder* presents two who are political opposites and who both play important roles in the plot. Pharaoh is a mulatto slave who identifies with the struggles of his white owners. He so empathizes with whites that he runs to

Richmond in a downpour to warn them of impending doom. He believes that the whites will see that only he had their best interests at heart, and they will reward his diligence and protect him from vengeful slaves. The whites neither offer protection nor thanks, so he must fend for himself when he returns to the plantation. Pharaoh becomes so paranoid that the other slaves are trying to kill him that he ceases to function. His opposite is Mulatto Melody, apparently a prostitute, certainly a “kept” woman who lives alone near the river. Her house is not near whites or blacks, symbolic of her intermediary status. It appears that she has never been a slave, but it is not explained how she gained her freedom. Rich white men frequent her house, and she employs an elderly male slave to run errands. (Her errand boy-man is one of Gabriel’s lieutenants who is also owned by Prosser.) Hence, she knows what is happening in the highest white councils and in the slave quarters and manages to leave for Philadelphia when things get ugly. Still Mulatto Melody is the opposite of Pharaoh because she *never* tells white southerners what she knows. (She does warn the French immigrants to get out of town for they were under suspicion of encouraging the slave revolt.) Most importantly, when Gabriel is on the run, he appears at her door. At great risk, she takes him in and feeds him. It is she who suggests that Gabriel hide under the deck of one of the docked ships; then she departs for Philadelphia without telling a soul his whereabouts although she knows of the \$300 bounty on his head. Melody’s covert associations with whites and blacks make her the quintessential mulatto character, a person who moves with equal ease in black and white communities, deciding every day her racial allegiance. *Black Thunder*

presents various roles for mixed race people in Virginia in 1800.

In the end, slavery's daily, infinite brutality prompts Gabriel and a thousand other black men to revolt. Gabriel's owner, Thomas Prosser, is notoriously wicked, viciously beating and killing slaves at whim. The slaves who witness these outbursts agonize at the sights and whisper among themselves. The physical violence against slaves is not confined to one or two "bad" owners. Oppression is heavy everywhere. White men are gripped by such intense fear of slave uprising that Pharaoh's announcement of the impending revolt sends them into frenzy. Pharaoh had no credibility with planters at any other time. Why do they believe him now? His warning was confirmation of their worst fears, so slaves and freedmen are indiscriminately hanged in groups for the month that Gabriel remained at large. One senses the spiral of violence that triggers fear and more fear and knows no end. As brutal as the white response was to the aborted revolt, it did not stamp out slave resistance. Thirty years after Gabriel Prosser's death, Nat Turner, with a small band of men, slaughtered sixty white people near Richmond.

Judging from readership at time of publication, Arna Bontemps was among the few interested in what motivated slaves to break from bondage. "*Black Thunder* [...] earned no more than its advance" according to Bontemps (xv). Its publication during the Great Depression undoubtedly affected sales, which were limited. However, the civil rights movement of the 1960s created a public appetite for novels about black heroic episodes and Macmillan and Company reissued *Black Thunder* in 1963. Today it remains in print.

Critical response to *Black Thunder* both at time of publication and now remain positive. In fact, the favorable reviews kept Arna Bontemps from despairing about paltry sales. He believed the novel was not “a total loss” (Bontemps xv). Literary critic Mary Davis in *Historical Slave Revolt and the Literary Imagination* (1984) compares Arna Bontemps and Herman Melville as historical novelists:

...Bontemps and Melville were able to consult fairly precise sources about their subjects. Both scrupulously followed these sources when it suited them, silently modified them when they chose to, and abandoned them altogether when the artistic need arose. Thus in both their cases, it is much easier to separate the historical ‘event’ from the literary image of it and to see how attention to historical detail is often superseded by subjective or artistic interests. (138)

Because of Bontemps’ fine craftsmanship, *Black Thunder* is considered the first historical novel of consequence written by an African-American (Turner 114). By comparing Bontemps with Melville, Davis intended a compliment to Bontemps, putting him among the elite craftsmen of the American literary canon in general and historical novelists in particular.

Conclusion

The historical novels in this chapter were written during a thirty-year period more turbulent than most. Clearly World War I diverted authors and readers away from historical fiction about slavery. After *Dem Good Ole Times* and *Bonnie Belmont*, there’s a twenty-year silence on the subject until *Migrations* (1927). Homegrown

plantations are of little consequence when Americans are fighting international foes. During World War I and the roaring 20s, interest in antebellum America waned yet the 1930s produced *Fugitives of the Pearl* (1930), *Cold Blue Moon* (1931), *Kingdom Coming* (1933), and *Black Thunder* (1936). Literary scholar Mary Davis states, “James O. Young argues that the historical novel in the 1930s ‘served two major and dramatically opposing functions during a period of severe crisis: providing escape and generating morale’” (251). Did the Depression’s difficult economic straits create in writers and readers a yearning for mansions of old and blacks who worked without pay for white southerners, as Howard Odum and Roark Bradford intimate? Odum’s *Black Ulysses* narrator certainly is not a heroic man of war but a comedian, while Bradford’s *Telegram* appears timid too, leaving the plantation only after the whites had abandoned it. He was most content as a slave. Did race riots, the Marcus Garvey Back-to-Africa movement, and the NAACP lynching protests make the novelists yearn for quieter, more passive and more satisfied black people? Two black male authors, John Paynter and Arna Bontemps, wrote of black men who fought the enormous odds against success in *Fugitives of the Pearl* and *Black Thunder*, and both based their fictions on true incidents. Were they motivated by the race riots, Garvey movement, and the NAACP protests? Were they urging African-Americans during a bleak time to resist despair and take action against troubles? Both black novelists write heroic tales of black triumph despite the slave economy. The historical novels about slavery published in the 30s certainly serve as escapist fare for white readers and morale-boosters for blacks.

In terms of race, only two African-Americans, John Paynter and Arna Bontemps, contributed historical novels to this period. “The Black novelist's knowledge of publishing trends and audience receptivity is also a factor which has contributed to the scarcity of historical novels about Black life. The Black author has been encouraged by publishers and audience response ‘not to write narrowly about Negroes but broadly about people,’” according to Arna Bontemps (Pettis viii). For example, Langston Hughes marveled in a letter to Bontemps that no one had attempted a novel about Frederick Douglass. “Langston Hughes...knew that some material about Black life would make fine novels but would not sell” (Pettis viii). Both *Fugitives* and *Black Thunder* did not have impressive sales at publication and both went out of print after the first printing despite favorable reviews for Bontemps. Yet both novels returned to print during the 1960s and 1970s civil rights movement. Another Harlem Renaissance participant, Sterling Brown (who wrote a brilliant review of *Kingdom Coming*) bemoaned: “[. . .] the more truthfully we write about ourselves, the more limited the market. Those novels about Negroes that sell best [. . .] touch very lightly upon the realities of Negro life [. . .]” (Pettis ix). Perhaps that fact accounts for the poor sales of two novels based on actual resistance to slavery.

The most obvious difference in *Fugitives of the Pearl* and *Black Thunder* from novels by white novelists of this period is the treatment and description of black characters. Actions are seen from the slaves’ point of view, rather than whites’, and most importantly, the black characters think, plan and ruminate about freedom. In the stories by black authors, the slaves yearn for freedom and will risk their lives

acquiring it whereas Sallie May Dooley and Howard Odum would have readers believe that slaves were content with their wretched living conditions and dependence on their owners. In addition, the interior lives of slaves tend not to be imagined by white novelists, even in novels with black narrators such as *Dem Good Ole Times*, *Kingdom Coming*, and *Cold Blue Moon*. Perhaps the novelists were not convinced that blacks have thoughts, or perhaps they had no need and their audience had no need to see slavery from the perspective of slaves. Arna Bontemps knew where to separate history from fiction by going into Gabriel Prosser's thought processes with stream-of-consciousness writing technique. Prosser was not literate and left no written records of his plans, but Bontemps was not reluctant to speak for those for whom no archive exists.

Bontemps is credited with writing "the first historical novel of consequence by an African-American" (Turner 114) despite *Fugitives of the Pearl* being published earlier because Bontemps is a polished, professional writer. Whereas *Fugitives* was Paynter's first published work, *Black Thunder* is Bontemps' fourth. Paynter eschews paragraphs while the English professor produces flawless prose. No character drops out of the plot, forgotten, in *Black Thunder*. Not only do characters appear and disappear magically in *Fugitives*, but also there's little effort to distinguish one person from another in the large Edmondson family. As Mary Davis observes in her comparison of Bontemps to Melville, Bontemps knew when to abandon the historical record for the sake of the story in ways that Paynter did not know when or how to do. Yet *Fugitives* is a novel because Paynter created the thoughts and words of the

characters while adhering to the oral history and newspaper accounts of the escape. Finally, not only did Paynter keep too strictly to the historical record and lack writing expertise, but he was writing about his own family, unlike Bontemps. Arna Bontemps did not have to worry about how his own family would react to the book about their ancestors. Freedom from the constraint to please family with the publication might be the essential factor in making *Black Thunder* a noted historical novel.

This generation of authors does not shy away from the crushing physical and emotional brutality of slavery. Even the two novels that attempted a more light-hearted approach, *Dem Good Ole Times* and *Cold Blue Moon* do not evade the ragged children, squalid housing, and ubiquitous hunger. While these texts do not feature mulattos, again due to their effort at being “happy” chronicles, other novels reveal the destruction to black and white families when “bright” babies are born to slave mothers. As both children yet chattel, they signal the rape of the slave woman and often the dissolution of the slave family. In *Migrations* and *Kingdom Coming* slave husbands abandon their families because of their inability to protect their wives from sexually predatory owners. The white wife in *Migrations* ignores the obvious, never questioning her husband about his look-alike slave baby. *Kingdom Coming* avoids the white wife’s predicament by not having any white women appear in the novel. *Black Thunder* features adult mulattos who have difficulties negotiating between free and slave society. In addition, vivid, wrenching depictions of slave auctions are presented in *Bonnie Belmont*, *Fugitives of the Pearl*, and *Black Thunder*.

Among historical novels written from 1906-1936, three do not condemn slavery, intimating that it was probably a good thing for blacks. Both *Cold Blue Moon* and *Dem Good Ole Times* have ex-slaves reminisce with laughter about the time when they were property. While *Kingdom Coming* lacked the slave-comedian-narrator, its slave characters were complacent about the plantation system—even a freed one worked for the slave-owner, completely forgetting to visit her son in the Territories who set her free. Freedom is the terrain the blacks could not navigate; therefore *Kingdom Coming* is another pro-slavery novel in this chapter. Evelyn Scott's *Migrations* has both slaveholders and slaves entirely destroyed by the institution, but the slaves are expendable props. This novel sits in the middle of the continuum between the pro-slavery and abolition novels. For Scott, a white female Southerner, slavery did not make sense, but there was no passion behind this logic in the novel. (She lacks the fire behind her convictions like John Cochran, abolitionist and Union soldier.) Scott never stopped being white when she wrote black characters, preferring to invest them with no importance in the plot and keeping them one-dimensional as opposed to the white characters. In sharp contrast, conviction about abolition shines through in *Bonnie Belmont*, *Fugitives of the Pearl* and *Black Thunder*. Judge John Cochran, a white male, joins the two African-Americans novelists in this respect. The second generation of slavery novelists is almost evenly split between pro-slavery and pro-freedom in these seven books. Slavery remains a battleground, accurately reflecting its place in American history.

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Chapter 4: 1937-1967

October Pruitt, a fugitive slave, says, “I’m trying to find my own freedom. I’m trying, in a sense, to be master of myself” (Anderson 95).

Harriet Tubman tells fugitive slaves, “No one can give freedom. It’s yours to take, but mostly you have to fight for it,...and then go on fighting to keep it, seems like” (Parrish 121).

Making definitive judgments about the authors and novels portraying slavery from 1937-1967 is complicated given the number of novels and the ranges in ages, writing styles and politics of the authors. Fifteen historical novels about slavery were written in this period, beginning in 1940 with the publication of Willa Cather’s *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* and Frances Gaither’s *Follow the Drinking Gourd*. Generally, only one historical novel about American slavery was published each year, except in 1944 when two appeared, Henrietta Buckmaster’s *Deep River* and Gaither’s *The Red Cock Crows*, and then there was a silence between 1957 and 1964 when none was published. The 1940s were the boom years for these novels with seven being published. The three other novels published in the 1940s include: John Weld’s *Sabbath Has No End* (1942); Anne Parrish’s *Clouded Star* (1948); Gaither’s *Double Muscadine* (1949). The following were published in the 1950s: Elizabeth Coker’s *Daughter of Strangers* (1950); Julia Davis’ *Cloud on the Land* (1951) and *Bridle the Wind* (1953); Robert Penn Warren *Band of Angels* (1955); and Waters Turpin’s *The*

Rootless (1957). Only three historical novels about slavery were published in the 1960s: Alston Anderson's *All God's Children* (1965); Janet Stevenson's *Sisters and Brothers* (1966); and Margaret Walker's *Jubilee* (1966).

What national pressures prompted a flurry of activity about this subject? The changes in the world during 1937-1967 were nothing short of monumental. Race relations, in particular, were shaken out of old paradigms based on white supremacy. Adolf Hitler's mythology of Aryan world dominance crashed before Allied forces that included more black and brown people than ever before, and after the Pearl Harbor attack, no longer could white Americans behave as if the non-white world did not exist. The demands for racial equality or the completion of the Emancipation Proclamation rose during the period. The Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education*, calling for the desegregation of schools, became a clarion call for the rise of a full-blown, organized civil rights movement that led to the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. President Lyndon Johnson, a Texan, employed his considerable persuasive abilities to get Congress to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964, "...the most far-reaching and comprehensive law in support of racial equality ever enacted by Congress" (Franklin and Moss 539). One novelist, Henrietta Buckmaster, author of *Deep River*, explained her motivation for writing historical fiction: "I knew that the present unfinished business of civil rights was inextricably entangled with our misinformation about the Negro before and after the Civil War" (Wakeman 235). Many died as a direct result of insistence on ending racial segregation, yet some despair and much hope were born anew.

Some novelists decided to examine slavery through a fictive prism. They exhibit enormous diversity in terms of their talent, generations, gender and race. Among the novelists in this chapter, three were born in the nineteenth century: Willa Cather in 1873, Anne Parrish in 1888, and Frances Gaither in 1889. Cather and Gaither are Southerners with slave-owning heritages who had heard family plantation stories from parents and grandparents. Most of the novelists in this chapter were born during the first decade of the new century: Julia Davis (in 1900), John Weld and Robert Penn Warren (in 1905), Henrietta Buckmaster and Elizabeth Coker (in 1909), and Waters Turpin (in 1910). The births of Janet Stevenson (1913) and Margaret Walker (1915) precede the youngest, Alston Anderson in 1924. As of 2003, Janet Stevenson was living in Oregon, and it is possible that Alston Anderson is alive (his demise has not been noted). This group of writers sat at such remove from slavery that they drew deeply on family stories, their own research into the era, and their imaginations. In terms of gender, this group is decidedly female, perhaps reflecting new opportunities for intellectual pursuits. Another factor in the gender imbalance is the male writing population was affected, if not reduced, by the world wars. Of the four male novelists, three were too young to serve in World War I and they were too old to participate in World War II. Finally, there is slight racial diversity, with the three black writers, Waters Turpin, Alston Anderson, and Margaret Walker, publishing in 1957, 1965, and 1966, respectively. Apparently it remained more difficult for black novelists to be published during this period. Of the two black male writers, Turpin self-published and largely went unread while Anderson was published by Bobbs-

Merrill, yet he never found an audience either. In sharp contrast, Walker's *Jubilee* was a bestseller, selling into the millions, but the critical firestorm in the white media surrounding the publication prompted Walker to publish *How I Wrote Jubilee*. The controversy clearly signaled that 1966 was still too early for African-American novelists to own the slave story. Special note must be made of one novelist whose characters were so nuanced and subtly delineated that it was difficult to discern her racial identification. Elizabeth Coker in *Daughter of Strangers* successfully avoided stereotypes to a degree seldom seen in American fiction and certainly in fiction in the 1950s. In her plot and characterization she made unique choices.

Willa Cather (1873-1947), among the three most celebrated American authors in this chapter (the others being Robert Penn Warren and Margaret Walker), dedicated the last novel in a prolific career to a rumination about slavery in her Virginia birthplace. Born in Back Creek Valley, Virginia on December 7, 1873, her family moved to Red Cloud, Nebraska in 1882 ("Cather"). The West as a setting dominates her fictional works. By the time Willa Cather graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1895, she had switched her major from medicine to writing, as she began working as a journalist and editor (Woodress). Briefly she left journalism to teach high school English in Pittsburgh for five years. She gave up teaching to return to editing magazines in New York, before becoming a full-time writer of short stories, novels, and essays (Woodress). The author of thirty books, Willa Cather was revered during her lifetime, receiving a Pulitzer Prize for one novel (*One of Ours*, 1922), seven honorary doctorates, and a National Institute of Arts and Letters Gold medal

(1944). On April 24, 1947 she died of a cerebral hemorrhage in New York City (“Cather”). According to critic George Dekker, Cather “may well be the preeminent American historical romancer-novelist of our century” when looking at her entire canon (254).

In *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940) slavery itself and its wide-ranging destruction stand at the center of the conflict. Cather returns “to her origins...” and “...draws on family history...” since her Grandmother Boak helped a slave escape to Canada in 1856 (Woodress). In Back Creek, Virginia in 1856, Sapphira Dodderidge Colbert, a powerful and controlling woman, can not ascertain whether her husband, with whom she shares her fortune, is engaging in a sexual relationship with the mulatto teenager who used to be Sapphira’s favorite. Confined to a wheelchair, she cannot investigate for herself, and she refuses to ask Henry when she sees him for his daily visit at breakfast. She and everyone else knows that in antebellum Virginia Henry Colbert had the privilege of doing whatever he wanted—with whomever he wanted, especially his property. The Colberts’ only child, Rachel, even as a youngster, intimates the destructive nature of her parents’ “enlightened” version of slavery. There are no whips, beatings or overseers at Mill House; no slave is ever “sold off” even when indigent. The slaves and Colberts know each other as well as can be expected given the power differential. These slaves have been in the Dodderidge family for years and the sole heir, Rachel, believes slavery is wrong, showing that children can have values not molded by parents. Since Back Creek, Virginia is populated by whites too poor to own many, if any, slaves, Mrs. Rachel

Blake is embraced by the larger community that has never approved of her parents. The parents die after reconciling with their only child and granddaughters. In *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* all relationships are subtle, nuanced, complicated.

The slaves who remained at Mill House in Virginia, after the scale-back in acquiescence to neighborhood norms, are those most valued by Sapphira and Henry Colbert. They had been with the Dodderidges (Sapphira's family) for generations. Fat Lizzie and her daughter Bluebell cook, whenever they are not gossiping; they are useless at housekeeping tasks and Henry forbade Bluebell to set foot in his lodgings at the mill (63). The other house servants include Till, Sapphira's lifelong personal slave, her mulatto daughter, Nancy, and old Jeff, Till's husband (married by Sapphira's dictate). Mulatto Sampson serves as Henry's right hand at the mill. The oldest slave at Mill House is Jezebel who lies dying for the half of the novel (11). Jezebel and Tansy Dave are non-working slaves who receive Sapphira's attention and upkeep despite being unproductive.

The catalyst for the central conflict in the novel is Sapphira's suspicion about Nancy and her husband, Henry. Pretty, teenaged Nancy has been the only person allowed to clean the Mill House where Henry Colbert lives. She has had this duty since she was twelve and spends as much time alone with Henry as his invalid wife who never enters the mill (64). When Sapphira's jealousy spikes, Nancy, a former favorite slave, can do nothing right although her service remains impeccable. Matters are made worse by Henry's protectiveness and defense of Nancy when Sapphira criticizes her. Both Till, Nancy's mother, and Henry are bewildered by Sapphira's

change of heart toward Nancy. Sapphira has no way of discerning the paternal relationship that Henry has with Nancy. The basis of Sapphira's doubts about her husband and slave is rooted in the nature of slavery; all know that Henry can do whatever he wanted with Nancy since she was his property, like the mill.

Since Henry refuses to sell Nancy to a neighbor, Sapphira invites Martin Colbert for a visit (155). Simultaneously Sapphira orders Nancy to no longer sleep in her parents' cabin, but she must now sleep in the hallway outside of Sapphira's door, contiguous to Martin's bedroom. Martin constantly pursues Nancy with sexual propositions. She narrowly avoids attack each instance by quick thinking (195). Nancy approaches a nervous breakdown in a few weeks after Martin's arrival. Neither Till nor Jeff, her stepfather, does anything to intervene.

When Sapphira sends Nancy to the woods to pick flowers on the same morning that Martin goes horseback riding in the same area, Nancy decides to save herself from rape. Instead of falling directly into Sapphira's trap, Nancy stops at Rachel's house instead and begs for protection. Sapphira's daughter and two granddaughters accompany Nancy to the woods to pick flowers—to Martin's surprise (168-175). Readers see no more of Martin after Rachel's intervention; he tires of pursuing Nancy and takes up with the more willing Bluebell instead.

Rachel's protection doesn't end in the woods. With funds from her father and arrangements from her minister's contacts on the Underground Railroad, Rachel and Nancy set out for Canada. No one questions a white woman traveling with a slave, and Nancy escapes slavery easily (223, 233). When Rachel returns home, she

receives a letter from her mother telling her that she is no longer welcome at Mill House (245-246). Sapphira never learns that Henry supplied the money for the escape, and Henry continues to visit his daughter at her home. As for Nancy's family, her mother has a few hasty conversations with Rachel, and she is overjoyed that Nancy is free, even if it means that they will never see each other again.

After a year, one of Rachel's daughters dies and Sapphira invites Rachel and the surviving child to live at Mill House (267). Henry is grateful that Sapphira forgives Rachel and the Colbert marriage rekindles before Sapphira dies (268). Henry survives his wife by five years (291).

The Epilogue features a first-person narrator, a white child in Mill House who witnesses Nancy's triumphant reunion with her elderly mother after 25 years. Slavery has ended but servitude has not for the blacks at Mill House; the children of former slaves keep the mill going. Black life is similar in Canada. Nancy works as a domestic for a rich Canadian family. Her husband is a gardener, and they have two children (285). Throughout the years, Nancy has always sent money to her mother at Christmas (281).

Sapphira fights fire with fire to break up whatever is going on between Henry and Nancy. Since her suspicion of white male lust is the problem, she invites to her home for an extended stay Henry's own nephew who is known for being wild with women. Sapphira knows that there is no protection for black females from white males. The old male slaves have no way of thwarting Martin's behavior except one exchanges pallets with Nancy; she sleeps in the wine closet and he sleeps in the hall when

Martin roams the house at night. When Mulatto Sampson informs Henry of Martin's constant pursuit of Nancy, Henry does nothing until his daughter confronts him about the same problem--and provides her solution. Even then Henry does not directly give Rachel the \$100 needed for Nancy's escape to Canada. He leaves the money in his coat pocket near an open window where Rachel is to reach and get it while he slept. Henry's behavior in this instance symbolizes his attitude towards slavery. In his religious beliefs, he sided with Rachel's abolitionist leanings (They attend the same church, headed by an abolitionist.) The omniscient narrator explained Henry's thinking: "Henry Colbert knew he had a legal right to manumit any of his wife's negroes; but that would be an outrage to her feelings, and an injustice to the slaves themselves. Where would they go? How would they live? They had never learned to take care of themselves or to provide for tomorrow." Only Mulatto Sampson, Henry believes, had enough skill to live independently for he is the head mill hand (108-109).

The existence of mulattos, such as Mulatto Sampson and mulatto Nancy, also stands as evidence of the lack of protection for slave women. Nancy's father is a painter from Baltimore who stayed at Mill House to produce the family portraits. He impregnates Till, Sapphira's personal servant, and it serves a constant joke between Sapphira and Henry (9). After Nancy is born, Sapphira forces Till to marry Jeff, the ancient carriage driver, so that Till will not have any more children who would interfere with Till's service to Sapphira (42). Sapphira's recognition that white males father slaves at whim serves as fuel for her suspicions about Henry later.

Yet, because the novel is as much a character study as anything, the stories of two slaves are included to show how caring and considerate Sapphira could be. When Sapphira returns from making her annual visit to her family, she immediately visits Jezebel, a slave who had been in decline before Sapphira left. Sapphira's visit to Jezebel permits a flashback to Jezebel's life. "Jezebel was the only one of the Colbert negroes who had come from Africa. All the others were, as they proudly said, Virginians...." Jezebel came from Guinea in the 1780s, "...about 20 years before the importation of slaves became illegal. She was sold to her first master on the deck of a British slaver out of Baltimore." Jezebel's original village lay four days from the sea but a tribe that became kidnappers for the slavers raided it. Jezebel witnessed her village burned and her male family members slaughtered (90). "When they reached the coast they were kept in the stockade only long enough to be stripped, shaved all over the body, and drenched with sea water....Jezebel and the other captives were rowed out in small boats and put in leg chains..." The Albert Horn was the name of the ship. The slaves were put beneath the deck with only three feet, 10 inches "between the shelf on which they lay and the upper deck which roofed them over. The slaves made the long voyage of from two to three months in a sitting or recumbent position...." (91). "All were kept naked throughout the voyage, and their heads and bodies were shaved every fortnight." The slaves' quarters smelled foul because of the lack of air and drainage for water. "The Captain of the Albert Horn was not a brutal man, and his vessel was a model slaver." Slaves were allowed above deck each day when the weather was good. Jezebel received her name on the first

night of sailing; the sailors called her Jezebel for starting a fight among the women below deck (92). The sailor who tries to beat Jezebel for fighting has his thumb bitten through. He urges the captain to throw her overboard. While the captain worried about the mate's infected hand, he was not interested in throwing cargo overboard since he had a third interest in the slaves that made land. The captain ordered Jezebel to be brought up from below. "Jezebel was brought up in heavy irons for his inspection. Her naked back was seamed with welts and bloody cuts, but she carried herself with proud indifference, and there was no plea for mercy in her eyes." The captain believed Jezebel was worth three other women and as much as the best man (93). Once in America, Jezebel is traded several times before arriving at the Dodderidges the year of Sapphira's birth. Until the age of 80, Jezebel supervised the gardens at Mill Farm (96). When Jezebel dies, the entire Colbert family attends, dressed in black (101).

The other slave who triggers Sapphira's compassion is Tansy Dave, a formerly happy slave young man who falls in love with a visitor's slave. To make himself smell sweet for her, he rolls in a flowerbed. His passion is deep, and he begs Sapphira to buy the slave girl so they can marry. Despite not needing another female slave, Sapphira does attempt to buy the girl for Dave—but her owner won't sell. The visitor "thoroughly disapproved of slave-owning" and the only reason she owned two slaves is because that is the only way to obtain good house servants in Baltimore. She will not sell for any reason. Sapphira is affronted by the visitor's attitude. When the guest leaves the Colberts', Dave runs after them. He gets as far as Harper's Ferry

but returns to the Colberts where he descends into madness. Sapphira always see that “he was clothed and fed through the winter” although he works for them no longer (205-208).

Each Colbert is well-intentioned and none are overtly brutal to slaves. Nonetheless slave-holding tears this small family apart; it draws a wedge between the only child and her parents. Rachel sees that even the sanitized slavery at Mill House is full of oppression and heartbreak for the slaves. She acts on her conscience and helps Nancy escape its clutches by living in Canada. Many sacrifice for Nancy to live free: Rachel is estranged for a year from her parents and Nancy and her mother, Till, do not see each other for twenty-five years, long after the Civil War. Based on a real-life family drama, the novel illustrates the high cost of conscience and defiance of societal norms.

Sapphira and the Slave Girl received mixed reviews from critics. Those who disliked the novel cited the long stretches with no action; the plot didn’t stretch over a 300-page book. Clifton Fadiman of the *New Yorker* called the novel “...minor in tone and content...” (121). Judith Berzon in *Neither White nor Black* agreed: “the novel as a whole is weak, for Cather utilized many stereotypes and stock situations” (71). Robert Littell in *Time* admitted “Willa Cather could not possibly write a bad novel; but *Sapphira* bears witness that she can write a dull one” (88). In addition to its slow pace, the other major flaw, according to some critics, was the conclusion that shifted to a first-person narrator, an unidentified young child who witnessed Nancy and Till’s reunion. Readers must presume the narrator is Sapphira’s great-grandchild,

and it is jarring to accept this new voice who knows so little of the story. The unsigned review in *Catholic World* stated, “The one flaw in this delightful book is the Epilogue; it could so well have been devoted to a satisfying completion of the exceptionally well-drawn characters. Instead, Miss Cather confuses her reader and leaves them greatly exasperated” (634).

However, an equal number found the novel, Cather’s last, to be her best work in thirteen years and one of five best of her canon because it “...shows in its central character the tangible passion and struggle, in its secondary characters the honest virtue and credible humility, and in its general atmosphere of fear and obsession a dramatic force that lift the tale out of its exaggerated moralism and dramatic simplicity into its own kind of truth and power” explained M. D. Zabel in the *Nation* (574). Furthermore, Clifton Fadiman in the *New Yorker* noted how Cather was original by avoiding the popular tale: “*Sapphira*...is about as remote from the main stream of current fiction as you can well conceive.... Most writers...make up their stories; she seems to remember hers. Out of this book, designedly minor in tone and content, is exhaled a flavor rare nowadays...a flavor of cool, almost austere gravity” (121). Overall, Cather specialists do not rank the novel among Cather’s best work.

For Frances Gaither (1889-1955), antebellum plantation life was also family history. Her father, a medical doctor, was the son of a prosperous planter. Born in Somerville, Tennessee in 1889, Frances Jones graduated summa cum laude from Mississippi State College for Women in 1909 (Burke and Howe 234; Bain, Flora and Rubin 171). She married a reporter, Rice Gaither, and the couple lived both in the

South and the North throughout their lives (Bain, Flora, and Rubin 171). Gaither wrote in many literary genres, producing short stories, four books for children, one biography and three novels by her death on October 28, 1955 in Florida (Bain, Flora and Rubin 172; Seymour-Smith and Kimmens 935; Levy 212).

Follow the Drinking Gourd (1940) illustrates the demise of two struggling plantations with their inhabitants at an unspecified time in the past. “Slavery does not pay” is the obvious moral of a depressing plot. No whites benefit from it. Nature itself rejects all efforts at cultivation; the land will not yield crops or weather washes them away. The overseers who manage the plantation for the absentee landlord don’t prosper either. The heir apparent fares no better and is killed by cholera. The slaves toil endlessly and yet remain broken and separated from families until they run off or die.

Once again, readers have the story of an overseer producing a child with a slave who is taken away from a male slave who is destroyed by his inability to do anything about the theft and rape. The male slave is rendered impotent in the situation as the white overseer fathers a mulatto child. The female slave’s desires are also negated; she must do as she is told. The beautiful mulatto child grows up to be the prize possession of various male slaves. She abandons three children when bought by a free mulatto with a paying job. Everyone dies a slow, painful death in *Follow the Drinking Gourd*.

The reviews for the novel in the *New Yorker*, *New York Times*, and the *Saturday Review of Literature* were generous and kind, citing the simple but effective writing

style. Frank Daniel of the *Saturday Review of Literature* writes, “Mrs. Gaither . . . presents the economical wastefulness of slavery, and its inimical effect on all concerned—even upon the land where the institutions were scarcely questioned” (21).

Another historical novelist, John Weld (1905-2003), had the most eclectic jobs of any of the historical novelists in the chapter. Born on February 24, 1905 in Birmingham, Alabama to a journalist and an astrologer, Weld acknowledged his “Yankee blood” and ancestors among the original settlers of Carolina (“Weld”; *Sabbath* N. Pg.). He attended Alabama Polytechnic Institute. At various times in his life he was a stunt man in films, a reporter in France, a screen writer, a publisher, a public relations director for Ford Motor Company on the West Coast 1944-49, a film documentarian, and a hospital board member (“Weld”). His relation with the film world was an enduring connection throughout his adult life. Not only was he a stunt man from 1923-26, but also he produced five documentaries. Indeed, *Sabbath Has No End* (1942) is dedicated to film director John Huston. As a writer, he produced five novels, three of which were historical fiction, and three biographies/autobiographies. John Weld died, having lived a full life, on June 14, 2003 in Dana Point, California (“Weld”).

Sabbath Has No End appropriately uses as an epigram a sentence from *Along This Way* by noted black scholar and writer James Weldon Johnson: “Through it all I discern one clear and certain truth: in the core of the heart of the American race problem the sex factor is rooted . . .” (Weld N. Pg). The novel is a long tale set in Spartanburg, South Carolina in 1815 detailing how all slave women are victimized by

white males' sexual aggression and how male slaves are impotent to protect their women from this aggression. Sometimes the male slaves are driven to insanity with this situation and resort to retaliatory rapes of white women. Of course, black misbehavior is quelled with beatings and death while white males go unpunished for the same crimes against blacks. All women, white or black, are portrayed as manipulative and materialistic that the crimes against them are not viewed as crimes at all; a misogynistic view of women runs through the novel. The novel ends with Quash and Chloe, the slave protagonists and lovers, declaring their love for one another. Quash explains to Chloe:

'Dis yhere's er white man's world us libe in. Us gotta libe in hit lak de white man say...till us kin git ourse'fs edumecated an' till us kin git erholt of God....De one hope fer er colored man is fer his woman t' be true wid him. Efn er colored man cud feel his woman wuz his'n, effn eh cud feel she warn't gwine an' mess wid no white man—eh'd be happy. Nigger man ain' gwine out an' rape no white gal effn de white mens leabe his woman erlone.' (326-328)

As Quash details it, white women are raped only in retaliation for white men's rape of female slaves. If the sexual relations between whites and blacks ceased, the races could coexist peacefully. The significance of Chloe's silence about Quash's political analysis is left to each reader to decipher.

While the prime focus of *Sabbath* is sex between owners and slaves, John Weld provides an intimate glimpse into the daily misery of slave life throughout. The novel opens with a description of a slave coffle, headed by a New England slave trader

(hinting at how all parts of the U.S. prospered from slavery). Most of the twenty-four people in the coffle are male but all are chained at the neck and wrist as they slog through the mud and rain. Quash is a member of the coffle and Webb Montgomery has pity on him because his iron collar has formed a sore on his neck. "The collar was wrapped in a dirty rag as protection for the sore." Montgomery is horrified at Quash's treatment and that sympathy prompts him to buy the slave and have a doctor treat the wound (11-12, 18-19). The slave's iron collar reappears at the novel's end locked onto Moses, the fugitive who turns into a murdering rapist. John Weld leads readers to the obvious conclusion that brutal handling of the male slaves, in particular, leads to violent retaliation, and he implies that the converse is true: more sympathetic treatment by owners like Webb Montgomery produce more responsible, docile slaves.

Portions of the novel celebrate the brain-numbing field labor of all slaves old enough to stand. After all, there were only 47 slaves to work 500 acres, only half of which had been cleared (67). On Quash's first day at Fairview he helps clear land for tobacco, "...jerkng saplings and cutting out underbrush" (54). Every slave, no matter the age, is employed in this undertaking:

all over the field men, women and children were working, the men wielding axes and knives, the women digging the dirt out from about the roots of the larger saplings, and the children piling up and burning the brush. And among them there was sporadic singing and frequent laughter and much idleness. The men did as little as they dared; the women...eased their work

with song; and the children made a game of whatever they were assigned to do. (55)

Weld's description suggests that this task of clearing land is not back-breaking at all. See, the women sing and the children play for endless hours in the hot sun for no pay, little food and squalid conditions. The omniscient narrator breaks into an elegy to slave labor:

And it was a symphony to see them work.... There was about the slaves—in their work and in their song as they followed the mules and horses—something indescribably wonderful and throat-catching, and all the beauty that is bondage, all of its poignance, its misery, its anguish and yearning were expressed there in delicate blend. (73-74)

In this novel readers encounter "...all the beauty that is bondage..." indeed.

Sabbath appears particularly misogynistic, for all women profit in the slave economy while there is silence about white male profiteering. White and black, women are willing to sell their souls for material gain. Maud Montgomery, as inheritor of the plantation from her father, is determined to make money off the investment; her philosophy is that the plantation is unprofitable, because her husband is not exploitative enough of slave labor. He is too easy on slaves, so she is eager to provide the overseer with a special incentive to "grow more cotton"—unbeknownst to her husband. She is willing to overlook her suspicions that her son's personal slave is also her husband's child and that he seems particularly fond of that same boy's mother, also a house slave (157-159). The overseer's wife, Mrs. Tate, likewise is

portrayed as being the most grasping, thieving, and manipulative of all the women. She too suspects her husband of sexual dalliances with female slaves, but she too is willing to turn a blind eye—since she has a sexual encounter with a young male slave she has employed to steal meat from the smoke-house for her (276-283). She is mildly concerned about having “a black baby.” This is the only instance of a white novelist suggesting that white women were not horrified at the prospect of intercourse with male slaves and, in Effie’s case, even initiated it. When Curtis is caught stealing a ham for Effie Tate and is beat and put in the stocks, she does not intervene. Not only are white women cunning and manipulative of childlike men, but the slave women behave similarly; Chloe’s resistance to Tate’s sexual advances disappear when he gives her a necklace. Her husband never enters her mind during her trysts with Tate and when Quash does question her about their obvious relations, she lies forthrightly. She trades sex for a better circumstance for her grandmother and she chastises Tate for being extra rough with Quash in the field—so their relations do not only profit her alone with new baubles. As soon as Chloe sees how she can profit from prostitution, she suffers no ethical conflict. Likewise the fugitive slave in the swamp, Moses, has a wife whom he hates because he does not believe she resists sex with their owner. Unlike Quash who believes the female slaves lack protection and choice in these matters, Moses believes his wife encourages and invites sex with whites. In the world of this novel, women are devoid of moral compass, and payday is the goal of their spirits.

For their part, male slaves don’t want sexual relations with white women; they

rape out of revenge for how white men rape black women. Both Curtis and Moses simply lack control, according to their depiction. Curtis tells Effie Tate after their encounter that she should not have put her hands on him while sneaking to the smokehouse to steal. Their encounter is not depicted as criminal since, after all, Effie Tate is a scoundrel. On the other hand, poor, innocent white Nancy is raped and killed by Moses on a rampage once he is freed from his iron collar. He decides to punish himself by committing suicide rather than be lynched by the vigilantes. It is not explained why he doesn't try to escape capture since he is already a fugitive. Males are the only ones sensitive to guilt in this novel. However all characters' sexual machinations are rooted, as the epigram so states, in race. The slave males' inability to protect slave females from rape by white men lead to most of the tragedies.

In general, John Weld's novels in the 1940s were "well-received." In particular, "Critics had high praise for *Sabbath Has No End...*". F. T. "Marsh, this time opining in *Books*, called it Weld's 'best story,' and asserted that the historical research for the book had been better handled than that for..." a previous novel. "Rose Feld, reviewing *Sabbath* in the *New York Times*, declared that 'there is a good deal in this novel which commands respect,' and complimented Weld on the realistic portrayals of his black characters. She went on to conclude that the author 'creates a truly heroic figure' in Quash" ("Weld").

1944 proved to be a banner year for the publication of historical novels about slavery. *The Red Cock Crows*, published in May 1944, was Frances Gaither's second

contribution to this particular genre. The author skillfully weaves a sub-plot, involving blossoming love between a southern belle and a Yankee schoolteacher, with the main plot, involving the transformation of the slave-overseer-preacher, Scofield, into an insurrectionist. If Scofield's tale echoes Nat Turner's, that is probably deliberate. The mythical Mississippi white townspeople overreact to the rumored slave uprising and hang hundreds of innocent slaves. However, the town returns to its previous quiet temper after the mass executions.

As soon as Adam Fiske, a teacher from Maine, debarks from the steamboat in Scotts Bluff, a Mississippi town in 1835, he is confronted by slavery. A slave is sent to meet him and lead him to the tavern inn where he unwittingly impresses the other guests when he announces he's working for the Dalton plantation. Fiske had saved for two years for the journey south to open a school for rich planters' children (3-7). The Dalton plantation is the largest in the area. In fact, when a man wanted to say he had a "heap" of anything, he said that he had: "as many as Dalton's got niggers." The town had been settled only twelve years, but there were so many slaves that they outnumbered the white population forty-to-one (6).

The Northern schoolteacher gets to see first-hand the best of plantation living as he is taken on a tour by Ward Dalton himself who knows all his slaves by name. Although there is a white overseer, he has only a perfunctory role, almost ceremonial—because Dalton's neighbors expect a white overseer on each plantation. The plantation is run, in truth, by a black slave driver, Scofield (17).

That night festivities in the "big house" and in the slave quarters celebrate the corn

shucking. Fannie Dalton decides to take bored-looking Adam Fiske to the party in the slave quarters because she "...never saw a Yankee yet who wasn't crazy about darkies singing in the moonlight." Indeed, the slaves' singing did exhilarate Fiske (18-19).

No sooner than the white spectators depart, than a murderous fight erupts in the quarters. Scofield, the black driver, runs to the mansion to tell "Mas Ward" about the killing. Ward Dalton does not blame Scofield when the slave party gets out of hand. A female slave, Coatney, stabbed and killed "a strange nigger" (21-22). Dalton takes a doctor down to the quarters to tend the slaves hurt in the fight, and even patches up the murderer who doesn't belong to him (25). Then, Scofield is ordered to drive Coatney home. She wails all the way for she's worried about being hanged for murder. Scofield has sex with her in an open field to quiet her (26-27).

At this point in the novel, Scofield is portrayed as having an enviable life for a slave. Despite Scofield's privileged position as slave driver, he shares a cabin with his stepfather Montgomery, a house servant to Ward Dalton's father (23). Both Scofield's mother and wife had died, but he mourned for his mother more than his deceased wife—even when he is with Coatney. "...[H]e knew he'd get him another woman. But he'd never have another mama" (45). In fact, a turning point in Scofield's otherwise steady relationship with Dalton occurs when Dalton returns home from a profitable trip to sell cotton and buys everyone gifts—except the gift Scofield had asked for, a marker for his mother's grave. Instead, Dalton buys Scofield another woman. Dalton explains, "You know I told you a long time ago I

was going to get you another wife as soon as I could afford it. And I'll never afford it any better than now. So I did it. Nathan and Top need women, too. So I bought three at once.... Now understand, you're to have first choice. They're all fine young wenches, stout and hearty...'" (112-113).

In rather heavy-handed fashion Frances Gaither illustrates that even the most compassionate slave owner never considers that slaves have emotional ties to family. Slaves are paired like animals and bred for profit. Dalton believes that Scofield is more interested in sex than in honoring his mother with a grave marker; that is one reason why Dalton conveniently forgot the marker. Of course, another reason will be the potential profit to Dalton if Scofield and the "stout and hearty" wench reproduce another slave. Ward Dalton was raised by a father who had also disrupted Scofield's family life; the Judge had taken Scofield's stepfather, Montgomery, away to Washington, D.C. for years when he served as senator. Scofield's family exists solely to serve whites; slaves' relationships with each other are of no consequence.

However, not only is the slave owner guilty of insensitivity in this novel. The northern schoolteacher remains impressed by the affluence of the Dalton plantation where even slaves own a few things. After all, Scofield owns his own horse and Montgomery is a regular bank, loaning money to all sorts of folks. Even "[t]he humblest slave had money to spend. They all raised private crops and poultry..." (52). With these thoughts Fiske is able to justify slavery and not show any abolitionist tendencies of which he is suspected.

When two slaves are overheard talking about killing a white baby at a neighboring

plantation to Dalton's, the few whites not vacationing in other states organize to protect themselves. Only Fannie Dalton and her grandfather remain at the Dalton plantation (131-132). Judge Dalton dismisses the rumored slave revolt, explaining, "Our people are too well-fed, too comfortable all around to cut our throats..." (136). The Judge cautions the young hot-heads because he knows that whites' fears have killed more blacks in his lifetime than slaves have killed whites (137). Still, even Fannie remains on edge, slapping a rude slave that hints at rebellion. Fannie "hadn't struck a servant since she was six years old. It just wasn't done at Shandy. Nobody struck a Negro in anger. Once an overseer had been fired for doing it. Even official whippings were rarely administered and then only as a last resort for flagrant crime such as stabbing or infidelity." Fannie immediately apologizes (144-145).

The Judge miscalculates. The slaves are on verge of uprising—with Scofield as the head. On the night his mother had died, Scofield had decided to lead a revolt that would set all slaves free. He saw it in a vision. Scofield has no desire to run away by himself: "I wouldn't care nothin' 'bout bein' free all by myself. Seem like I wouldn't want it less'n ever'body else, they be free, too'" (96). Scofield's main concern is getting enough ammunition for his plan (98).

Hysteria grips the whites at the hint of slave insurrection, and they begin rounding up and executing black people on whim. The schoolteacher witnesses a female slaveholder tying up an entire slave family and sending them to jail. When Fiske asks what crime the children have committed, the woman replies that she can do whatever she wants with her slaves (170). A Committee of Safety is formed to investigate the

rumors of insurrection and to punish the blacks. The northern schoolteacher, although always suspect of abolitionist sympathies, is permitted to join the Committee and become secretary. (Eventually he will be thrown off the Committee and told to leave the county forever for some jottings in a diary that made him appear to question slavery.) All types of blacks—all ages, genders, and occupations, including freedmen—are brought before the Committee of Safety (196). Many are hanged based on little evidence (202).

General (yes, he's given himself the title) Scofield's army is diminished by the hangings and jail. He still wants to have the rebellion, just differently than planned (218). Eventually all his captains are killed and Scofield is caught, alone. The arresting sheriff asks him, "It doesn't make sense to me somehow, Scofield. How on earth could a boy with so many advantages, so trusted by his master, foster a bloody rebellion?...?" (289). Scofield admits that no white man has stolen a woman from him or done a specific wrong (290). Of course, he must not have considered enslavement "a specific wrong". When he's before the Committee, Scofield admits to being led by the Spirit to foster the slave rebellion (291). He is sentenced to hang (302).

After a week of bloodletting, the town returned to normal: the gallows was destroyed, the Committee disbanded. "It was just like old times again—except that people, black and white, were kinder, if anything, to one another, as though they all entered into tacit conspiracy to wipe out the memory of that one incredible week at the beginning of July" (304). The whites try to return to normal, which means

returning to their imagined belief that they are kind and that slavery helps blacks. The slaves have no choice but to submit to whatever the whites demand. It is Mississippi in 1835.

The novel ends with a focus on the young white characters' love story. Fannie Dalton rejects her heritage, leaving the plantation to marry Adam Fiske in Boston. She knows she is doomed to exile for her betrayal of marrying a non-southerner (and one suspected of helping to incite the almost-slave rebellion). Once again, the Civil War is settled in fiction by the romantic love between a southerner and a northerner who are not far apart, as it turns out, about the slavery question.

In quite obvious fashion, Frances Gaither wants readers to see the horrific effects of slavery, even on an "enlightened" plantation with "kindly" owners who eschew the usual, overt, physical brutality. Nevertheless the slave system itself creates the constant fear of slave uprising in outnumbered whites, the constant urge to be free in the seemingly docile, and the bloody repression that enables the whites to maintain control. The *Red Cock Crows* is an attempt to explain Nat Turner's bloody siege. Scofield is transformed from reliable overseer to a general who plans to kill all whites despite his relatively prosperous life as a slave. Scofield also is led by a spiritual vision, so his transformation does not have to make logical sense. The fractured slave families' lives are presented as is the random, easy sexual escapades among slaves who know no fidelity to a spouse whom they do not love and who is selected for them by the slave-owner. The whites' iron-fisted terror tactics are never recognized as the true source of a cycle of violence.

Red Cock Crows received mixed reviews at publication. Some critics labeled it fast-paced while others thought it slow. Many described it as melodramatic (“Gaither,” *Book Review Digest* 268). In *The American Historical Novel* Ernest Leisy believes that Gaither’s goal was to demonstrate “...that slavery was an anachronism even during the period of its economic success” (147). For today’s readers, the novel offers so little that it is probably unread by all but doctoral students.

A novelist with a similar style as Gaither’s, Henrietta Buckmaster was the pen name of Henrietta Henkle (1909-1983), born in Cleveland to a newspaper editor although her family had settled in the South in the early eighteenth century (Rothe 79; Wakeman 236). She grew up in New York City where her father was foreign editor for the *New York Herald Tribune* (Wakeman 235). Henkle was educated in private schools, Friends Seminary and the Beardley School, but she did not attend college. Her publishing career began at twelve years with a short story in *Child Life*. By seventeen, she was writing book reviews for the *Christian Science Monitor* and the *Saturday Review of Literature* (Rothe 79). Her first novel was published at the age of eighteen, but before her life was through, she would complete nine novels and three non-fiction books (Wakeman 235-236). 1944 was her most celebrated year as a writer in which she won the Ohioana medal for *Deep River*, and she received a Guggenheim fellowship to complete a biography of William Lloyd Garrison (Rothe 79-80). Buckmaster worked as an editor for *Harper’s Bazaar* and *Reader’s Digest* (Rothe 79). She died in 1983 (Wakeman 236).

From her earliest work, Buckmaster was committed to producing carefully

researched historical fiction about the abolitionist movement and Civil War for contemporary readers (Rothe 79). Her works were rooted in purpose to correct “[...] our misinformation about the Negro before and after the Civil War” (Wakeman 235). Always “... Miss Buckmaster had been convinced of the rightness of the anti-slavery movement” and her third novel, *Let My People Go*, focused on the Underground Railroad. She had so much material left after completing it, that she decided to put it to use in *Deep River* (Rothe 79).

Deep River (1944) demonstrates how slaveholding created friction in white families. The novel begins in 1859 in Oglethorpe County, Georgia on the wedding day of Savanna Dorr and Simon Bliss. Savanna, the daughter of a prosperous planter, is encouraged by her mother to call off the wedding, ostensibly because the groom is late and might not show up. Mother Amelia Dorr believes Simon Bliss is a poor choice for a husband since he does not own as much property as Savanna’s father. Simon has only ten acres of land and no slaves, compared to the Dorrs’ 150 acres and twelve slaves. Nevertheless, Savanna’s paternal grandfather and her personal slave, Mammy, counsel her to marry Simon who is late to his own wedding because he was talking a white man out of beating a black man (3-15). Eventually Simon arrives.

Immediately after the wedding dinner, Simon and Savanna depart for their new mountain home, many days’ ride away. Savanna complains that Simon would not let her “bring Mammy,” the only person she had wanted to take with her. Simon proclaims, “There’ll never be a slave man or a slave woman in my house [...]. There’ll be no slaves. We don’t take to black men or white men doing our work for

us in the mountains [...]. No woman and no man bends dutiful to me [...]. Everyone stands upright in the image of Almighty God” (22). Thus, Simon’s abolitionist ideals are established at the outset.

The character most transformed over the course of *Deep River* is Savanna Dorr Bliss. Her first argument with her new husband centers on her desire to take Mammy with her to their new home. Simon absolutely refuses to own a slave—which raises the question of why two with such different values would marry in the first place. Pure animal magnetism seems to be the culprit. However, Savanna, possibly recalling her grandfather’s life with Dodie, secretly worries that Simon will have intercourse with the one slave on Lonesome Mountain, Venus (48). Savanna notices Simon talking to her at a neighbor’s cabin-building and that plants the suspicion. Although a communal project, Venus stands apart as an outsider until Simon talks to her. Savanna

...for almost the first time in her life she thought of a Negro woman exactly as she might about herself [...]. Men loved black girls because they were women. They knew nothing about black skins or white skins while they loved them [...]. Maybe men naturally loved black women better than white women because they had a dark beautiful secret, Savanna thought. (54)

Not only Venus makes Savanna rethink her slaveholding values, but the fugitive slave Ben causes Savanna to engage in her first abolitionist activity. She personally helps Ben return to her parents’ plantation in order to get his family and then return to Canada. Savanna’s parents note that slaves disappear whenever Mrs. Bliss arrives

(174).

Before his marriage, Simon had been away from his home for two years, getting an education, yet he is disheartened upon return by the intractable poverty in the mountains. No one represents poor men in the legislature since slave-owners control the state capital (56). Savanna's grandfather sympathizes with Simon's abolitionist leanings and knows that Simon plans to run for public office in a state hostile to his politics (87). Simon decides to run for election to the state house and win by rallying poor whites (there are no rich ones in his district) against slavery (125-142). His campaign is successful (171). The plot slows to a crawl when the couple arrives in the state capital, Milledgeville, since Buckmaster reproduces the politicians' speeches in legislative session. Simon's first address questions a law that supports slavery since his poor constituents do not own slaves (185-221).

As Abraham Lincoln goes into the White House and talk of civil war abounds, Simon's district re-elects him handily (416, 426). The state of Georgia does not immediately desire secession, yet the Bliss family pays a high price for adhering to their ideals. Simon is at the center of the anti-secession movement (442). To prevent Simon from voting against secession, Simon is attacked in his own house, yet he attends the convention, battered. He casts one of six votes to remain part of the Union (461-465). While Simon is voting, his political rival assaults Savanna in their house. Simon arrives home in time to rescue his wife and badly beats the intruder (467-473). The Bliss family leaves Milledgeville for their mountain home as the Civil War begins and they remain ready for whatever the future holds (475-477).

The ethics of *owning* another human being stands at the heart of the political struggle for state delegate Simon Bliss. Hence, his marriage into a slaveholding family makes the political controversy a personal conflict too. His abolitionist sentiments were known to both Grandpa Dorr and Mammy but apparently to no one else; both encourage Savanna to marry Simon. It is intimated that Grandpa's appreciation for slaves stems from his lifelong relationship with Dodie, the slave woman who lives with him openly in the family home (14). During a visit shortly after their marriage, Grandpa asks Savanna:

do you know what the life that your husband plans for himself will be like? Do you know that he'll speak with a low voice, and will give thanks to his God if one or two voices raise up with his? Do you know that he'll walk a lone path, ambushed on all sides by those who'll seek to spill his blood?...Vanny, do you know that your husband means to fight the biggest thing in this country—black slavery? That he means to set himself up against four billion dollars in the hands of the men who rule the country?... (87-88)

Grandpa warns her that her parents will reject them (87).

By the time Simon is elected to the state legislature, Savanna no longer misses Mammy but is willing to hire a freedwoman, Prudence, as a housekeeper. Savanna's conversation with Prudence gives her insight into the existential dilemma of being slave or a free black person in America. Savanna to Prudence: "You have an easier time being free, don't you?" 'No'm.' 'But would you go back to slavery?' 'No'm.'" After this conversation, Savanna wants to do more to aid black people; she intends to

teach black children to read (175). Savanna becomes completely converted to the abolitionist cause when she begins to read Simon's books and literature and when she sees how her husband is verbally and physically attacked for his politics. She becomes his soul mate in the cause.

Deep River posits that the Civil War was primarily an economic conflict "...of the poor, including the slaves, against the rich planter class..." according to Jennings Rice in the *New Yorker* review. The idea that there were small bands of poor whites with abolitionist sentiments is indeed controversial ("Buckmaster," James and Brown 341). Is the creation of abolitionist mountain people in Georgia a twentieth century compromise with a northern publisher to make the novel amenable to a broad readership in the 1940s? The novel had broad appeal; an Armed Forces edition was published in 1944 (Rothe 79). Henrietta Buckmaster, along with Frances Gaither, Lillian Smith, Howard Fast, and Hodding Carter, belonged to a school of white Southern writers who used literature for overtly political purposes to advance black rights. They saw black characters and themes as inextricably part of American history and literature and won praise for their sensitive treatments of these characters and events (Franklin and Moss 460). *Deep River* was extensively reviewed with most critics noting its excessive length (due to inclusion of too many speeches on the state house floor) and its passionate prose ("Buckmaster," James and Brown 341-342).

Four years lapse before another historical novel about American slavery is written. *A Clouded Star* (1948) is dedicated to Anne Parrish's great-aunt "who knew Harriet, and told me about her when I was a child...". Precisely how her great-aunt came to

know Harriet Tubman—whether as a white abolitionist on the Underground Railroad in Delaware—is unknown to readers. (In the novel Harriet Tubman leads fugitive slaves into Delaware looking for one of the Underground Railroad’s outposts.) What Susanna Parrish did transmit to her niece was a great love for Tubman’s heroism and her astonishing range of skills.

Novelist Anne Parrish achieved a degree of celebrity in her lifetime that died when she did. Born on November 12, 1888 in Colorado Springs, Colorado, Parrish was raised jointly out West and in Claymount, Delaware, her grandmother’s home. Both parents were painters. Describing her education, Parrish wrote: “I was slightly educated in private schools in Colorado and Delaware, then studied painting in Philadelphia [...]” Anne Parrish published nineteen books, many of which were children’s books, which she also illustrated. Three of the children’s books were nominated for the Newbery Medal. Her third novel, *Perennial Bachelor*, won the \$10,000 Harper Prize in 1925. With her second husband, writer Josiah Titzell, she traveled the world but used New York as home base. Anne Parrish died on September 5, 1957 (Seymour-Smith and Kimmens 2003).

The novel’s prologue features 95-year-old Samuel Mingo returning to the shambles of Ellen’s Portion, a Maryland plantation from which he escaped at age nine. The last survivor of the slave owners, Miss Amanda, lives in the overseer’s house and is cared for by the granddaughter of former slaves (Parrish 1-2). Samuel has returned after all these years to thank Amanda for helping him to escape to Moses (Harriet Tubman’s alias) and the Underground Railroad (5). The remainder of A

Clouded Star is a flashback of Samuel Mingo's story of the journey to Canada.

Samuel's first eight years are as close to idyllic as a slave boy's can be. He lives in the happy home of his parents, Tobe and Lovey, on Ellen's Portion. Although only a child, Samuel is already working in the tobacco fields with his parents; he mainly carries water to the field hands. His parents adore him, their only child, and try to shield him from knowledge of his future. Life seems acceptable until "Old Master" dies and his son, Mr. Charlie, takes over (11). The son is a reckless gambler who sells slaves and eventually Samuel to pay his debts.

On Samuel's first day at the new plantation he meets Amanda Piper, Mr. Harry's niece, who is visiting her mother's southern relatives for the summer. She lives in Boston with her father and grandmother and really does not like the South or slavery (28). Since no one knows who Samuel is or why Harry brought him home, Samuel and Amanda, his elder by two years, spend the day together. Amanda immediately counsels him to run away to Africa (30). As the summer progresses, Samuel and Amanda spend hours fishing, playing with the dogs and dolls and even playing croquet together (for which Samuel is hit with a mallet and Amanda roundly chastised) (46).

Eventually the children eavesdrop on the overseer telling the grandmother and matriarch how Moses is stealing slaves from nearby plantations (83). They also overhear that Samuel is to be whipped, not for any wrongdoing, but just as a preventive measure against rebellion and to ensure terror and obedience. Both recognize that Samuel must leave Tranquility at next sunrise. Dressed in Amanda's

clothes in Amanda's canoe, Samuel takes off with directions to Ellen's Portion, his former plantation (84-85). He arrives at his former cabin to find no one there. His father is in hiding for breaking a white man's neck and his mother has been sold. He locates his father who tells Samuel to leave with Moses that night. Tobe's plan is to find Lovey and reunite with Samuel in the North (88-91).

The heart of the novel is Samuel Mingo's journey with Harriet Tubman. In the dark of night, through deep woods, Samuel follows the whippoorwill's call, Tubman's signal, until he reaches her and her fugitive band of two men, two women, and two babies (95, 119). He had to catch up to them because they had already started while Samuel is talking to his father. The adults are amazed and overjoyed at the fearless little eight-year-old who had wandered upon bloody feet. He is badly bruised from his flight so the men carried him for several days until he heals, and he is instantly Tubman's favorite. The fugitives get to Delaware but the roads are "watched as they never had been watched" and they can't reach the Underground Railroad station (123). Tubman tells them the story of Thomas Sims, a 17-year-old slave, sent back to Georgia from Boston though abolitionists had tried to save him. In Delaware she tells them, "You free, but you not safe yet." For safety they leave the U.S. for Canada (120). The novel is told from Tubman's point of view from the moment she is introduced, so all of the suffering the fugitives experience as they walk from Maryland to Canada is seen through the prism of her mind and character (154-239). At Niagara Falls the fugitives board a train in which they are welcomed by John Brown himself and they sing and rejoice as they cross into Canada (240-241).

Although Harriet Tubman is the star of the novel, Anne Parrish portrays young Samuel Mingo's slave life well enough to give readers a sense of why "Moses" had to lead her people to Canada. Samuel works incessantly, carrying water to field hands during the day and entertaining Mr. Charlie and guests at night. He gets to wear pants and a jacket when he's performing, but normally he's clothed in a scratchy linen shirt, called "sally-go-naked". Slave children are not given normal clothes until ten years.¹² Since children are not producing much for the owner, as little as possible was expended on their upkeep—while exploiting their work as much as possible. Samuel is sold on a whim in a card game—and his owner is saddened only by the fact that he will no longer be able to use the child. There's no sense that the child is being ripped from his family and is emotionally devastated by the change; Samuel is no more than an object given to another owner.

The break up of the only intact slave family in the novel is meant to have emotional resonance. The slave parents' inability to protect their child from any of Charlie's enterprises causes deep concern. The last time Tobe appears in the narrative, he is clinging to the idea of a reunited Mingo family in the North. Adult Samuel never mentions to Amanda what became of his parents. The odds are against the family's survival as a unit despite Tobe's and Samuel's valor and faith.

During Samuel's journey to Canada with Harriet Tubman, she tells him many things, including a description of the Middle Passage. Tubman tells the boy:

'Then they is stowed between decks, naked, jammed into each other's laps. No room to move. They is seasick, so it makes the sailors sick to come below,

¹² Frederick Douglass in *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* details how slave children are kept naked year-round.

after a storm, to take out the dead ones and throw them overboard. When it's nice weather, they is brought up on deck to have water thrown over them and get rice and water, not for pity's sake, just so they'll be fit to sell when they reach shore [...]' (Parrish 143)

Not only does Tubman want the child to know his history, but he needs to know, in the midst of a painful moment, what he and his people survived. From that story and too many like it, we see what would drive these fugitives to leave family, friends, and all that was familiar to walk miles through woods and snow and dark with empty stomachs. We see what compels Harriet Tubman to risk her life and her freedom to help others who had experienced slavery's horrors.

In addition to fleeing slavery, overt rebellion is also illustrated in *A Clouded Star*. The reason Tobe Mingo is in hiding on the night of Samuel's return is because he had put a "...grapevine across the road, that broke a white man's neck. Every Saturday night the patrollers on horseback hunted negroes for sport, chased men, women, and children, not because they had done anything, but for amusement..." A little girl was trampled to death. "[S]o the Negroes stretched wild grapevines across the dark road, a rope of vine where it could catch the horses below the knees, a rope of vine where it would catch the men's necks." The slaves hide until they heard patrollers in the area and call out, bringing the patrollers down the road; one man had been killed (88-89). Although the body count for the most sadistic white racists is nowhere as high as for slaves, retributive violence had to be a constant feature in antebellum America.

As mentioned previously, *A Clouded Star* is dedicated to Parrish's great-aunt

“who knew Harriet”. It is quite possible that the novel contains family stories passed down through generations describing with pride the work that at least one member may have done on the Underground Railroad. From her aunt’s stories Parrish fell in love with the heroic, larger-than-life Harriet Tubman who selflessly defied, not only slavery, but American society’s concept of what a woman could do. The novel is a praise song to her. Although it was easier to be unrepentantly abolitionist in 1948, since the Civil War had been won and the book publishers are all located in the North, the “winner,” still it is remarkable for a white novelist to focus an entire novel on the heroism of its black characters. In addition, there’s not one derogatory stereotype or description of the black characters, and the black characters’ actions, not the white ones, drive the plot.

A Clouded Star had universally positive reviews by the publishing industry although it was not a bestseller, nor has its distribution grown over the years. In fact, the novel has disappeared from contemporary readership. *World Authors 1900-1950* gives this assessment of the novelist: “...Parrish remained the object of conflicting opinions, of which the only certainty was that this was a skilled craftswoman, adept at dissecting the world around her. An essentially minor writer, her novels have hardly survived, except as a part of the history of pop fiction” (Seymour-Smith and Kimmens 2003).

In 1949, Frances Gaither published her third historical novel of the decade to focus on master-slave relations through the prism of interracial sex. *Double Muscadine* details how sex between white men and mulatto slave women led to the destruction of

white families and what's left of the blacks'. In this fictional world, no black men, slave or free, have sexual relations with anyone, and white women sit around, embarrassed, by their husbands' unbridled lust for slave women. This story also highlights whites' fears of slaves' retribution against their owners, specifically fears of a house servant killing the owner. According to the preface, the characters and setting are fictitious, but the "trial is modeled in considerable part on an actual case in the records of the Supreme Court of Mississippi in the 1850s" (N.Pg).

A mulatto slave woman is accused of poisoning her owners, killing the youngest heir to the ill-gotten fortune. The poisoning at Waverley, the biggest plantation in the county, outrages all whites, independent of status. Conventional wisdom believes "A slave who would do such a thing to her white folks was a creature hardly human, a monster beyond all pity....Each white man felt the mortal threat in his own bones...as if the evil done out at Waverley had been done to each of them personally" (22). Novelist Frances Gaither quite obviously set out to humanize the accused mulatto killer and explain why slavery creates the impetus for murder.

Waverley plantation was founded by "old Hunt," an overseer from North Carolina who came to Mississippi with a spouse and "...a pair of slaves who had come to him through his wife." Rumor was he had been his father-in-law's overseer (24), so his wealth is rooted in his wife's property. As the Hunt family grew with the addition of two daughters, Hunt added to his property in acreage, buildings and slaves. Waverley prospered so much that "...long after he was dead and gone, to speak of Waverley cotton or Waverley hams and butter, or even a Waverley Negro, was to guarantee it

as a reliable product” (25). Until the poisoning incident, “...the Waverley colored people...were known far and wide for their honesty...”. Miss Hat, the spinster daughter to “Old Hunt,” is another protagonist who takes her responsibility as sole heir seriously now that her sister has died and that her sister’s child, “little” Hunt, was killed in the poisoning. Elderly Miss Hat still lives at Waverley with her newly remarried brother-in-law, Kirk McLean, father of little Hunt (60-61).

More than anything, *Double Muscadine* is a tale of two mulattoes. One mulatto is Lethe, a favored slave of old Hunt. Although Hunt had concocted a story that her father was a traveling mule driver (67), many believe that Hunt himself is her father. Lethe is his favorite on the plantation: “You take my little Lethe and who’s to light my pipe and fan the flies when I set eating?...” (69), but Hunt permits his daughter to acquire Lethe upon her marriage to Kirk (70). Soon after, Lethe has her first baby, and Miss Hat suspects Kirk is the father (73). Lethe is hired out “to the Methodist preacher’s family” after Honey dies and Kirk remarries a seventeen-year-old. The entire town approves of Lethe being removed from Waverley at Kirk’s remarriage (86).

When the head slave has a stroke, Miss Hat tells Kirk to go to New Orleans to buy another (92-93). Miss Hat does not have Aimee in mind as a replacement. Kirk buys Aimee in New Orleans for only \$650 despite her beauty and good health (134). Later, during the trial, the brother of Aimee’s former owner testifies that Mrs. Arnaud sold Aimee for such a low price out of spite; she knows Aimee had been her husband’s mistress (279). Upon her arrival at Waverley, Aimee demonstrates no

cooking or cleaning skills, and Miss Hat detects that her presence spells trouble for Kirk's new bride. Aimee refuses to sleep in the shed or answer any commands (144). Both white men at Waverley, Kirk and the overseer, refuse to punish her for her disobedience (150). Hearing of Aimee's great beauty, Lethe walks from town to do laundry at Waverley. With one look, Lethe does not like what she sees—the sole reason for which Kirk had bought Aimee, her replacement. During the trial, Kirk is not believed when he testifies that he did not have sex with Aimee in New Orleans after he had bought her. No one believes him, even his pregnant wife (193, 164).

Meanwhile Kirk has had a fecund few months. As his second wife gives birth to a daughter, Lethe becomes pregnant again. The town's doctor knows that Kirk is already the father of several of Lethe's children. However, Kirk still resists Lethe's manumission because he worries that she will be preyed upon in the North (208). All along Kirk has known that Old Hunt's will freed Lethe and her children (66). No one questioned Lethe's special place in old Hunt's heart. When Miss Hat reminds Kirk of old Hunt's provision for Lethe, Kirk resists freeing her, saying it is illegal to free slaves at death since Lethe and her children would immediately be sent north (66).

Syke, Aimee's lawyer, makes a remarkable showing at his first trial. On Kirk's final day on the stand, Syke gets Kirk to admit that he had been "having sexual relations with Lethe" for some years and that "her two youngest children" are his (252). With this second public revelation of sex with slaves, Kirk's second wife is ready to leave him (252). Through skillful cross-examination, Syke forces Lethe to admit that she had visited Waverley on the evening of the poisoning and that she

could have secreted a bottle of arsenic in her apron. She denies too vehemently her jealousy of Aimee, which is her apparent motive for the crime (234). As a reaction to her disastrous performance on the witness stand, Lethe jumps off a cliff and drowns (271).

The white protagonists fare no better. Miss Hat dies alone at Waverley while blowing the supper horn on the same evening as Lethe's death (276). While trying to commit suicide in the woods, Kirk manages only to wound himself yet kill a friend who was trying to stop him (280-282). Kirk's wife witnesses the shootings and her testimony will be the only obstacle to a murder charge for Kirk (285).

As for Aimee's fate, she is declared "not guilty" and is bought for \$2,000 by her former owner's brother, who had wanted to buy her immediately upon his brother's death but his spiteful sister-in-law refused. He takes Aimee back to New Orleans (279), presumably to be his concubine.

What is learned about slavery from *Double Muscadine*? First, all white men, particularly rich, white men, are sex-crazed with lust for mulatto slave women. It doesn't matter if the mulattoes are homegrown or exotic beauties from the infamous capital of Mulatto Land, New Orleans; these rich men must have sex with mulattoes. For their part the mulatto slave women prefer having sex with white men although they do not benefit materially. Apparently there are no other black people with whom to interact on any level. (No full-blooded Africans have sex with anybody in the entire novel.) Finally, the white wives turn blind eyes to their husbands' fornication, for they have no power to prevent omnipotent white men from doing what they

please, which includes bringing their nearly-white children into the mansion to serve as personal slaves to the white family. The white women are embarrassed by their husbands' behavior but they are powerless to change anything.

If sex sells products in America—and it does—interracial sex in 1950 sold well. *Double Muscadine*, a *Book-of-the-Month-Club* selection for 1949 (Bain, Flora and Rubin 172) was widely reviewed and stands as Frances Gaither's "best known" work (Seymour-Smith and Kimmens 935). The reviews were positive, for the most part. M. H. Ley in *Commonweal* wrote: "This Book-of-the-Month-Club selection has the smooth, professional polish of expert ladies-magazine fiction" (572). W. T. Hedden in the *New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review* exclaimed:

The anthropologist seeking an understanding of this peculiar culture need seek no further. The amateur novelist, wondering how to synchronize Freudian charts and living characters will see the answer in action and old-fashioned soul-searching. And as for the mystery addict, he'll look a mighty long time before he'll find a whodunit to match this one. (2)

Herschel Brickell in *The New York Times* proclaimed it "a novel of unmistakable distinction" (5). Rayford Logan in the *Journal of Negro Education* noted that "only a woman could fathom the dark brooding of the mistress women whose men defied law and convention for the Brown Girl" (510). While only a black male critic commented on the intersection of gender and race in producing the novel, Bucklin Moon of the *Saturday Review of Literature* commented on the curious silences of the mulattoes, how readers can't fathom what they *think* about their predicament. They remain

objects of desire, not characters. Moon wrote:

In her determination to condemn no one and to take no sides, she has lost strength by telling her story almost completely through the eyes of her white characters, so that her negroes become mere props, players offstage so to speak. Thus readers, unsure until the final resolution by a skillful plot twist at the end, how to feel towards Aimee, the light-skinned and comely Negro slave girl, are likely to feel nothing. Mrs. Gaither's reasons for this, I'm sure, were to create suspense, yet the overall loss is great and it is this, perhaps, which places 'Double Muscadine' in a category slightly below that of a wholly realized creative effort. In spite of this, however, it is a joy to read a decent piece of writing again. (13).

Few others in their raves about the novel noticed the effacing of the slave voice and, most importantly, the lack of evidence of mind. Although "racy" by 1949 standards, *Double Muscadine* elicits ridicule at best in the twenty-first century for its racial and gender stereotypes—if anyone reads it at all.

In 1950, Elizabeth Boatwright Coker (1909-1993) published her first novel, *Daughter of Strangers*, about slavery in South Carolina. She remained a proud South Carolinian all of her days. Born on April 21, 1909 to a planter family, Elizabeth earned a BA in 1929 from Converse College in Spartansburg, South Carolina. She was a child of privilege who married into more wealth. Elizabeth Boatwright married James Lide Coker in 1930 who would become president of Sunoco Products Company. Coker did some graduate study at Middlebury College in 1938, where she

would become “a life member of the college’s board of trustees.” As expected of a person of her status, she belonged to many other boards, clubs, and advisory councils, among them: United Cerebral Palsy of South Carolina, Blowing Rock Horse Show Association, Camden Hunt Club, Caroliniana Society, Palmetto Garden Club, World Adoption International Fund, American Association of University Women, P.E.N., and the Authors Guild. At forty years, she published her first novel, *Daughter of Strangers*. Between 1950 and 1981 she published nine historical novels. Due to her contributions to South Carolina and American history and culture, “[s]he was inducted into the South Carolina Hall of Fame” a year before her death in September 1993 (“Coker,” Contemporary Authors Online; “Coker obituary” B7).

According to the *New York Times* obituary, “Critics described Mrs. Coker as a romanticist who found her plots, heroes and heroines in the legends and family histories of her native South Carolina.” *Daughter of Strangers*, typical of most first novels, contains many autobiographical elements such as slave-owning for many generations within a family; the setting of Charleston, South Carolina as a place where slave and free mingled; and her knowledge of horse training and racing. *Daughters* was born out of Elizabeth Coker’s passions for history, literature, and horses.

Much like *Iola Leroy* and *Hagar’s Daughter*, *Daughter of Strangers* (1950) is a study of life for a beautiful, intelligent, mulatto woman caught in the net of slavery. Ironically, whereas *Iola Leroy* and *Hagar’s Daughter*, both authored by black females, do not fully examine what it means for such a character to be a slave,

preferring to focus on life after Emancipation, the central concern of *Daughter of Strangers*, authored by a Southern white woman born two generations after the Civil War, is what slavery means for a mulatto woman. This novel keeps the protagonist trapped by her racist surroundings.

Daughter of Strangers begins in New Orleans in 1830, with the birth of Charlotte Le Jeune, daughter of August Le Jeune, “the last of a good line, with a little money and a severe case of gold fever, among other foolish fancies” (17) and Celeste, “the most beautiful Quadroon Queen who ever danced a pavanne with an egret feather blowing so proudly in her smooth black hair” (14). Celeste has died in giving birth to Charlotte, and Auguste arrives fresh from the California gold rush to see the dead mother of his child (11). With Celeste from childhood to her death is Poulette, an orange-tawny Negress who always evades the question of Celeste’s parentage (11, 14). Both Celeste and Poulette are owned by Vignie, “the most famous encanteur in the whole slave trade” (13); his “specialty” is the trading of mulatto women to rich patrons. In one year alone he made over \$50,000 in the sale of mulatto slave women (12, 14). Vignie never had sold Celeste to Auguste Le Jeune; he only permits them to have an affair, perhaps half-hoping for the conception of a child since “[t]he children of a slave mother and a free father, whatever his color, are themselves slaves since they follow the condition of the mother.” Upon seeing his daughter, Auguste is entranced at first sight by the “very white” baby girl with red hair like his mother’s (13). “She must never suspect that she is not entirely white,” Auguste tells Poulette (14). But Auguste will not personally see to Charlotte’s upbringing because he is

bound to return to California to find gold. “It was not difficult in the New Orleans of 1830 for such a man as the reckless Auguste Le Jeune suddenly to install in his artistic small house on Toulouse Street a large competent Negress and a tiny white ‘ward.’” Some cousins “sniffed and gossiped” and then found other things to investigate. By six months old Charlotte is completely in the hands of caretakers: the Abbe to educate her; Shisi Zana, the cook; and Poulette. Charlotte is raised in isolation, with no playmates except on occasion Potee, the cook’s “sharp black son” (21). By six years, Charlotte is given a poodle for companionship, Catholic nuns for art training and the Abbe comes to dinner once a week to practice the art of conversation with her. Charlotte’s absent white father has plans for her future: from twelve through sixteen years Charlotte will attend convent before relocating to his mansion in California. All of those plans evaporate when Auguste stops sending Poulette money for Charlotte’s upkeep. Her owner Vignie pledges that he won’t make the same mistake with Charlotte that he had with her mother Celeste in not profiting from her sale (22-24).

As soon as the Abbe receives word that Auguste is dead (“...killed in a gun fight protecting a nigger cook,” according to Vignie), Vignie arranges to sell Charlotte for \$5,000 to Mr. Gaillard of South Carolina (26). Gaillard buys Charlotte, thinking she was better off with his family than being sold from a display window at the Slave Exchange in New Orleans—as Vignie’s other mulatto women (28). Realizing that twelve-year-old Charlotte does not know of her black ancestry or that she had been sold, Nicholas Gaillard decides to let his wife tell Charlotte about herself. At first

Charlotte is content in South Carolina, believing she is going on a brief trip to play with Gaillard's grandsons and that she will return to New Orleans in a few days. She has no way of knowing that Gaillard has bought Charlotte for "[h]is only son, Inigo, [who] was tragically unhappy in his marriage" (29).

On her first day at Normandy plantation, Charlotte is told "...that she had come into this house as a slave, not a visitor," that she had been sold \$5,000 and "...that Africa was responsible for the strange ivory tone of her complexion." Charlotte accuses Tafra, whom she had liked until this news, of deceit and wickedness (41). Tafra, who was raised in France and Vienna by her father, a Southern diplomat, wants to experiment with Charlotte. Tafra intends to treat Charlotte like the beautiful daughter she never had (42) while training her to manage the accounting books and the house (53). Ultimately Tafra hopes to raise Charlotte to accept her black heritage (52). As Tafra and Charlotte bond, Tafra is willing to free Charlotte but is told by the family lawyer that "it is not only illegal but punishable with imprisonment to free a slave in ...South Carolina" (51).

The heart of the narrative is the sexual attraction, or perhaps love, between Inigo Gaillard and Charlotte Le Jeune. From their first encounter at Normandy, they liked each other. Inigo thinks Charlotte is physically beautiful as an adolescent and Charlotte thinks him kind and handsome. Despite a fifteen year difference in age and racial distance, their smoldering attraction is noted by the rest of the Gaillard family and slaves. When Inigo's wife and son Robert leave Normandy for the town house in Charleston, that frees Charlotte to aspire to the role of mother to little Nick and lover

to Inigo.

Yet Charlotte's white skin, red hair and gray eyes, features that men found so physically appealing in her, did nothing to keep her from the brutal aspects of slavery. When 18-year-old Charlotte disrupts with a sneezing fit the training of a prized horse, Inigo becomes so enraged that he beats Charlotte with a whip (147-148). She is confined to the slaves' sick house for two weeks, nursed by elderly Hagar who tells her stories about the Congo (152). A contrite Inigo visits Charlotte in the sick house and promises to take her out West with him after New Year's (155).

Inigo's mother, Tafra, decides to intervene before the couple disappear and leave the South forever; she intends to "save them from each other" by selling Charlotte (166). Tafra and an old family friend, Colonel Hampton, rehearse their options: "You'd have to sell her. The new laws have clamped down on traveling about with slaves, so sending her away for a time isn't possible any more. You can't free her. You can't even let her go and live among free Negroes in Charleston unless you sell her to one of them." Tafra Gaillard replies: "I've thought of all those things. It distresses me that she is only one eighth Negro yet she is legally black. If she had just one more drop of white blood, she could be freed and legally marry Inigo here in this parish, and their children would be white citizens..." (164). The Gaillard family attorney draws up a legal document that sells Charlotte for \$5,000 to Inigo's best friend and neighbor, Harry Singleton, for six months. Tafra intends to buy her back. During this same period, Inigo will be in Mississippi looking at land to expand his empire (166).

These events all occur in 1848 when conditions are becoming even more repressive, if that is possible, for slaves. By 1848, South Carolina had changed:

There were vindictive attacks of Abolitionists in the North. Southern cotton planters were agitating for the reopening of the Slave Trade. The fanatical hymn of murder was sung hysterically by John Brown in Kansas. Though thousands of thinking people in the South were sick to death of slavery and its whole stench, and earnestly trying to work out a practical scheme for gradual, orderly emancipation, a greater number, incited to rage and fear, passed more stringent laws against Negroes than had ever existed in the state before. The ban against freeing any slave, for any reason, was continued in South Carolina, and enforced relentlessly; travel with slaves, excepting body servants, was prohibited; teaching a slave to read or write became a crime, punishable by flogging, plus a prison sentence; free Negroes were no longer accorded justice in the courts; curfews tolled loudly at nine for free and slaves alike. (77)

At Heronfields, the Singletons' plantation, Charlotte lives the normative slave experience. She shares a cabin with another slave woman and sleeps on a thin cot with a rotting blanket. She catches malaria and attends a slave prayer meeting, but most of all, she learns how to avoid and ultimately blackmail the white overseer, Lustbader, who is operating a market in stolen goods (275, 217, 222). (Encountering an overseer is a new experience for Charlotte since at Normandy, no white overseers exist; Inigo and three slaves run the plantation contrary to South Carolina law that insists on a white overseer on every plantation.) On her first night at Heronfields, her

new owner confronts Lustbader and tells the overseer that Charlotte will not be his sexual possession, so she is spared the traditional rape only because of Singleton's lifelong friendship with Inigo. Although she works as a house servant with Mrs. Singleton and her two children, her daily degradation is much more in keeping with that of the other slaves to the point that she plans her escape if Tafra doesn't buy her back (245).

When the Singletons move into their town house in Charleston for the winter social season, they permit Charlotte to attend the black church service (249). Charleston has a significant free black population that has heard about Charlotte Le Jeune from the first day of her arrival at Normandy. "All the Negroes—free and slave—had mourned over her when the drums of Normandy tapped out her secret on the very first night she arrived" (69). From trips into town with Inigo, she has met Leon Cavallo, the mulatto grandson of the wealthiest free black craftsman in Charleston (66-70). At sixteen, Leon was smitten with twelve-year-old Charlotte and nothing changes his affection when they, as adults, resume meeting each Sunday at church. Leon Cavallo has since become a medical doctor, having been educated abroad with money from his anonymous white father. Despite their mutual attraction, Charlotte's slave status is a huge impediment to any marriage plans. As Charlotte's own life story illustrates, the child of a slave mother is a slave, and Cavallo intends to "own" his children; "[h]is children must be free" (69).

Charlotte becomes trapped at Heronfields when Tafra dies before six months have lapsed (285). Charlotte now belongs entirely and forever to the Singletons at

Heronfields (292). Inigo is still in Mississippi when his mother dies so he is not able to intervene immediately in any events at Normandy.

When Inigo Gaillard returns from Mississippi, the heir has become sole proprietor of the large estate. Upon return, Inigo begs his friend Harry Singleton for Charlotte's release to Normandy. After all, Charlotte served as mother to little Nick and with Nick's grandmother dead and his mother ensconced in the town house with the oldest son, Nick has no maternal influence. Inigo offers to pay double for Charlotte's return. Harry refuses to release Charlotte because the transaction was made with Tafra, now dead, and Singleton worries about Inigo "straying" if Charlotte returns to Normandy (317). In addition he tells Inigo that Dr. Leon Cavallo also has offered to buy Charlotte for \$10,000. Harry Singleton believes Cavallo would be the best buyer, but Mildred Singleton will not let her husband trade with a Negro (318). How best to resolve Charlotte's possession? Harry Singleton suggests that he and Inigo have a horse race in which Singleton pits ownership of Charlotte against Festus, Inigo's prized boatman (319).

Before their fathers' horse race can occur, the men's two oldest sons have a squabble that they resolve by racing one day earlier the same two horses that their fathers are to use in their wager (332). Charlotte decides to run away if the boys' bet causes her to remain a slave at Heronfields (333).

The novel climaxes at the sons' horse race—that their fathers refuse to cancel, subsuming their bet in their sons' race. The sons would ride four one-mile heats on their parents' prized thoroughbreds. After two heats, in which the Singletons win the

first and the second is a tie, Colonel Hampton, the racetrack's owner, threatens to move the track to Mississippi if "proper jockeys" are not put on "these fine horses" (357-358). Normandy has the best jockey and horse breeder in Cuffee, a deformed, mystical, free black man who lives on the plantation and who is also a friend of Charlotte's. He wins the last two heats (365), meaning Charlotte returns to the Gaillard family. Charlotte and little Nick leave for Normandy as soon as the fourth heat ends, so they are not at the track to see Inigo Gaillard killed by his own "devil" horse while celebrating his victory (368, 370). Inigo's will leaves everything to his favorite son, seven-year-old Nick. Charlotte arranges Inigo's funeral as she did his mother's and gets to be mistress of Normandy for a few days until Nick leaves for Mississippi with Colonel Hampton.

In the "Epilogue, 1865" the Civil War has freed Charlotte to marry the only mulatto doctor in town, Leon Cavallo. Dr. and Mrs. Cavallo come home from working all day in the Freedman's Bureau (375) and Charlotte receives a letter from Nick Gaillard who has just returned to Normandy from Appomattox. Normandy, unlike Heronfields, is not torched in the War, and Big Jake, the black overseer, has run the place in Gaillard's absence. Charlotte has instituted a "wage system" that has kept most of the former slaves content in their work (378). Nick hopes Charlotte will come for a visit to Normandy soon to meet Nick's fiancé; she should bring her children also because Nick wants to spend time with them. The letter lifts her out of exhaustion from the demanding administrative work at the Freedman's Bureau where "[e]verybody insisted on having Miss Charlotte talk to them....They wanted the light-

skinned woman who was a Negro like themselves—the one who, they had heard, had even been whipped by her master—had even been won on a horse race—had even been loved by a white man” (379). Leon works in the medical clinic at the Bureau and they have three children, fourteen-year-old Taffy, twelve-year-old John, and a toddler with gray eyes. This black family is the picture of contentment. Leon is “...convinced that at last Charlotte had found true happiness. That by her own efforts she had saved herself from slavery in any form—spiritual or actual; that she had triumphed over her indecisions; that she had forgiven fate for the cruel trick played on the little white girl from New Orleans” (380).

The novel’s title, *Daughter of Strangers*, refers to the child created by a rich, white man and a mulatto slave woman, “strangers” to each other, not the expected marriage of lovers. Although the “daughter” in question is Charlotte Le Jeune, Charlotte’s mother, Celeste, is also the child of a rich, white man and a slave mother, very probably Poulette who is described as a mulatto, giving rise to the possibility that Charlotte is a third generation “daughter of strangers”. From the start, the novelist wants readers to witness a slave system that was never meant to produce “daughters” but a commodity to be sold, a slave.

By creating a protagonist with the proverbial “drop of black blood,” since all of Charlotte’s fathers for perhaps three generations are white males, Elizabeth Coker could have written a “passing” narrative but she does not. With Charlotte’s white skin, red hair, and gray eyes, she can live as a white woman, the life her father had intended. However, LeJeune’s death kills Charlotte’s prospects to live as a white

person. As in Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy* and Pauline Hopkins' *Hagar's Daughter* and *Winona*, the death of the white father signals instant enslavement for the mulatto children, no matter how white their skin. Two days after Vignie learns of Auguste's death, he sells twelve-year-old Charlotte for \$5,000. Like novelist Pauline Hopkins, Coker wanted readers to be horrified at how slavery ensnared the white-looking slaves as well as those darker. These novels explore the unsettled boundary of racial identity during a time of intense racial segregation in America. Today, at least among scholars, race is a social construct with no basis in biology¹³. Upon arriving at the Normandy plantation, Charlotte has to be told that she is a black person who has been sold into slavery. Tafta Gaillard hopes that Charlotte, for her own future happiness, will eventually accept being considered black and a slave. Much like the protagonist in another novel, *Iola Leroy*, Charlotte does slowly come to recognize that she is in the same helpless condition as those with black skin, and like Iola, at novel's end, she identifies completely with the black struggle.

By setting the "Prologue" in New Orleans, Elizabeth Coker reveals how that city served as epicenter for trade of mulatto women like Charlotte and her mother Celeste. Wealthy planters, looking for concubines (that "their kind" had fathered), flocked to New Orleans to buy these women. Sometimes the slave-concubine would be kept in a house or apartment in New Orleans; sometimes, she would return with her owner to his plantation. This mulatto-women sexploitation in New Orleans was a public secret, known about by all strata of American society. Such was the case when

¹³ On October 11, 2004, Frank Roylance completed the second of a two-part article in the *Sunpapers* outlining how "modern genetics has undermined old ideas" about race. The article appeared on page 1A.

Nicholas Gaillard of the Normandy plantation traveled to New Orleans expressly to buy a mulatto child to become his son's sex toy. Tafra, Inigo's mother, knew about her husband's plan for their son and Inigo's wife and oldest son must have known about Charlotte's arrival and her intended purpose. The widespread social acceptance of the rape of black women and girls by white men—rape that created the large mulatto population—must have been astonishing to a twentieth century Southerner like Elizabeth Coker. Imagine a world in which a father of high reputation openly bought an adolescent to be his married son's concubine. Everyone on the plantation and the surrounding area in Charleston knew of Charlotte's purpose. Everyone knew, that is, but Charlotte, who arrived on the plantation thinking she was a white visitor, not knowing she was a slave. The slaves grieve over Charlotte's predicament, but outward rebellion there was none. The free blacks in Charleston knew of her too. "All the Negroes—free and slave—had mourned over her when the drums of Normandy tapped out her secret on the very first night she arrived" (69). The slaves realized another was caught in slavery's web.

The author avenges this injustice by killing all the white males except Nick who has the closest and most humane bond with Charlotte. Only he survives to the novel's end. In contrast, Nicholas Gaillard, patriarch of Normandy and the second owner of Charlotte, drops dead a week after buying her.

Even under "enlightened" ownership, Charlotte's gifts are used only for the slaveholders' profit. Tafra Gaillard fully intends to exploit Charlotte's high native intelligence that was already developed by private tutors in New Orleans. Since

daughter-in-law Emily lives a separate life from the Gaillards in Charleston and remains unuseful, Tafra decides to teach Charlotte how to manage the house and keep the accounting books as she used to do for her husband (Coker 53).¹⁴ Charlotte only interacts with a few other special blacks such as Hercules, the doorman, and Cuffee, the horse breeder and trainer—who are both free¹⁵--and Hagar, a slave who operates the sick house at Normandy. The field slaves know of Charlotte but there is no social contact or acknowledgement of each other's existence--until Charlotte's beating. Charlotte's whipping is the only one described at Normandy and serves as the bridge to her deeper descent into slavery.

By sending Charlotte to Heronfields, the novelist permits readers to glimpse the typical plantation, run by fear of slave vengeance. Harry Singleton and Lustbader are the only two white males on their plantation. Lustbader, a poor white, serves as cruel overseer while the planter-owner lacks interest in his estate, preferring social amusements. Charlotte's avoidance of rape due to her privileged status with the Gaillards is her only untraditional welcome to Heronfields where there are beatings to the point of crippling children. The slave cabins are squalid. Slaves flee often and even Charlotte starts planning her escape. No slave sings at Heronfields. During the Civil War, Heronfields is torched while Normandy remains unscathed. The implication: Heronfields' slaves burned it down while the more contented ex-slaves

¹⁴ Several historical novels have had slaves acting as accountants on plantations. Both Robert Johnson in *Iola Leroy* and John Peter in *The Issue* handled the accounting books that kept them enslaved. Perhaps the novelists couldn't resist the irony in the situation or perhaps there were slave accountants.

¹⁵ *Kingdom Coming* featured the phenomenon of free blacks who live and work on a plantation also.

protected Normandy in its owners' absence because they were guarding their own livelihoods.

For all the violence against slaves at Heronfields, it remains that Normandy is the site of Charlotte's introduction into slavery and the site of her beating. When Inigo beats Charlotte (for having a sneezing fit that scared a thoroughbred horse being trained) with the butt of his whip, no scene establishes the master-slave relationship better. At the brutal whimsy of a "loving" slave owner, Charlotte is beaten—unlike any other slave at Normandy. Charlotte has no protection from the assault. There is no one to whom she can appeal. What conclusion does the novelist want readers to draw? There is no such thing as "enlightened" slavery; one human being simply cannot own another. Charlotte is unable to move for two weeks after the attack and is nursed by Hagar, the slave who runs the slaves' sick house. While there, Charlotte hears tales of the Congo and Middle Passage. Hagar, then only twelve-years-old and pregnant, went into labor "amidst offal and rotten food, while her tiny bones ground the life out of the little one hopelessly caught in her loins." Her husband pulled the baby son out and tossed the body overboard (152). Hagar's story is a brief but powerful one that grapples with slavery's beginning for African people. A white Southern woman is among the few to dare imagine the start of the whole sordid mess.

More than any other story in this chapter, *Daughter of Strangers* is a love story that twice asks the question: can a slave woman and a white man love each other, or are they made forever strangers by the slave system? Elizabeth Coker's answer is an emphatic no. While Charlotte's parents, the white Auguste Le Jeune and the slave

Celeste, may have a sexual chemistry, readers are not shown a love affair, and their offspring belongs to Celeste's owner. Likewise, Inigo Gaillard and Charlotte Le Jeune may share a sexual attraction also, but love can only exist, Elizabeth Coker suggests, between equals.

Hence, at the end, Charlotte turns to Dr. Leon Cavallo, another mulatto and a free man, for a mate. Even with Leon, Charlotte's slave status is an obstruction to their marriage. Charlotte cannot legally be freed, and Harry Singleton refuses to sell her to Dr. Cavallo, so the couple's future is in limbo. Dr. Cavallo cannot have a wife who is a slave because in essence he has no control over his own wife's future and their children will be owned by Charlotte's owner.

The narrative never explains how Charlotte becomes free. The plot stops in 1849 with little Nick riding off to Mississippi after Inigo's death. Legally, Nick owns Charlotte. When Charlotte reappears in 1865, post-Civil War, she and Leon are working at the Freedman's Bureau. Since Charlotte and Leon have a fourteen-year-old daughter, they must have wed by 1851. Perhaps with the demise of the white adults at Normandy, Charlotte merely walked away. Very probably the Union army liberated Charlotte officially from slavery.

At its conclusion, *Daughter of Strangers* ends on a triumphant note for Charlotte Le Jeune who completely identifies with the black cause. Like the close of *Iola Leroy*, we see a mulatto woman completed by marriage to a mulatto man, and the family is healed, whole, and functioning for the benefit of black people. Despite slavery's horrors, former slaves survive.

At the time of publication, 1950, *Daughter of Strangers* was well received by the reading public, requiring four printings. Its popularity was fairly short-lived, however; the story would fall out of sync with the racially turbulent 1960s in which few would have been fascinated by any type of plantation. Currently, the novel is not in demand, but it can be found online with used book sellers.

Overall, the literary critics welcomed this first novel by Elizabeth Coker with most commenting on her fine abilities in characterization and plot development. One senses in the two lukewarm reviews that the critics objected more to the subject of plantation fiction than to Coker's craftsmanship ("Coker," *Book Review Digest* 189). *Daughter of Strangers* is a novel that would have pleased Frances Harper.

The next novels, *Cloud on the Land* (1951) and *Bridle the Wind* (1953), were both written by the same author. Julia Davis (1900-1993) lived a life associated with large numbers: she married four times; she gave birth to seven children; she wrote 24 books, mostly novels; she died at 92 (Atkins 184). Davis was born and died in West Virginia and her works "...often focused on the history of western Virginia and her family's role in that history. Her father, John W. Davis, ran for president in 1924 on the Democratic ticket opposite Republican Calvin Coolidge. He also served as ambassador... to England and as a law partner in the New York firm of Davis-Polk." Her mother died in childbirth, giving birth to her, and she was raised by both sets of grandparents ("Davis," Contemporary Authors Online). Her grandfather, Edward McDonald, "...served in the Confederate cavalry...despite his Union sympathies". From an early age, her family's role in the big political decisions of their day held

deep influence on Davis. Unusual for a woman of her time, but not unusual for her economic class, Davis earned a BA from Barnard College in 1922 (“Davis,” Contemporary Authors Online) and lived part of her adult life as a journalist, author and social worker in New York City. History remained an abiding interest, as evidenced by her play, “The Anvil,” that recreated John Brown’s trial (Atkins 184), and she wrote a play and two memoirs about her family (“Davis,” Contemporary Authors Online). Davis lived a full life, nurtured by her southern roots.

Cloud on the Land (1951) is the first of two novels about a slave-owning Virginia family in the early 1800s and their internal, psychological conflicts about slavery. The novel opens with Angus MacLeod leaving his plantation to become a fur trader in the West. Angus is the third generation to own Glengarry, whose many thousand acres remain undeveloped, since the family owns only twelve slaves. He and the family matriarch, his grandmother Millicent, often argue about the need to buy more slaves, but Angus refuses because he believes fur trading will make more money than “a dying system” like slavery (Davis, *Cloud* 3-9).

Young man that he is, when he meets two sisters in his journey towards the Missouri River, he marries Lucy (44). Of course, they know little about each other, and it is not until they encounter a fervent abolitionist that Angus reveals to his wife that he is a slave-owner. He assures her that he didn’t seek to be a slave-owner; he was born into it. He tells Lucy that his slaves don’t desire freedom because they are well-kept. Nevertheless Angus promises to free his slaves if Lucy asks him when they return to Glengarry (93-94).

During the more than eighty pages of adventures living among the Sioux Indians, the issue of slavery only arises with the appearance of Angus' brother, Edward, who travels west to avoid slavery. While in college, Edward embraced the abolitionist movement, which runs contrary to his family's practice. Lucy "could not tire of Edward." Edward explains, "At the South our hearts are so divided. We love the blacks, and we wrong them, we wrong them, and we tell ourselves lies to cover up the wrong. We cannot be honest, even with ourselves....There is ruin in it for us. An end must come....Lucy, I mean never to go back. Never!" (174-176). Angus, naturally, has a jealous fit during Edward's visit, accuses his brother and wife of having an affair, and goes off and lives among the Indians for several years (197). By spring of 1825, Angus, now an independent fur trader, returns to Lucy who has never left the fort.

Angus decides to travel beyond the fort as a trader, but life is difficult on the move with a wife and four children, so Angus decides to return to his Virginia plantation. As they approach Glengarry, Lucy is not impressed with the overgrown fields. Angus admits that slaves "never do more than they have to. But we will soon set it right" (298).

In the absence of Angus and Edward, the elderly matriarch has had free rein to buy more slaves, a desire she long held. She has even procured a personal slave for Lucy. As the slaves line up to greet their returning owners, "Some of the little Negroes began to dance, while others sang, and Angus threw them a handful of pennies, for which they scrambled, giggling" (303).

Each of the three white owners of Glengarry has decidedly different goals. Millicent is willing to sell slaves for profit, especially if she sells them to “good neighbors. I would not sell them south, perhaps.” She believes that “most masters are kind enough” and that she’s heard of only “...one case of real brutality in all my experience.” On the other hand, Angus is opposed to any sale although he would like to diminish the slave population since Glengarry does not produce much (310-311). Lucy is the most ambivalent. She doesn’t want to leave her husband and children, but she believes slavery is immoral. Still she has come to like Lethea, her personal slave and the children’s mammy. Lethea is on loan from Judge Rutherford, and Lucy refuses to permit Angus to buy her and thus become part of the slave trade (317). Lucy’s horror about slavery only increases when she discovers that Lethea is Judge Rutherford’s slave daughter (330).

Although Millicent MacLeod has heard of only “one case of real brutality,” she has to look no farther than her friendly neighbor, Judge Rutherford, to find unhappy slaves. Not only is his own daughter a slave that he hires out for profit—facts that Millicent never acknowledges—but six others risk everything and run away, using a white abolitionist to drive them by wagon into Pennsylvania (379). True to his character, Judge Rutherford dies from a stroke induced while beating slaves. Several owners thought he had caused his own death. “It was against the code for a master to do his own whipping, it was undignified, it was, as could be seen, dangerous” (383).

Upon the Judge’s burial, his only white child, his daughter Maria, sells Lethea for \$1500 to New Orleans. Lucy learns this news with only a day’s notice to buy Lethea,

which she is willing to do to “save” her, but Angus is away from home and there is only \$300 in the house (385). Lucy pleads with Maria to rescind the deal, but Maria wants the \$1500 and to be rid of her black look-alike (390). Millicent is willing to help Lucy buy Lethea, exclaiming: “I fear for her soul where she will be going. I hear sad things of pretty girls in New Orleans” (386). All seems lost, so Lucy encourages Lethea to run away to the Underground Railroad of which Lethea is ignorant. Besides, Lethea is physically frail and rather simple-minded; Lucy knows “Lethea could never make it alone...” and she “...felt herself responsible for her predicament,” meaning that Lucy could have bought Lethea years ago but she didn’t want to participate in the slave trade. Lucy decides to take Lethea to Pennsylvania herself (395). Lucy does not act unilaterally; she waits for Angus to return to enlist his aid (396). First, Lucy urges Angus to publicly denounce slavery. Angus refuses to lose property and go to jail. Furthermore he believes Lethea might be better off in New Orleans since her only prospect for marriage is an old man (400). Eventually Angus orders a carriage for Lucy and Lethea for their trip to Pennsylvania. (No one will question a white woman traveling with her personal slave.) However, Angus remains out of sight as Lucy and Lethea bid farewell to the MacLeod children. Lucy leaves knowing she will not return any time soon, having broken many Virginia laws about aiding and abetting a fugitive slave (402-404).

In terms of its depiction of slavery, Julia Davis made sure that she displayed how brutal all aspects of slavery were—even on an “enlightened” plantation. Davis made two references to the Middle Passage. First, she described the slave and surrogate

mother to Angus, Aunt Winnie whose grandmother remembered the Middle Passage. Her father had knocked down a white man for harassing her mother and then had beat up another white who had tried to discipline him. They beat him with a chain until he died, but her mother was already pregnant with Winnie. “No drop of white blood in my body, bless God” (341). Aunt Winnie, knowing the horrors of slavery, states: “One time I thought I could never love white folks. But I can....” (342). The second Middle Passage reference is by one of the black men Angus meets on his trek west. He describes why seventy-six slaves died on the voyage: “Two hundred we lay down in the stinking hold in the darkness, packed feet to head....No air, no room to move. ‘Twould have hurt your heart to hear the children crying. The food was never much, and that gave out” (21). The hellish voyage into slavery is presented to show how correct abolitionism is.

Then there’s the obligatory scene by white novelists, whether slavery’s apologist or abolitionist. White novelists who write historical fiction about slavery assure the reader that no one on the protagonists’ plantations ever-so-much as slapped a slave. Yet if a slave is slapped, as often transpires, it is the exception and not the rule. In *Cloud on the Land* Angus spanks his eldest son because the son hit at his personal slave. Angus explains that “‘Shad can’t hit you back, and so you must never hit him unless you have to punish him....When you get to be master I want to see you be a good one....” (Evidently, Angus sees no contradiction in spanking his son for engaging in physical violence.) Lucy, of course, believes their son would be better without owning slaves (316).

After living at Glengarry for several years, Lucy ventures into the slave quarters for the first time to help deliver twins since the white doctor did not immediately respond to her call. Lucy is stunned by the living conditions. “Even the wild Indians did not live in such filth and confusion—but then they had established their own way of life, they had not been thrown like orphans into an alien civilization.” The new mother has no rights over her own children. Slave newborns “...could be taken from her as soon as they had finished with her milk, and she might never find them...” (346-349). Until that moment, Lucy had not appeared to know what she presided over, as Mrs. Angus MacLeod.

Cloud on the Land is psychologically realistic and subtle, showing the tensions and ambivalences within each individual, marriage, and extended family about slavery. Only the old, dying matriarch embraces, unquestioningly, slavery. Both grandsons know the peculiar institution is economically untenable and unethical. Edward goes to college and afterward rejects his heritage because slavery does not make sense to him. Angus, at the novel’s start, believes slavery is dying, but it doesn’t die soon enough for him to be spared entanglement. When he returns to Glengarry with a family, he finds that he owns more slaves than when he left, thanks to his grandmother purchasing more and given to how quickly the slaves reproduce. Edward returns to Glengarry when Millicent has a stroke and asks his brother what Angus will do with his “ever increasing crop of blacks?” Angus says he’ll rent out some and work the rest, but he will not sell any. “We will work something out, in the end. We know it is a bad institution, but we will work

something out. That is, if the Yankee fanatics will let us alone long enough to do it” (359-360). Angus had decided the sale of slaves is immoral but the exploitation of their free labor and their squalid living conditions are acceptable, despite not being able to create a viable solution, a “something...in the end”. However, boxing him in on the other side is his wife who always expressed abolitionist sentiments. In Lucy, the reluctant slave-owner, Julia Davis demonstrates how white abolitionists were forced into criminality: Virginia law dictated that any freed slave must leave the state (and family, friends, and the known world) within the year of manumission. For example, Aunt Winnie cannot be freed and remain at the only home she knows, Glengarry. Once freed, she must leave her feeble-minded son and Virginia. Lucy finally breaks out of this trap between the law and economics by personally helping one slave to escape since Lucy believes she had helped sell Lethea “down the river”. Lucy knows she is breaking the law, shattering a long-standing friendship between the MacLeods and Rutherfords, and most importantly, estranging herself from husband and children. She chooses to do it with Angus’ silent acquiescence. The novel’s sequel, *Bridle the Wind*, finishes these adventures.

Perhaps these subtle and characterizations explain the critical reaction. *Cloud on the Land* was reviewed by major publications and received a tepid response. Many noted that Julia Davis was no ordinary novelist and that *Cloud* is a superior historical novel....And yet there were no rave reviews (like those for *Double Muscadine*, for example). Shirley Baker in the *Saturday Review of Literature* defended her temperate praise and in the end admitted that there was no specific fault she could find:

There is no rule of her craft that she has broken, she knows the period, she has worked out her story with thought and care, she has made no obvious errors one can put the finger on. Many readers will enjoy her book. It does everything but live. And this quality of life is something we who write historical novels cannot consciously give to our work. We can only pray that it will be there. (51)

Reviews in the *Chicago Sun Tribune*, *Kirkus*, *Library Journal*, and the *New York Times* all contained similar lukewarm praise without pinpointing error (“Davis,” *Book Review Digest* 224). Could it be that Lucy’s decision to leave her children and husband to free a slave was too politically and morally aggressive and progressive for the white reviewers of 1951? Lucy not only liberated Lethea, Lucy herself was too liberated for 1950s America.

Bridle the Wind (1953) continues the story of Lucy MacLeod, a white wife and mother, who leaves her husband’s plantation that she never liked to free a slave by personally taking her to Pennsylvania. Lucy and Lethea settle in New York City where Lucy reunites with her sister Phoebe. Edward MacLeod, abolitionist and brother-in-law, takes Lethea to Canada to live (Davis, *Bridle* 15). Since it was Edward MacLeod who had helped the first six fugitives from the Rutherford plantation, it is fitting that he would take Lethea too. Edward now lives in Boston (14). By 1835, Lucy had been in New York City for three years and is desperate to see her children. She writes to her husband, asking him for reconciliation. He never answers her letters (5). Lucy knows that Virginia law will fine and jail her upon

returning for helping a slave to escape. In addition, the Rutherfords could sue her for double the value of the slave (4). Neither MacLeod desires divorce, (27), but Angus does not seek out Lucy until prompted by his invalid mother (31). He agrees to go to New York City to see if he can face her.

Life at Glengarry has been difficult since Lucy's departure. "...what a hand-to-mouth business it was, under the surface of apparent plenty—how one crop had to be juggled to meet the expense of raising another, how the slaves ate up the surplus, and the one thing never available was cash" (18). Then, Maria Rutherford, Lethea's owner (and half-sister), sues the MacLeods for double the fugitive's value, or \$3,000. Millicent is an invalid taken to her bed (17), and the MacLeod children are ridiculed in school and feel abandoned by a mother who "...never will come back, because she loves the niggers better than she loves..." them (112).

At the same time that Angus decides to go to New York City, his brother Edward also meets with Lucy (35). Edward and Lucy have always shared abolitionist values, and for his part, Edward has always been in love with his sister-in-law. During their meeting, Edward tries to dissuade Lucy from returning to Virginia since both her children and the neighbors will be hostile and to Angus whom Edward believes has "forfeited his right..." to her. Lucy lets Edward know that her marriage is deeper than he can comprehend (42-43).

Just as Angus reaches New York City (89), Lucy decides to return to Virginia incognito so not to be arrested before arriving at Glengarry (92). The first people Lucy meets at Glengarry are the slaves who consider her a heroine; they will keep the

secret of her return from neighbors (97, 106). Millicent surprises herself and is happy to see Lucy again. She welcomes Lucy's return but advises that she remain in seclusion in the house for fear of the neighbors' reaction (103). In the little Lucy saw of Glengarry upon arrival, she can see that the plantation is going downhill. Lucy notices the slave population has increased to about forty ragged human beings. Everyone consults the invalid, the elderly Millicent, about everything in Angus' absence. Lucy observes, "There was no freedom here, either for master or slave." Millicent too knows the plantation is unproductive and comments to Lucy: "This place is being run by blacks, and that means it is badly run" (108-109). Still, slavery's biggest defender is Millicent MacLeod who tells Lucy how her family came to be slave-owners:

'My father was one of the first to bring a slave across the Blue Ridge.

Mzambo, his name was, bought fresh from a ship in Baltimore....It did not seem to us a bad thing....In time my father bought him a wife. My stepmother had died then, and Judith [her sister] was a baby. My poor father never had luck with his marrying. Sula was good to us. Then she had some babies of her own, and there we were. Cato and Dred are their grandchildren, and so the line goes on....Mzambo had the strength of two men, and my father rejoiced in working beside him, clearing the forest. He thought that the blacks had a great future in this land and—it may be they still have, though it is hard to see it. Yet if you could have watched Mzambo, learning our ways, picking up Christian customs, singing, you would not have thought we were doing a great wrong.

When he could speak our language, he told us he was happy. Happier than he had been in Africa, where there were wars all the time.'

The five children of Mzambo and Sula serve as Millicent's dowry(137).

Eventually word gets out that Lucy has returned, and Maria Rutherford sues Lucy immediately for slave stealing. Long-time family friend, and coincidentally the best lawyer in town, Holmes Peyton, offers to defend her (131). Millicent and Lucy debate about what she should plead. Millicent wants Lucy to say that after living in New York City and witnessing the squalid conditions in the slums, Lucy now realizes that slavery is not as harmful to blacks as northern freedom. Lucy replies, "I cannot say it, Madam. I don't think it. I still think slavery the worst of evils. I still tremble when I think what it may bring to us all...to my children..." (136). Millicent then argues that freedom is not practical for the slaves because a freed slave must leave the state within one year of manumission, and if a freedman enters a non-slaveholding state, the ex-slave must have a \$1,000 entrance fee. Millicent concludes, "So we cannot expect that they will go and starve quietly elsewhere..." (139). Nevertheless Lucy is more convinced than ever that her method of freeing Lethea is best. Peyton, her lawyer, requests that Lucy plead not guilty in order to make the prosecution prove their case (146).

Meanwhile Angus is living with a woman he first met on his western adventures and is not thinking about Lucy at all (154-157). By chance, he meets his sister-in-law Phoebe on the street; they have never liked each other. Nevertheless from her he learns that Lucy has returned to Virginia (168). He instantly leaves his mistress,

taking \$2,000 in cash that he made on the stock market (172-173). The MacLeods have a blissful reconciliation at Glengarry (182). It is so joyful that Lucy soon discovers she is pregnant with their fifth child who will be born in jail if Lucy is convicted (199-200).

Lucy's trial is a speedy one, thanks to the expertise of Holmes Peyton. The Judge agrees with Peyton's argument and dismisses the case (240). The MacLeods, returning to Glengarry, are welcomed by their children and the slaves (246). Lucy and Angus have a final conversation about slavery as the novel ends. Angus asks Lucy for the solution to the slavery dilemma. Lucy believes that love for everyone is the answer (247).

In terms of critical reception, this novel received warm reviews, meaning all the major critics liked *Bridle the Wind* to a degree that they did not praise *Cloud on the Land* ("Davis," *Book Review Digest* 241). "...according to a *New York Herald Tribune Book* review contributor..." *Bridle* is "...a warm, human, mature story of a person who, in a moment of impulsive heroism, sought to resolve a problem that divided a nation'" ("Davis," Contemporary Authors Online). In the end, only one slave is better off for Lucy's sacrifice and that is Lethea, living in Canada. The other slaves are more ragged and hungry and no closer to freedom than before Lucy arrives at Glengarry despite Lucy's deep love for them. Nevertheless, Lucy did act on her abolitionist convictions in freeing one slave.

Why are the critics delighted when Lucy returns to her marriage, her children, and her plantation? The critics are comforted when Lucy returns to the conventional

woman who “went along to get along” and is willing to accept her punishment. In addition, author Julia Davis gives Angus a romantic fling to perhaps counterbalance Lucy’s betrayal of his heritage.

Probably the most celebrated of all the novelists in this chapter, Robert Penn Warren (1905-1989) rose to quick prominence in academe. Born in Guthrie, Kentucky in 1905, by sixteen he was attending Vanderbilt University with the expectation of studying science but redirected his energies to literature. He earned masters degrees from the University of California and Yale, and by 1928, attended Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar. Subsequently, Warren taught at a host of universities including Vanderbilt, Louisiana State, University of Minnesota, and Yale (“About the Author,” *Band N*. Pg).

Robert Penn Warren distinguished himself by working in a wide range of literary genres, including poetry, essays, short stories, novels, biographies and drama (Holman and James). His awards include: a Guggenheim fellowship, a National Book Award in 1958 for a collection of poems, Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress, three Pulitzer Prizes over the course of his life, culminating in being named the first Poet Laureate of the United States in 1986 (“About the Author,” *Band*; “R. P. Warren,” Encarta). Warren died in 1989.

According to C. Hugh Holman and Theresa James, “In Warren’s principal work in the novel and poetry, there are a persistent obsession with time and with history, a sense of man’s imperfection and failure and an awareness that innocence is always lost in the acts of achieving maturity and growth.” Certainly *Band of Angels* reflects

its author's penchant for creating historical fiction that highlights the downward arc of lost innocence from childhood to middle age. In many ways the novel revisits the first half of *Iola Leroy* by Frances Harper, but ends as Pauline Hopkins' works. Just as in *Iola*, the main character is raised by a white slave-owner in isolation from other white and black children. The setting here is Kentucky in 1843. Amantha Starr, the protagonist of *Band of Angels*, is sent away to school, believing she is white, just as Iola Leroy had believed. Then, upon the death of the white father, all protection from racism and financial resources are lost, and it is revealed to her that she has a slave mother, before being sold into slavery. At this point Amantha Starr becomes more like Pauline Hopkins' mulatto heroines who shun all associations with black people as they meld into the upper echelons of the white populace. Amantha is bought by a "kind" slave-owner in New Orleans who takes her into his house but does not immediately sexually abuse her. (He doesn't need to since the mulatto housekeeper is a lover also.) Hamish Bond owns three plantations in rural Louisiana and it is not until Amantha decides to live with him on his favorite plantation that they become lovers. She still maintains distance from the other slaves, preferring the company of her owner almost exclusively.

When the Civil War begins and six months after the fall of New Orleans, Amantha leaves Hamish at the plantation and returns to New Orleans with her free papers in hand where she meets a Union officer, a Harvard grad (205-209). They fall in love and marry (229, 232). When the war ends, Tobias Sears decides not to return to New England and work for his father's corporation but he stays in the South and work for

the Freedman's Bureau (259). Mr. and Mrs. Sears have been married a couple years before Amantha tells her husband about her slave past; Tobias accepts her (290-291). Eventually Tobias and Amantha leave New Orleans for St. Louis where Tobias begins a law practice and they start a family (340). Tobias writes both a book of poetry and an indictment of how the federal government betrayed the Reconstruction process (342). The couple moves at least three more times, "failing westward," ending in Halesburg, Kansas with a daughter now that the son has died. Their economic status ebbs and flows, but mostly ebbs (348). The novel ends on notes of reconciliation: Amantha forgives her white father for not freeing her when he could have ("*Nobody can set you free, I thought...except yourself*") and she forgives her white husband from whom she had been estranged, ending the novel in each other's arms (363-364, 375).

Robert Penn Warren explores the paradox of a principled slave-owner in this novel. Beginning with Amantha Starr's faint sketch of Starrwood, her father's Kentucky plantation, the entire novel is told by a first-person narrator, Amantha, beginning as a young child who remembers "...things only in starts and patches...in a kind of mystic isolation." Amantha's grandfather Rodney Starr first built the plantation in the 1790s and her father, Aaron Starr, inherited it (5). From early on Amantha is puzzled by her mother's absence. Aunt Sukie, her "black mammy," raises her until nine years when she leaves for school. Her father tells her that her mother died of a fever, and her mother is buried, not in the graveyard with Aaron's second wife, but in a plot near the house. Her father tells her that he wanted her

mother “...closer to the house. Where she’d be closer to me. And to you” (8).

That explanation sufficed for awhile, until Manthy learned who and what her mother was. The only other slave let into Amantha’s small world was Aunt Sukie’s cousin, Shadrach who carved dolls for Amantha (13). This same Shadrach was later sold, but true to Aaron Starr’s philosophy, Shadrach had never been whipped (16). Manthy’s father didn’t whip slaves. “He took the view that, if you had to whip a nigger, the nigger wasn’t worth keeping anyway. Also my father was a humane man, and in the years of my recollection he had never had to sell off a soul. In fact, selling your people was against his principles” (17).

Aaron Starr’s contradictions affect all the black characters in shattering ways. Although overt physical brutality may have been minimal (no whipping), the slaves are all sold at his death—even the one who thought she is his white daughter. As Amantha descends into the maw of slavery, she is thrown into a desperate identity crisis: “I touched my face, I prodded my body, and I was sure that this was not myself, it was somebody else, yes, somebody I should feel very, very sorry for.... Had I really believed the tales about what it was like to be a poor black man, a poor slave?” (63). She attempts suicide by jumping out of a window but grasps a ledge at the last second before plunging to the ground and is saved by a mulatto slave driver. Going from a white privileged position to the luckless slave caste is beyond nightmarish for Amantha, and life is almost not worth living. After her suicide attempt, her new owner locks her in a separate cabin on the boat for Louisiana. If she tries to escape again, she is threatened with being thrown in the slave pit with no

protection from the slave men. “Then I saw the human figures in that tumbled shadowy landscape, some thirty figures I should estimate, figures with black or brown faces, men, women, children, propped vacantly against the bales and staring at the shore....Two of the men were manacled, a leg and wrist of each chained to one of the uprights supporting the boiler deck. They were Mr. Calloway’s coffle, they, too, famous produce of Kentucky” (70). Amantha is also guarded by an elderly slave woman who encourages her to eat because “Ain’t nuthin gonna change nuthin” (73).

When they arrive in New Orleans, the slaves are assembled in the slave-house jail. The oldest slave is trained to say that he is forty-three rather than the more likely fifty; grey hairs are pulled from his head as preparation for sale. Those slaves from Kentucky are in good shape, but Calloway had also picked up three slaves at Memphis who are poorly fed and cared for. They are given special meals on the ship to fatten them up. One Memphis slave is publicly scrubbed in a tub with a broom in front of everyone. Manthy tries not to look at the naked man. The man’s skin was wiped with grease and soot to make him shine and he was given new clothes. Even Amantha is given a red ribbon to brighten her appearance (85), all to disguise the horror of the slave condition to encourage sales.

Then the slaves are led to the beautiful St. Louis Hotel at Royal and St. Louis Streets for auction to the gentry in the town. The auctioneer would “call up the property being offered, enumerate the subject’s points and invite any interested gentleman to make a personal inspection.” Shirts are opened to see scars; “...a

marked back meant a bad nigger...” Manthy believes she would spit on someone who would physically examine her. A young man instantly moves forward to inspect her when her turn arrives as the last slave on the block (87). A middle-aged man bids \$2,000 on Amantha before the young man can examine her. The older man is Hamish Bond, and Amantha’s life with another principled slave-owner begins.

Hamish Bond has a long, complicated history of interaction with Africans. His given name is Alec Hinks when he was born in Baltimore before leaving his mother as a teen for sea (178, 188). Eventually he owns his own slaver, and he quickly realizes the economic benefit of taking good care of the slaves. He tells Amantha:

’...I swore that when I got my ship I’d run it clean. And I did. You had to lay ‘em on the slave-shelves, but I gave turn-room, and all day, gang by gang, on deck for air and dancing. I hosed ‘em down with sea water. Every other day I hosed down and holystoned the slave decks....I made ‘em wash out their mouth with lemon and gave chew sticks for teeth. I fed ‘em like the crew...My ship didn’t smell. I never lost money by it. I landed my cargoes.’ (188)

The novelist repeatedly insists that Hamish Bond acts out of kindness whenever he “rescues” beautiful, young mulatto women from the slave block to become his concubines. Amantha asks Hamish what made him buy her. He replies, “I just happened to be in there, in the St Louis Hotel. I just happened to see you standing up there. You looked so little standing up there....and I saw that fellow. That fellow who started up to look at you and paw you....It looked like I couldn’t stand it. I just did it.” Manthy responds: “Kindness...Michelle said you had it like a disease....”

(201). Michelle is another mulatto slave who serves as Bond's housekeeper in New Orleans now that she is old; prior to being his housekeeper, she too was a mistress.

This kind man owns two plantations in addition to his townhouse in New Orleans. Tarnation, his least favorite plantation, has 2000 acres with 250 slaves and a white overseer (141). The other, Pointe du Loup, is his true home. Pointe has eighty to ninety slaves who are ecstatic to see him whenever he visits (139). When Bond is absent, Pointe is managed by Rau-Ru, an almost supernatural African. Rau-Ru is the only black male Bond ever rescued, snatching him from a burning African village as a newborn and raising him as a son. Rau-Ru, of course, is only "free" at Pointe. When he interacts with the outer white world, he is nothing more than a slave. Indeed, when he encounters the apparently-white Amantha while in the city, he defers to her as a servant (126-127). Eventually Rau-Ru rejects Hamish Bond's patronage and attempts to kill him. Later still, Rau-Ru becomes a dashing Union officer who changes his name to Oliver Cromwell Jones and single-handedly defeats a Confederate unit (260-261).

Like Amantha's Starrwood, Pointe du Loup is a plantation paradise for slaves. "...certainly those of Pointe du Loup nearly ran their own lives. True, corn and cotton had to be raised, but under that iron necessity the rule of life was theirs—theirs and Rau-Ru's." There is a council of elders that meets with Rau-Ru about disputes at the plantation. "And justice was easy. The lash had hung, stiffening in its thongs, used, on the granary door, in plain sight, for five years." Punishment includes short food rations, banishment from the weekly party, and "finger-pointing, ...a system

whereby no word except an order might be addressed to the culprit during the term of punishment..." (144). Although the slaves remain Bond's possessions, they are allowed to judge their own misdeeds.

The Civil War impinges on the tranquility of Pointe du Loup. Suddenly, meals are burned. A child of a healthy "wench" is still-born. Horses are used at night and Bond does not know for what reason. Bloody fights in the quarters and finger-pointing do nothing to alleviate the problems. Even Hamish Bond is shot at while in the gig; he doesn't know who did it, but Manthy believes Rau-Ru is the culprit (165). Why these contented slaves would be affected by sounds of upheaval in other places Robert Penn Warren never explains.

Amantha's entire journey from slavery to freedom and from innocence to knowledge culminates in her epiphany that "Nobody can set you free...except yourself." For Robert Penn Warren to make a slave decide that slavery is merely another existential condition like all others evades whites' responsibility for the brutality known as slavery. The white male slave-owners never acknowledge how they benefit from all their "kindnesses" to slaves. The male slaves are sold for top dollar without evidence of beatings and they do not run away while the mulatto women settle into their beds. The final truth, that freedom may not exist for any human being, comes perilously close to Orwellian in a novel about slavery. *Animal Farm* gave the world the perfectly cynical paradox, "all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others." In *Band of Angels*, while all characters struggle to be free, certainly the white males in the novel have an easier time exploring personal

freedom than others.

Literary critics almost uniformly pan *Band of Angels*, calling it overly long or disliking Amantha as narrator. Most rejected the improbable coincidences and melodrama (Hardy 481), other qualities it shares with *Iola Leroy*. C. Hugh Holman argues that the main problem in *Band of Angels* is that Warren “subordinated the story and the characters to a plot structure...in order to make statements about the nature of freedom--essentially the statement that freedom simply does not exist in this world and that freedom ultimately consists of, at best, our choice of the person or the thing to which we yield it” (Holman 85). John Hardy explains, “Full justice will be done to Robert Penn Warren by the critic who can accommodate his greatness and his littleness, the unpredictable fluctuations of his talent, in the one encompassing insight” (Hardy 481-482). *Band* certainly did not succeed as a novel; even an accomplished writer could not provide an adequate explanation or apology for slavery’s corruptions.

The writing career of the next novelist, Waters Turpin (1910-1968), stands in sharp contrast to the acclaim of that of Robert Penn Warren. Waters Edward Turpin was born on April 9, 1910 in Oxford on Maryland’s eastern shore, very near the birthplaces of Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass. From early life he was influenced by his maternal grandfather, Thomas Waters, “who boasted that neither he nor his parents had been anybody’s slaves.” Both Cap’n Tom, his grandfather, and proximity to the birthplaces of Maryland’s most famous freedom fighters, Tubman and Douglass, piqued Turpin’s lifelong interest in history and in those who could

transcend disaster (Hollis).

For a black man of his generation, Waters Turpin was very well educated. He earned a BA from Morgan College, a MA from Columbia, and an EdD from Columbia University. Such an education permitted him to teach first at Storer College in West Virginia, then at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, and finally at his alma mater, Morgan State College. Throughout his teaching career, he remained a prolific writer, completing three historical novels, biographies, social novels, essays, plays, and two textbooks. Waters Turpin died on November 19, 1968, leaving a powerful legacy to Maryland students and writers in particular (Hollis 289-295).

In Turpin's first novel, a character voiced the author's aesthetic that would guide all his all fictional work, including *The Rootless* (1957). The character wants to write about black families from Maryland's Eastern Shore that celebrate their past and anticipate a great future (Hollis 289-295). *The Rootless* reflects the devastation of what slaveholding does to black and white families alike in Maryland in the 1770s. The novel begins with a slave ship unloading her cargo of 120. Only half of the slaves that boarded the Betsy Ann, the ship, in Africa survive disease to arrive in Maryland. Already the price paid in African lives is too high. The slaves are described:

...the gangplank creaked to the tread of shackled blacks. Each file was led by one of the crew who held a lead rope looped chain fashion from neck to neck of the gagged captives. Sullen submissiveness and abject terror marked all until the last score of males reached the gangplank. In the middle of that file one

great-shouldered, lean flanked giant stood out from the rest like a lord of the night. His was the face of the earth's unconquerables. (Turpin 14)

The giant attempts suicide by throwing himself overboard but is prevented by a crewman and is whipped. The giant is depressed because his wife has just died in childbirth, giving birth to a little boy who will be raised by the midwife (14-20). Here the slaves are depicted as heroic and loving of each other and understandably traumatized by the horror of what they've experienced on the slave ship.

The slave children are raised by Sula, the midwife from the slaver, who also serves as the local witch doctor. In keeping with her supernatural abilities, she appears to be ancient yet without old age's weaknesses. She raises slave children orphaned by slavery. She pays particular attention to Prince, the son of the "giant" at the novel's opening, and Cindy. She urges both of them to learn to read since both are selected as servants in the Shannon mansion. Sula believes reading is essential to maintaining freedom (157).

Even as children, Prince and Cindy love one another, and their love blossoms as teenagers. Of course, slavery and the Shannons derail their hopes. Prince is scheduled to reproduce with Big Lu in order to breed more slaves for the plantation (164). Waters Turpin describes how slaves, being human, still loved and engaged in tender passions; they were not so dehumanized as to have normal family relations. Nor does Turpin disguise how slave family life was under constant attack by the mercenary plans of the slave owners who wanted to expand their estates by breeding the slaves like animals.

Lanrick and Louisa Shannon are the white planters who have three heirs. The most evil is the oldest, Mariah, who supervises the plantation after the parents' deaths. Her treachery includes murdering her grandfather (because he was going to free his slaves before he died, thereby making her poorer as an heir) and killing a cousin who had discovered that Mariah had poisoned grandfather Delaney (146-149, 184-185). Mariah's accomplice in these crimes is Hosie Delaney, a mulatto slave and uncle (149, 187). Pure greed makes her kill. Perry Shannon, another sibling, is the dissolute youngest whose only interest is in the next party. The middle child, James, is the most educated and he becomes an abolitionist. All of their lives are ruined by slave-holding.

When James Shannon returns from Oxford University, he urges Prince and Cindy to run away to Baltimore where James will reside and practice law. The fugitives join the Underground Railroad and are sheltered by Quakers in Baltimore (288-289). As soon as their baby is born, Prince wants the family to sail for San Domingo, Haiti since he has read of the successful Haitian slave revolution (298). Before they can get away, a mulatto reveals their hiding place for reward money. James Shannon is beaten by a mob, trying to protect the couple (306-308). Prince and Cindy are returned to Shannon Place and viciously flogged, causing Cindy to go into labor (323-324). Prince is put on the same slave ship where he was born to be sold south. Perry Shannon happens to be onboard too (327). Prince leads an insurrection aboard the ship and the deck becomes "a slaughterhouse floor" since the white crew is vastly outnumbered (330). However, the insurrection occurs at the same time as the ship

encounters a hurricane off of Cape Hatteras. The mutiny's few slave survivors drown (332).

Meanwhile Prince is wreaking revenge on the slave ship, Cindy has gone insane on the Shannon plantation, scalping Mariah who is a bedridden alcoholic with venereal disease. The Great House burns down (334, 336-337).

The only survivor is James Shannon who is recovering from the assault when Prince and Cindy were recaptured. In the epilogue, he is elected president of the abolitionist society (339). He regrets the deaths of Prince and Cindy but not the demise of his siblings and he vows to fight slavery for the rest of his life (340).

The only conclusion to reach after reading *The Rootless* is that slavery was a bloody horror for all involved—slaves, slaveholders, and abolitionists. *The Rootless* has two kinds of slave-owners, those who die immediately from the brutality of slavery or those who die eventually from slavery's violence. Nature itself exacts a fearsome toll on those who sell humans for profit.

The four characters in the novel who survive these treacheries are abolitionists: Dr. Will Stevens, who operates the Underground Railroad while curing the sick; Amos and Delilah, two fugitive slaves who briefly aid Prince and Cindy in their escape; and James Shannon who is converted to abolitionism by Dr. Stevens and his studies abroad. Not by accident the two white abolitionists are also intellectuals, suggesting that opposition to slavery is smart thinking.

Waters Turpin self-published *The Rootless* although the author's efforts in securing a publisher remain unclear. Given its violence and abolitionist stance,

Turpin may have known that the story would not find widespread acceptance in major publishing houses, but no one knows for certain if Turpin submitted it to established publishers at all. “By the end of 1956 Turpin decided to publish the book himself. He was hopeful that public reaction to the book would prove the misgivings of publishers wrong” (Hollis 289-295). Typical of self-published works, circulation of *The Rootless* was quite limited. Readers were not impressed. Even Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore refused to put the novel in circulation. The few literary critics who did read the manuscript were no less kind (Hollis). Today *The Rootless* “has remained largely unread” (Pettis 77). One of the few to discover the novel is Joyce Pettis who unearthed it for her doctoral dissertation. She writes that Turpin

...is relentless in his pessimistic thesis that ‘the unlimited power of master over slave breeds tyranny—tyranny which debases the tyrant more than those who bear the tyranny;’ that unlimited power outrageously inflates one’s sense of one’s own importance; that any positive gain achieved on another’s misery can only be short lived; and that the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children. All action of the novel is contrived to demonstrate this thesis. (Pettis 72)

The next novel, *All God’s Children*, was also written by a black male author, but one completely at odds with Turpin’s style or aesthetic sensibilities. Alston Anderson (1924-) is truly a man of the world, having lived many places in it. Born to Jamaican parents in the Panama Canal Zone, his early education took place in Kingston, Jamaica. At fourteen he arrived in the United States (Hughes 497). From nineteen

through twenty-two years he served in the U.S. Army before earning a bachelor's degree from North Carolina College. "He did graduate work in philosophy at Columbia University, then studied eighteenth-century German metaphysics at the Sorbonne in Paris. It was there that he began to write after being inspired by William Faulkner and Franz Kafka" (Albert 208). By 1967 Anderson was living in Majorca (Hughes 497). Author of two books, *All God's Children*, a novel, and the critically acclaimed *Lover Man*, a collection of short stories, this African-American stylist is the literary father of Ishmael Reed and Charles Johnson in their postmodern treatment of slavery, with its concern for interrogating narrative form, the *how* the slave's story is told.

All God's Children (1965) is a parody of the slave autobiography and slave narrative; it may even be a parody of a novel as a literary genre. The story follows October Pruitt, a slave born in Southampton County, Virginia in 1824 who lives through Reconstruction. Most of the novel is narrated by October himself so that readers experience first-hand his desire to secure personal freedom while living in the South. October never considers himself a slave and his conflicts throughout life is with an outer society that does consider him less than human. His life's goal is "to be master of myself" (95). However, typical of a postmodern novel, the reader is asked to question, if not outright reject, the story that this unreliable narrator tells.

As a direct descendent, albeit a black one, of his owners, the Pruitts, October has a life typical of many house slaves enslaved to family members who are their "owners". His purpose in life is to serve his white owners and as such is deprived of normal

family interactions with either his black or white relations. His mother is never mentioned, yet slave status is determined matrilineally. At the start, Anderson makes October's slave status suspect. His father, a mulatto, runs away to the North after Nat Turner's massacre in 1833 when October is eight-years-old. (The Pruitts live in the same county as Turner's rampage.) In fact, October interacts mostly with his white cousins throughout the novel. As was often the case, the Pruitt children, October's peers, know that October is a cousin, but they also know he is a "nigger" (Anderson 9), not the same as a white cousin at all.

Upon the deaths of both slave-owners, their children leave the South for New England, and October is sold by the overseer who runs the plantation in the son's absence and disinterest. October is held in a packed slave pen in another town, awaiting auction and manages to escape right before sale. His escape is completely unplanned—he doesn't know where he is or the direction in which he's running—and yet the miraculous happens, as it did for so many, and he connects with white abolitionists on the Underground Railroad. They give him passes, certificates for a new identity, and boat passage to Philadelphia where the abolitionists find him a job and put him in a boarding house.

October's "freedom" is short-lived, however, as was that of many fugitives who did not go to Canada. He aborts his "escape" by deliberately returning to the South to live where he is re-enslaved for ten years to a relatively benign owner in Georgia. When the Civil War begins, October joins a black military unit. Recovering from a shoulder wound, he meets Celeste Robineau who becomes his wife. They return to

his birthplace, Southampton County, Virginia, at the war's end. There, he builds a life, a family, and a house as a free black man in the South. He is lynched after many successes, all circumstances common to slaves.

The ways in which October is atypical of other slaves may be of more import in his life choices than how he is similar. First, October is taught to read by his white cousin Tom as a child; both boys risk a "whipping" since teaching a slave to read is illegal after Nat Turner's massacre (7). October reads the newspapers to the slaves in his cabin when he becomes a field hand upon the Pruitts' deaths (34). Reading enables October to keep abreast of abolitionist activities and "...the miserable existence that so many so-called free men led in many parts of England and of the torture that freedom meant to many thousand free negroes in the United States" (33-34). As a reader, October develops a global perspective about slavery, freedom, and race.

October's verbal fluency does not extend to conversation with other black people, however. October suffers from extreme alienation from all slaves seemingly, not only from his slave girlfriend Sally Ann, preferring to identify with Tom and Angela Pruitt, his white relatives. Completely ignored are black relatives. There are four references in the novel to his mulatto father and no reference at all to his mother. Her name is never given; her existence is erased. No black siblings or cousins or aunts or uncles appear and October himself seems unaware of the absence of black relatives. October lives in the "big house" with the other servants, but he never comments on any interactions with them. While countless conversations with whites are presented,

only three interchanges with black individuals are presented: October's argument with Gant, the only other slave sold from the Pruitt plantation, as they walk along, chained, to the slave pen; October's conversations with Jacques Delahaye, a freedman from Martinique who helps him escape to the North; October's talk to the blacks in hiding on the Pruitt plantation after the Civil War. While there are few exchanges with his black wife or other soldiers in his Civil War army unit, and none with his sons, there are pages of dialogue with practically every white person he meets, particularly Tom and Angela Pruitt, the white abolitionists on the Underground Railroad, and Bill Sampson, his buddy-employer during Reconstruction. Since October, a mulatto, tells his own story, it is clear that he privileges whiteness over blackness, privileges his white self over his black self, which leads, eventually, to his demise.

October's literacy, nevertheless, leads to deep thinking about the existential dilemmas for black people. In his life October refuses two offers to flee to Canada. When he's a field hand, Tom Pruitt, his childhood best friend, owner, and white cousin, offers October money to escape to Canada. October replies, "I'm an American....And besides, who's going to tell me that I'm free when I go to Canada? You? The Canadian government? ...Who are *you* to tell me when I'm free and when I'm not free? Who is *anybody*?" When Tom becomes a Harvard professor, he calls him a "stupid nigger bastard" for rejecting his offer. October shrugs (33-34). October's insistence that he is his own man, despite the traps of slavery, makes him incredulous that he can be sold although he is warned ahead of time by his slave

girlfriend who is also sleeping with the overseer (35). (October exhibits neither anger nor jealousy about his girlfriend and the overseer.) He is sold and bolts without thought before the auction. As a fugitive, October meets with Virgil Henderson, an attorney who works for the Underground Railroad. October tells him that he wants to go to Philadelphia, not Canada. Henderson advises him of the Fugitive Slave Act that enables October to be captured anywhere in the U.S. and returned to his owner. October remains true to his belief that he is an American citizen, not a Canadian (72). He wonders, “What in the name of God was I if not an American,” since both his black and white grandfathers fought in the American Revolution War (92). He arrives in Philadelphia with his chosen alias, Ben Franklin, and all is going well until a chance meeting with his runaway father, Aaron Pruitt. October encounters his vaguely familiar face on the street: “Maybe it was seeing my father, living like the ghost he had become, that did it. Or maybe it was that seeing him I realized that I myself had become a ghost, a phantom living in the limbo that men like to call freedom” (91). This chance meeting prompts October to make a most unique decision for a fugitive in his relatively safe situation: *he voluntarily decides to return to Virginia to live*. He tells the Quaker who has set him up in Philadelphia: “I’m trying to find my own freedom. I’m trying, in a sense, to be master of myself”(94-95).

October buys a train ticket and heads south. As soon as the train enters Maryland, he is treated like a slave despite freedman’s papers (97-103). Arriving in Richmond, he goes to a white abolitionist, Thomas Parker, in search of a job. The abolitionist

does not believe that his work has been in vain, that a former slave without any family ties or close friendships with other slaves of his own volition returns to the South. October tries to explain in this soliloquy:

I'm here because this is where I belong....It's not that I like being a slave, because I never thought of myself as a slave....I thought that by coming back I could tell my people—and by 'my people' I mean both the white and the black—I thought I could tell them that there ain't no such thing as slavery because nobody can own anybody else....I don't mean to be a preacher or nothing like that. I just thought I'd tell them that every last one of them is free, and the thing that we all have to do is find our own *personal* freedom and not what somebody else tells us that that freedom is. That's why I came back.

(111-112)

Thomas Parker asks October: “Are you aware of the things that happen in our Virginia? Are you aware that there are men who will punch nails into a barrel and put a negro into it and roll the barrel down a hill *for no reason at all?*” (112).

This moment in the novel is as good a place as any to ask: what does Alston Anderson want readers to believe in *All God's Children*, for a question of belief stands at the heart of the novel. The title itself posits equality between and universality among the world's inhabitants and it also presumes the existence of God, a controlling principle in all events that happen here on Earth. In an ironic twist, neither racial equality nor God's benevolent mercies are overtly evident in the plot; the main character is a slave who desperately tries to ignore the realities of his

existence and who does not believe in God or the church. The entire novel focuses on October Pruitt's futile attempts to live like his white Pruitt relatives. Without any success in living as a free human being (indeed he is lynched because of his race), October refuses to recognize racial distinctions, believing in the equality of all individuals. His last written words are: "It occurs to me that in a former lifetime I may have been a white man, or an Indian, or an African; and that white men now alive may have been white, or African, or Indian. That's why race doesn't mean a thing to me. *All men are brothers. All men are related*" (219). October's "brothers" lynch him because they do not share Pruitt's beliefs.

The novel's title reflects October's last written thoughts on race. The title also reflects the theme of Eugene O'Neill's play, "All God's Chillun Got Wings" (1924) "...in which a negro marries a white girl and is unhappy" (Pollock). While October Pruitt never marries a white woman, his illegal dalliances with two different ones (his vain attempt to see himself as equal to white men, perhaps) leads to his death. Finally, the novel's title originates from the Negro spiritual entitled, "All God's Chillun Got Wings" in which a first-person narrator lists the several items, such as robes, wings, harps, and shoes that "all god's chillum" will have in "heab'n". The song's narrator in heaven will wear the robe, fly with wings, play the harp and walk in shoes "all ovah God's Heab'n". However, each stanza contains the ominous statement that "Ev'rybody talkin' 'bout heab'n ain't goin' dere/Heab'n, Heab'n..." ("All God's Chillun Got Wings"). Anderson's novel directly relates to the spiritual in that racial equality or the brotherhood of man is not seen on Earth, but October

believes, according to his final words, that race doesn't exist in the spiritual world—that his reincarnated self might appear as any race.

Despite the novel's title that invokes God, none of the protagonists espouse religious beliefs. October says that he is happy that no parent dragged him to a church, sometimes fourteen miles away, on Sundays. Instead, he listens to Master Pruitt's version of church at 10 am on Sunday that is to read to slaves who choose to listen from Shakespeare's plays. October remembers Polonius' advice to his son Laertes; the entire soliloquy is reprinted in the novel. "After a speech like that I could never understand why people believed that some mysterious God would take them to Jordan Land, wherever they thought *that* was. And I wondered, lying there on that cold floor in prison, what the good Lord that most of these people had prayed to for so long was doing for them now. (It's not that I'm against Christianity, or nothing like that. Some of my best friends are Christians.)" (49-50). Repeatedly, when others pray, October reads Shakespeare. Awaiting the birth of his son, he reads *King Lear*. Replacing the ambiguities of Shakespeare's plays for the certainties of Christianity displays October's moral agnosticism and lifelong antagonisms with both black and white Christians. October cannot fathom how God has helped black Christians. Where are His mercies during the constant, daily degradations in slavery? On the other hand, white Christian slave-owners come under his withering scorn for not seeing the "inconsistency at all in believing fanatically in God and keeping slaves at the same time" (121). October is grounded in the only world he can see. Just as the novel's title plays *off* of the O'Neill drama and the spiritual and plays *with* religious

sensibilities, the narrative itself may be the first satire about slavery written by a black author.

Typical of a satire, there is no tight causal relationship in the plot. There is more randomness, more accident, and most of all, action *without* consequences. The earliest scene to illustrate the absurd nature of this plot is October's sex scene with Angela Pruitt, his white cousin-owner. No one sees her leave the plantation with October, he says, as he goes to collect mail in Carrsville. Halfway to town they have sex in the bushes. They arrive in Carrsville where everyone stares at them. He picks up the mail, she never leaves the wagon—having no reason to have gotten in the wagon and come to Carrsville anyway—and they have sex again in the same bushes on the way home. This scene is followed by two folk tales October hears upon returning home, perhaps suggesting the interracial sex is also a folk tale. There are no consequences to the coupling for either of them and it is never referred to again. Indeed, Angela disappears from the plot. However, the Angela Pruitt sex scenes may be a foreshadowing for the novel's ending in which October is lynched for having a public affair with the young white schoolteacher. Again, readers have no way of knowing the white woman's motivations or reactions since Celeste Pruitt narrates the last three pages that focuses on October's death. Both of October's relationships with white women have a surreal quality about them. Readers are told they happen by an unreliable narrator. No one else observes him with Angela Pruitt, for example, and seemingly both women (Angela Pruitt and the schoolteacher), who have everything to lose and nothing to gain from the affairs, have no fear of pregnancy. It could be that

crossing this taboo—*perhaps* in October’s mind—demonstrates October’s freedom of choice *to himself*. When the lynch mob comes for him for his visits with the schoolteacher, October doesn’t resist them anymore than he resists re-enslavement.

Not only is *All God’s Children* a satire about the “good” vs. “bad” plantations that appear in many historical novels, but also it is a parody of the autobiographies of Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington. Unlike Douglass, October’s escape is a comedy of errors in which he has no sense of direction in where he’s heading. Nevertheless, tracking dogs turn back in the nick of time and white and black people help him all along the way—wherever he pops up or out of woods or from underneath railroad cars. The ultimate parody is October’s return to the South by train and to slavery after successfully escaping. Pruitt’s return stands Frederick Douglass’s autobiographies upside down. Douglass’ famous escape was by train, going north. Although October has forged “free papers,” he is treated like the slaves. Douglass too had forged passes during his escape but the train conductor did not look at them. Being literate, October could have forged his “free papers” but instead received his from a white lawyer. All are put off the train in Baltimore “to be weighed and measured” in an effort to catch runaways who are compared against reward ads. (How many fugitives are caught by this procedure since October Pruitt is the only fugitive to travel south by train?) The entire demeaning, nonsensical procedure does not catch the only person it was invented to catch, runaway October Pruitt. Then only one sentence mentions that he is re-enslaved for ten years upon returning to Virginia. He is captured by McGowan, the very slave trader from whom he escaped, when he is

on his way to get a job as a freedman. Then there's the parody of Booker T. Washington's Atlanta Exposition speech. After the Civil War, like Booker T. Washington, October becomes the mediator between the white business community and the terrified, unemployed former slaves. For an unknown reason, October is allowed to be the only black in a white tavern; he drinks with the white man he works for. October tells the white men about the blacks hiding in cabins and caves on the Pruitt plantation while white houses, land, and animals need care. October says, "I know you don't have any money. But put the negroes to work and we'll all have money, the white as well as the black. There's markets in Richmond. There's a railroad not too far from here. Give the negroes work to do, and we can make something out of this town and out of this country.'" He and Bill Sampson, a white man, get most of the former slaves working for whites again within the month (206-207). Since the blacks are not being paid for their labor, it can be argued that October re-enslaves them so Carrsville will prosper. Is this novel stranger than history? It certainly lives up to farce.

The plot has to be unstable and illogical because October Pruitt is a completely unreliable first-person narrator. The novel begins, "My name is October Pruitt...I was born in Southampton County, Virginia on September 4, 1824" (7). He promises to explain why he is named October since he was born in September, but he never does. Let the games begin. It is not so much that October is a liar; he may be a fool, despite his learnedness, and as such, it is difficult for readers to differentiate between actual events and October's imagination—just as it is in historical novels.

The case for October being a fool in his own story is the stuff satire is made of. While the slaves in the slave pen start to sing spirituals, October reminisces about Sunday mornings on the Pruitt plantation when Marse Pruitt reads from Shakespeare to the slaves who listen and who are not on their way to church. Which Shakespearean soliloquy is reprinted in its entirety? Polonius' advice to his son Laertes. Although the advice is sound, many literary critics believe Polonius to be the fool in *Hamlet*. No wonder October likes him. Then, Tom Pruitt calls October "stupid" for not accepting an offer to flee to Canada. In addition, all the white abolitionists in the novel believe October to be articulate but foolhardy. By the last chapter (and the last three pages), Alston Anderson gives the narration over to October's wife, Celeste, in order to kill the first-person narrator, October. (Killing off a first-person narrator in itself violates a writing taboo, suggesting that the author is lost. Did he not know how his novel would end? If he did, he should have selected a narrator who would not die before the tale ended, leaving readers adrift.) Celeste calls her husband "stupid" and an "idiot"¹⁶ for throwing his life away for an affair with the white schoolteacher. Finally, in one of the few critiques of *All God's Children*, in the doctoral thesis of Joyce Owen Pettis, she writes: "One has misgivings about Anderson's protagonists throughout the narrative....Still Anderson's protagonist defies neat comprehension and categorization. He spouts noble

¹⁶ Is Anderson suggesting Macbeth's final soliloquy: "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,/. . .It is a tale/ told by an idiot, full of sound and fury/signifying nothing" (Act v, sc v, lines 26-30)? One of Anderson's influences, William Faulkner (Albert 208), took another phrase from this same soliloquy for a title.

sentiments, but the historic time and his enslaved position make them extremely costly and any man who holds them a fool” (Pettis 99).

That October appears foolish in his own narrative is also a product of time dislocation throughout the novel. Alston Anderson, perhaps in an implicit critique of historical fiction, destabilizes the October Pruitt character by having him spout and think conventional wisdom about slavery in 1965 but these ideas become nonsensical when placed in nineteenth century Virginia. The existential questions of freedom and equality—what are they? How are they attained? How are they maintained? What do “freedom” and “equality” mean?—are not foolish at all but age-old investigations. October as a character is anachronistic from the novel’s start. He is born in September yet is named October. Not only is his name a misnomer, but his behavior likewise is nonsensical. October’s actions, of facing brutal circumstances rather than fleeing, make perfect sense in 1965; in modern literature his behavior may be the stuff of stoic nobility. Yet this stance does not work given the illogical mental contortions that served as the philosophic foundations of American slavery.

It has been noted that Alston Anderson claimed William Faulkner and Franz Kafka as influences. In *All God’s Children* readers experience anachronisms and time displacement in terms of character and philosophy, and while Anderson is not drawing the same philosophic conclusions as Faulkner, Anderson appreciates Faulkner’s resistance to chronology in plot. From Kafka,

All God's Children gets its sense of existential absurdity.

It is not surprising that *All God's Children*, a product by a black author with such unlikely influences as Faulkner and Kafka, did not find a broad readership in 1965. As a first novel, Anderson did not have a following then—and he still doesn't. The novel is available in libraries but used book stores that have copies are few and far between. The novel has yet to find an audience.

The critical world has been equally silent. While *Lover Man*, Anderson's second work, a collection of short stories, was widely reviewed, none of those reviews recognizes or mentions *All God's Children*. Only Joyce Owen Pettis in her 1983 dissertation critiques the novel and apparently she does not appreciate its satiric nature.

Janet Stevenson (1913-) devoted her writing life to historical fiction, specifically historical literature for juveniles. Born in Chicago, Illinois to an investment banker, Stevenson earned a BA from Bryn Mawr in 1933 and a MFA from Yale University in 1937. She has taught at the University of Southern California, Grambling College in Louisiana and Portland State University. Stevenson has maintained a prolific publishing career, writing sixteen books, eight of which were juvenile historical fiction. She has won three playwriting awards. As of 2003, she was living in Oregon ("Stevenson").

Sisters and Brothers (1966) details the inevitable conflict within the Grimke family when two sisters "reject[ed] their aristocratic South Carolinian heritage" to become national leaders of the abolitionist movement while other siblings remained

slave-owners until the Civil War. Indeed, as a reviewer writes,

...their brother, Henry, had indulged himself in a manner common to many slave-holders; he had forced his attractive house servant, Nancy Weston, to become his concubine. From this union came three sons, Archibald, Francis, and John. Thus, the Grimke family exemplified both the apex of righteous indignation and the nadir of moral degradation nurtured by 'the peculiar institution.' (Ferry 73-74)

The novel explores the rough terrain of whether master and slave can engage in romantic love. Sarah Grimke and Angelina Grimke Weld learn of the existence of their three black nephews after the Civil War, and the latter half of the novel depicts the reconciliation between the ex-slaves and their famous abolitionist aunts who did not know of their existence until the young men attended Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. In other words, slavery is very much a family drama in *Sisters and Brothers*.

The first half of the novel traces the Grimke sisters' rebellion against the status quo in their privileged South Carolina upbringing. The older sister, Sarah, had left the South as a young adult to join the Society of Friends in Philadelphia. Angelina, much younger, also expresses an early antipathy against slavery. She believes it stemmed "[i]n the very beginning, even before her recognition of the fact of slavery, was her oneness with a black child. Her first clear memory was of a playmate being punished—stripped naked and paddled till she screamed." By the time she discovers that only black children are beaten as punishment and never a rich, white child, her

empathy with the black child had cemented. Nina's first defiant act is to take rubbing oil to a beaten slave. "As she grew to womanhood, her hatred of slavery grew more personal and more intense." She even teaches a house servant to read, thereby breaking the law of South Carolina (11). Angelina has more confrontations with, not only family slaveholders, but the larger community, especially challenging a church that condones slavery. When a Methodist minister comes to the house for counsel about a slave woman, Angelina is merciless. The slave is a Christian whose rich master "made illicit advances to her." When the slave refuses, she is beaten. After healing from the beating, the owner approaches her again; she refuses again and is beaten again. The minister doesn't know whether to tell the slave to resist her master or commit adultery. Angelina replies, "'Ask yourself rather what commandment *you* sinned against when you left her to choose between the destruction of her body by the lash and the damnation of her soul!'" (12). Angelina's final break with her family comes when her brother Henry beats a slave (13). She joins her older sister Sarah who is already active with the Quakers in Philadelphia.

However, both sisters experience disappointment that all Quakers are not as fierce as William Lloyd Garrison in denouncing slavery. The Grimkes are surprised to discover how tolerant the Friends Meeting House is of racial segregation, designating a separate pew for black worshippers (54). Both sisters leave the Quakers simultaneously (55).

The Grimke sisters gain national reputations as fiery orators who live their convictions. Then, three years after the Civil War ends, when Theodore and Angelina

Grimke Weld, former abolitionist fire-brands, teach at a girls' boarding school, they read of a brilliant sophomore at Lincoln University, Archibald H. Grimke. The sisters know all white Grimkes are relatives and they know each of the emancipated slaves who had appropriated their last name (5). Who can this Grimke be at an all-black university? Perhaps he is one of their brother Henry's slaves although Henry's estate was auctioned in 1852. Most of all the Grimke sisters are puzzled about their sister Eliza's silence about this young man; Eliza has remained in South Carolina (6).

The story of the enslaved Grimkes is then told. When Archibald receives a letter from Angelina, he has a flashback to his life as a slave. Archy's earliest recollections involve whinnying like a horse to make his white father come out of the "big house" and play with him. The white man gives him a gift of some sort every time they meet (28). They are freed by Maussa's will and live in Charleston (30), but their lives as slaves do not end. Montague Grimke, Henry's eldest son and heir/executor of the will, and his Aunt Eliza decide to put Archy and Frank in uniforms and make them house slaves (32-33). Nancy is enraged that the white Grimkes have re-enslaved their own brothers and nephews and argues with Montague who has Nancy put in a workhouse where she almost dies (74). Frank takes up the rebellion by ripping his uniforms and breaks out of any confinement when he is locked up as punishment (35, 37). Finally, Montague gives Frank to a slave breaker and Frank disappears from Archy's life "as if he had been sold away" (76). Archy's separation from his brother makes him go wild. Montague has Archy arrested, taken to the workhouse, and viciously beaten in stocks while gagged. Upon returning home, Archy and his mother

plan to have him run away (79). For the next two years, Archy lives in attics of “free people of color” and he is “allowed to go outside only in the dark of the darkest night, and then only into the small fenced yard.” One of his few activities while in hiding is reading the Charleston newspapers that until the end of the war proclaim the Confederacy as winning; Archy believes he has no hope of escaping slavery (89-90). But the newspapers he is reading are wrong, and slavery ends, although racism does not.

The black Grimke brothers are reunited when the Civil War ends, and both are admitted to schools in Massachusetts. (Frank had escaped from a brutal slave master and hired himself out to a Union officer in Charleston, so he reconnected easily with his family.) When the young Grimkes arrive in Massachusetts, they go to the Freedman’s Bureau where they are given directions and car fare, but no clothes or meals, especially when they announce their last name (157). The Bureau’s aide is puzzled about why they refuse to visit the famous Grimke sisters who live outside of Boston (160). The Massachusetts school experiment does not work out and the brothers apply to Lincoln University, then the only black university in America, where both become exceptional students. After reading about Archibald in the newspaper and exchanging letters in which he reveals that he is Henry’s son (149), Angelina Grimke Weld rides to Lincoln University to meet her nephews (253).

At the meeting between the estranged Grimkes, Angelina begins by telling them about their father and her brother. She assumes they hate Henry for using their mother. Archibald corrects Angelina’s misperception. His mother loves Henry still

and the brothers insist that their mother stayed with Henry voluntarily. All of them hate Montague, Henry's eldest son, for destroying their lives (254-255). Angelina imagines what their relationship was like: "...Could a man—a master—love his 'property'? And Nancy? What did she feel? Could a woman, not a mistress of her own person, feel love for the man who held title to it?" (262). "Life could not have been easy for such lovers as they now became" (266). "This was not living like a white woman....It was not marriage....But at Caneacres, where she was in fact mistress, she could not live under the master's roof" (267-268). Trying to imagine what a slave woman felt is a daring imaginative act for both Angelina Grimke within the novel and Janet Stevenson as author.

The novel ends with Angelina admitting to Lincoln University's president that Archibald and Francis are her nephews, "the sons of my brother, Henry Grimke, and his wife, Nancy Weston Grimke." She extends an invitation to the brothers to visit her in Massachusetts. She charges Archibald to lift the Grimke name "...out of the dust where it lies and set it high." Archibald accepts the challenge from "Aunt Angelina" (277-278). Acceptance of their family's past and each other heals the Grimkes.

The novel's title, *Sisters and Brothers*, explores the moral mysteries of the Grimke family. How can one family produce siblings, some of whom are internationally-known abolitionists and others are the typical, run-of-the-mill slave-owners? How can one family have such a divided heart? Yet, by extension, the same question hangs over the issue of slavery and the conduct of a nation during civil war. Not only

were individual families divided, but the body politic dissolved over whether America could keep a segment of its population enslaved. By making the abolitionists grapple with their brother's secret slave family, Janet Stevenson points the way for readers to confront their own family's participation in the ongoing racial drama. Given her sons' vehement defense of their mother's character and affection for Henry, the abolitionists decide that love between Nancy Weston and Henry Grimke was possible—and the sisters' acceptance of that possibility turned a potential family rift into one reconciled by love. The African-American Grimkes transcended their slave origins and extended the family's honor.

The few reviewers who noticed the novel's publication were kind to it. One, Henry Justin Ferry, writing in *The Journal of Negro Education*, stated:

Miss Stevenson has researched this novel with an historian's penchant for discerning facts; adherence to her findings results in a largely nonfiction novel. To one familiar with the primary sources upon which the novel is based it is a pleasant surprise to find so much actual history housed in imaginative prose. The artistic hand is quite evident in the original use of raw material to heighten the inherent drama of history....As an historian one could wish that this novel had been a monograph, complete with footnotes and bibliography. But immediately one repents. Miss Stevenson has served historians well in whetting our appetites with an absorbing and enjoyable introduction to this part of the Grimke story. (73-74)

Ferry noted that the novel ends with the Grimke family, both white and black, is

reconciled by “acceptance through love” (73-74), perhaps the motivating message for writing *Sisters and Brothers*.

The final novel in this chapter is the epic, *Jubilee*, that attempts to do what none of its predecessors attempt, to tell the story of African-Americans from slavery through Reconstruction, as a family drama, much like Stevenson’s *Sisters and Brothers*. Its author, Margaret Walker (1915-1998), began her writing life as a child-poet. Born in Birmingham, Alabama, her parents, a Methodist minister and a music teacher, sent her poems written at eleven-years-old to Langston Hughes who “persuaded her parents to leave the South so Walker could grow as a writer.” They took his advice (Appiah and Gates 1956; “Walker”). After graduating from Northwestern University in 1935, Walker entered the University of Iowa’s renowned master’s program in creative writing in 1939 (Appiah and Gates 1956). Margaret Walker was the first African-American woman “to win a prestigious literary prize,” the Yale Young Poets Award of 1942, the same year she received her MFA from Iowa (Appiah and Gates 1956; “Walker”). Her early teaching career began at Livingstone College in North Carolina and West Virginia State College (“Walker”). By 1965 she had earned a PhD from the University of Iowa and “...began teaching creative writing at Jackson State College in Mississippi, where she retired in 1979” (Appiah and Gates 1956). Walker authored ten books, including poetry, essays, short stories, a novel, and a biography of Richard Wright (whom she had befriended as a young woman although they would later become estranged). She was celebrated for her literary contributions, winning the 1966 Houghton Mifflin Fellowship for *Jubilee*, a Fulbright Fellowship, a Ford

fellowship, and four honorary doctorates (“Walker”).

Written over a thirty-year period (Beaulieu 16), *Jubilee* (1966), blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction. Ostensibly the story of Walker’s “great-grandmother’s life in slavery”, Walker had, from the start, intended the novel to chronicle the folk culture (the food, music, games, quilts and tales) “...of an entire generation of black women, women whose stories have been, until now, virtually invisible” (Beaulieu 1, 22). In her essay, “How I Wrote *Jubilee*,” Walker “...explained that she planned a book about the Black folk-people that would provide a deeper understanding of slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction and its aftermath from a Black perspective” (Turner 122). Edward Jackson in *American Slavery and the American Novel, 1852-1977* describes the novel as “...the story of two sisters, bound by the same father. In some sense it is a metaphorical statement about the condition of Blacks and Whites in America. Not only are they citizens but they are also brothers and sisters” (46). Much is made of how much Lillian and Vyry—whose name rhymes with “free” while echoing “the last syllable of ‘slavery’” (Beaulieu 15)--are the same age and have the “...same sandy hair, same gray-blue eyes, same milk-white skin” (Walker 17), yet their lives can not be more different since Lillian is born to John Dutton’s white wife while Vyry is born to Dutton’s slave-concubine. By age seven, these sisters’ lives take divergent paths, but in an ironic twist, their endings reverse the beginnings; the privileged white female loses all, including her mind, while the beaten-down, destitute one triumphs, rich in family, friends, and property. The novel’s title is taken from a traditional Negro spiritual:

“We are climbing Jacob’s ladder, We are climbing Jacob’s ladder, We are climbing Jacob’s ladder, for the year of Jubilee!” The lyrics describe transcendence and “the year of Jubilee” in Old Testament terms is the fifty-year cycle when all slaves are set free.

Jubilee begins with the death of Vryy’s slave mother, Hetta. Hetta succumbs, hemorrhaging at the birth of her stillborn fifteenth child. She is only twenty-nine-years-old (Walker 5-6). The slaves gather, seeing that Hetta is dying and bringing her youngest child, a two-year-old, from a nearby plantation. The child is being raised by an elderly slave woman, Mammy Sukey (5), as are all of John Dutton’s mulatto children (11).

Hetta’s brief life is confined to breeding. When John Morris Dutton was a teenager (about twenty years ago), “[h]is father gave him Hetta...” when “...she was barely more than a pickanniny... Anyway it was his father who taught him it was better for a young man of quality to learn life by breaking in a young nigger wench than it was for him to spoil a pure white virgin girl. And he had wanted Hetta, so his father gave her to him, and he had satisfied his lust with her” (9). When Hetta became pregnant, Dutton married her to another slave, Jake (10). Jake hates Dutton for abusing Hetta but he never outwardly rebels (16). “Often when he found her crying after Marster’s visits while he, Jake, was in the fields he would get mad, but she never would talk except to keep him from doing foolish things. When their children were sold away and some babies never cried she would cry and grieve over their helplessness.” In addition to having Dutton’s children, Jake and Hetta reproduce

too. Now Jake assumes he will be sold when Hetta dies for there is no more use for him (15).

Dutton's sexual relations with his slaves are an open secret, even to his wife, Salina. After providing Dutton with a son and a daughter, Salina refuses to have sex in retribution for Dutton's children with Hetta. "Although she [Salina] never forgave him, she never left him. Miscegenation was no sin to Marse John. It was an accepted fact of his world" (11). Still, neighbors often remark about how much Vyry resembles Lillian—to Salina's fury.

Needless to say, Vyry does not have an easy time, thanks to Salina's wrath, when she begins working at seven-years-old in the Big House (19). Vyry is a well-behaved child who is a pleasant companion to Lillian. Although John Dutton is kind to Vyry during the few times in his presence (21), Salina slaps Vyry in the mouth twice on her first day. No longer will Vyry play with Lillian; she must work for her (32). Salina throws the contents of a chamber pot in Vyry's face (33) and hangs Vyry by her thumbs when she breaks a dish (34). Lillian intercedes and gets her father to cut Vyry down from the closet (40). Dutton gives Vyry to the cook, Aunt Sally, to raise (42).

Vyry adores her new surrogate mother, learning to cook and sing while going to church in the swamps with her (44, 48, 50). Working with Aunt Sally has many advantages. Not only do they eat well, but also they stay warmer than most in the wretched winter months. Winter sicknesses claim many lives and frost-bitten toes are common (64). However, stability remains elusive for slaves in central Georgia in

1851, and Aunt Sally is suddenly sold after two cooks on neighboring plantations are convicted of poisoning the white owners. The Duttons sell her, after permitting her to cook breakfast, to New Orleans. Sally's sons cry hysterically at the separation, but Vyry is too stunned to react. Sally leaves, wondering when deliverance will come for slaves (92-93). Three different cooks attempt to replace Sally, but all are found inadequate. When the last one dies in the middle of cooking a meal, Vyry, now fourteen, temporarily steps in to prepare dinner (94). She is never replaced.

In Vyry's role as head cook, at fifteen-years-old, she meets her future husband, Randall Ware, a free black man who is doing some work for the Duttons. Vyry is told one morning to take breakfast to the blacksmith in the barn. Upon seeing Vyry, Randall is smitten instantly and tells her his life story: there is no racial mixture in this accomplished craftsman from Virginia who has arrived in Georgia with enough money to buy 202.5 acres of land and a shop in town. He also needs a white guardian as long as he lives in Georgia. His guardian, Randall Wheelwright, a Quaker, vouches for the blacksmith in all legal contracts despite Ware being literate. Ware's freedom is always conditional in Georgia: he must keep a white guardian; he must renew his free papers each year; he cannot own a gun (98-101). Vyry is unimpressed with Randall Ware until he offers to buy her. The idea of her own freedom had never entered her mind until Ware's offer (103).

Vyry eventually succumbs to Ware's advances and they engage in a torrid love affair one summer (141). When Vyry becomes pregnant, she also gets depressed knowing that her child will be a Dutton slave too. Although Ware has enough money

to buy Vyry outright, by law he cannot buy a slave, nor will the Duttons sell Vyry, especially now that she is pregnant and will produce another slave for them. At best Randall must ask his Quaker guardian to buy her, and of course, the Duttons do not want to sell to a Quaker. For Ware's part, he hopes "jumping the broom," the slave version of a marriage ceremony, will pacify Vyry. It doesn't (155).

Vyry takes matters in her own hands and confronts her father-owner, John Dutton, with a manumission request. Dutton is stunned that she asks, but then he decides to free her in his will (160). In the interim, Randall and Vyry Ware's son is born a slave (163).

In the midst of Vyry's new family dilemma, two other tales depicting the suffering of slaves are presented. When a Dutton house slave runs away (because of the intense pressure surrounding Lillian's upcoming nuptials), she is hunted down by the overseer and the slaves are made to watch as she is branded with an "R" for runaway (125-127). In another case of slave rebellion in 1856, two slaves who had poisoned their owners are hanged publicly on the 4th of July. Every slave in the surrounding area is ordered to witness the hangings that are conducted amidst a picnic atmosphere for whites. "Whatever the motive had been in the minds of their masters to put on this monstrous show, one thing had been surely accomplished. The Negroes were frightened and sickened out of their wits" (129-137). *Jubilee* details the terror tactics used to control slaves.

Meanwhile, Vyry's marriage to a free black man poses problems for all concerned. The couple has two more children three years after the first. However, one dies—

almost to Vyry's relief: "That one was one who would never be a slave." Her third child is a daughter, although her husband shows a decided preference for the son (164-165). Vyry's owners disagree about her situation. Mrs. Salina Dutton is convinced that Randall Ware will induce his family to run away (168). She doesn't know how correct she is; in addition to his blacksmith business, Ware works with the Underground Railroad. Mrs. Dutton wants to sell Vyry and the children before they flee, but John Dutton believes Vyry loves the plantation and the Dutton family and will never willingly leave (170-171). The situation worsens when Randall is grazed by a bullet one night while going to visit Vyry; he knows he must flee the area. Randall tells Vyry: "If I can just get you to Maryland, there's a woman there to take you straight into Canady. I know the road all the way to Md. I know every underground stop" (179). With Vyry's white skin, she should escape fairly easily. Randall tells Vyry to dress in men's clothing and dress the children warmly too. When the moon is high overhead, she should cross the swamp and he will meet her there. The children are to be left, sleeping, and Randall assures Vyry that they will all be reunited (180). Vyry's nurturing instincts prevent her from leaving her children who are sleeping fitfully. She departs much later than she should have—with her two babies in tow. It is almost dawn when she arrives at the swamp where the overseer is waiting for her instead of Randall Ware. Vyry is too tired to care that their escape is foiled (184). Elizabeth Beaulieu, literary critic, believes Vyry's escape attempt "...raises interesting questions about gender, slavery, and freedom....Walker seems to suggest that typical, instinctual maternal behavior is not only inappropriate for

enslaved women but also dangerous, but this question receives little development” (19).

In a grisly scene, Vyry is stripped naked to her waist, tied to a post, and given seventy-five lashes for her escape attempt (186-187). Salt is thrown on her open wounds after she is untied and left on the ground until night when slaves carry her to her cabin. She is unconscious for three days, practically dead. “... [W]hen she was able to examine herself she saw where one of the lashes had left a loose flap of flesh over her breast like a tuck in a dress. It healed that way” (188).

Ironically, John Dutton’s prediction that Vyry will not leave them is correct too. After the failed escape attempt, Vyry and her two children are the last to leave the remains of the Dutton plantation; all the Duttons have departed before Vyry. Dutton himself dies from gangrene before the Civil War begins (206). Dutton’s son is killed by a battle wound that does not heal (259). Mrs. Dutton, never wanting to see ‘niggers free,’ gets her wish and dies days before the Emancipation Proclamation goes into effect (289). Lillian, now a widow, is the sole Dutton survivor and she incurs brain damage when she is hit in the head by Union troops ransacking the big house (313). All the other slaves but Vyry had disappeared by 1863 (265). Vyry stays, believing that Randall Ware will reappear. When the Union troops get to the plantation before Randall and read Vyry and her two children the Emancipation Proclamation, Vyry cries and cooks them a celebratory meal (302-303).

The rest of the novel, approximately 230 more pages, details Vyry’s life wandering the South with her second husband, a former field hand, Innis Brown, who

first appears to protect her from the Union soldiers on the Dutton plantation (318). As they journey, their family encounters a flood that destroys one house and the Ku Klux Klan that burns down another in 1869 (408). One town they visit is so appreciative of Vyry's obstetric skills that the whites build the Browns a house so they will stay in the area (470). The novel ends with Randall Ware's reappearance to reclaim his son and send him to school in Selma (498). Randall tells the Browns of his adventures during the Civil War and as a state delegate during Reconstruction. The three adults talk all night long and agree that Vyry should remain with Innis Brown since they now have a toddler together. Randall Ware leaves money for his daughter and the Browns' son and disappears back into his affluent life with his son (531-535). The novel ends with Vyry having "...a peace in her heart she could not express" (536).

Vyry's life reflects the story of the African-American female in slavery, and finally, in freedom. Margaret Walker avoids concentrating on the racial identification questions of mulatto females—unlike Cather, Gaither (in *Double Muscadine*), Coker, Davis, and Warren in this chapter. However, Vyry is born out of the privileged white male's permission to be sexually adventurous with slave women. When Vyry's mother is barely an adolescent, she is *given* to John Dutton to be a sex toy. Hetta, pregnant at fourteen, is nothing more than a breeder who increases Dutton's property holdings (i.e., more slaves to work his land). For all intents and purposes, the horrors of Vyry's life are directly attributable to her life as a black woman despite her white appearance.

While the exercise of white male privilege is the foundation of the plantation system, Margaret Walker presents two stereotypes for white women. Salina Dutton marries a man who had fathered several slave children. For her part, Salina plays the role of the wicked stepmother to perfection. Embarrassed from the start at the existence of her husband's slave-concubines, she takes her jealousy out on the slave children, berating and beating them, hanging them in closets by their thumbs. She hates the slaves but not their labor and the wealth they produce for her family. She stands in sharp contrast to her daughter Lillian who likes Vyry from the first day they met. Vyry repays Lillian's kindness and color-blindness by protecting her when Lillian is rendered brain-damaged by Union troops. Vyry never leaves her, although she could have, until Lillian's white relatives come to take her away to live with them. Excepting Salina's wickedness, the white women in *Jubilee* are also victimized by the caprices of privileged white males—although to a much less degree.

More than any other novel in this chapter, *Jubilee* details not only the emotional damage to black families at the specter of separation from loved ones, but it graphically describes the daily privations and brutalities that terrorized slaves into submission. In short, Walker attempted to explain through fiction why blacks complied with slavery. First, through careful research about slaves' daily activities, Walker chronicles the basic necessities that slaves lacked daily. There is seldom enough to eat unless, like Vyry, one works in the kitchen. No one is clothed properly, especially in the winter when frost-bite is common. Everyone lacks proper shelter, especially in the winter. Much is made of how Aunt Sally and Vyry keep warm

during the winter days since they work in the kitchen, but, when they return to their cabin after dinner has been served, they fight the wind's entry all night. Most slaves are not physically fit enough to escape, being too weak from hunger and too maimed by lack of clothing and shelter.

Yet Margaret Walker does not end her exploration of slavery with privation. She details how white society terrorized blacks with violence of every imaginable type due to their fears of black rebellion. In the novels written by white writers, there is a "not on my plantation" attitude toward even *slapping* a slave. Beatings, therefore, are completely absent from these texts. Walker, in contrast, describes Salina's vicious attacks against seven-year-old Vyry. Of course, adult slaves endure public whippings with cowhide. Vyry herself, daughter of her owner, is whipped almost to death with salt thrown on her wounds; she lay unconscious for three days. A second escape attempt earns one female slave a branded "R". While traveling to see his family one night, Randall Ware, a free black, is grazed by a bullet and that's when he knew he had to leave the area. While the white novelists describe sex between consenting adults (without mentioning that the female slave in question has no right of refusal), Margaret Walker details the rape of the slave female and the resultant mulatto children as a terror tactic against the black family. The white novelists never describe a character like Hetta who, from her adolescence, is nothing more than a breeder of slaves whose fifteenth childbirth killed her at twenty-nine. Hetta is Margaret Walker's great-great-grandmother, not a fantasy. Finally *Jubilee* chronicles the public hangings or lynchings that were part and parcel of the South. In particular, an

Independence Day hanging of two slave women is described, and again, all the slaves in the area were forced to watch it. The women are accused of trying to poison their white owners. In an attempt to contain the problem and prevent future ones, public hangings of slaves are another tactic aimed at controlling large slave masses that often outnumbered whites in an area. Throughout the story, Walker works not only like a novelist, imagining these atrocities, but she works as a historian who seeks documentation of such events.

In many ways, *Jubilee* was the first of its kind in terms of critical and popular reception. As "...one of the first modern novels about slavery told from an African-American perspective" (Appiah and Gates 1956), it served as the basis for Walker's doctoral dissertation and won the Houghton Mifflin Literary Award in 1966 (Jackson 40). *Jubilee* received more attention than *Iola Leroy*, *Hagar's Daughter*, *Winona*, *Fugitives of the Pearl*, *Black Thunder*, *The Rootless*, and *All God's Children* combined, all novels written by black authors. All but Bontemps' *Black Thunder* were completely ignored by the white critical establishment, at time of publication. In contrast, a white-hot light of scrutiny was cast on *Jubilee*, and few praised its strengths while most trumpeted its weaknesses. The din of contention rose so loudly that Walker felt compelled to publish a booklet, *How I Wrote Jubilee*, that explained "...that her fiction derived from an authentic historical framework" (Pettis 101). Succinctly put, many white reviewers did not believe that the brutalities Walker described actually occurred, preferring the sweet, sanitized versions of plantation life by pedestrian white novelists who never claimed to have done any research about the

subject. Frances Gaither's *Double Muscadine* became a Book-of-the-Month Club offering and received uniformly warm reviews—despite laughable stereotypes and unexceptional prose. There's a curious mean-spiritedness in the attacks by the white critical establishment, and whatever black critics had to say about the novel was said long after 1966. Black literary opinion about *Jubilee* was not sought at all by the major periodicals of the day ("Walker").

The most praiseworthy critique of *Jubilee* came from Henrietta Buckmaster, herself a historical novelist (of *Deep River*, among others). Buckmaster believed that the "...emotional mutilation that slavery brought to owner and slave are not paraded for their shocking effect....In *Vyry*, Miss Walker has found a remarkable woman who suffered one outrage after the other and yet emerged with a humility and moral fortitude that reflected a spiritual wholeness. This is a good book in a dual sense of the word." Her review in the *Christian Science Monitor* is apt to mention *Vyry*'s lack of hatred for her oppressors and her willingness to turn-the-other-cheek when attacked (Buckmaster 11).

Both Abraham Chapman in the *Saturday Review* and Wilma Dykeman in the *New York Times Book Review* present both strengths and weaknesses of the novel, with the weight on its weaknesses. Chapman wrote:

With a fidelity to fact and detail, [Margaret Walker] presents the little-known everyday life of the slaves, their modes of behavior, patterns and rhythms of speech, emotions, frustrations, and aspirations. Never done on such a scale before, this is the strength of her novel....[However] she fails to transform her

raw material into accomplished literary form. There are passages of very pedestrian prose. Fortunately, the colorful and musical speech of the Negro characters in the novel transcends the stilted prose of the narrator. (43)

Dykeman also notes that Walker attempted great things but may not have had the ability to succeed:

[This is an] ambitious and uneven novel....Several of its major characters emerge as stereotypes. Some scenes remain less than fully realized, more catalogued than rendered,[The publishers state that this] ‘is told from the Negro point of view *by a Negro.*’ (Italics theirs.) What is of first importance in a novel is not the race of the author or the sources of its inspiration but its ring of artistic truth.... (52)

Perhaps *Jubilee*'s publishers, Houghton Mifflin, were at fault for promoting the “authenticity” of the novel based on Walker’s race rather than on Walker’s research. Clearly, white reviewers in 1966 were not going to acknowledge that the slaves’ descendants might have any special understanding of their fore-parents or of the slave experience. Black writers were not permitted ownership of their own history or their own family story as late as 1966. These same critics, moreover, never made the same assumptions nor asked the same questions of white historical novelists. The “authenticity” of the historical novel of a white writer is presumed without any evidence of research or even a family connection to the South.

The biggest critical controversy centered on whether *Jubilee* promoted the myth of the old South or sought to destroy it. Guy Davenport’s critique in the *National*

Review is typical of those who believe the novel is a failure on all levels. He wrote:

The dialects are fake [and] the novel from end to end is about a place and a people who never existed....But if you want to go strolling through the myth again, here it is, nothing left out: darkies singing out beyond the watermelon patch, the cruel overseer, the frigid wife, the handsome son, the underground railway, the War, Reconstruction—even a plot of sorts....There is something deeply ironic in a negro's underwriting...the South of the romancers, agreeing to every convention of the trade....Slavery was far stranger and more terrible than the myth that Miss Walker has swallowed. (1001)

At the time of publication (1966), black critics were not asked their opinion by the publishing establishment, so Walker was left to defend herself by herself. Later, black reviewers examined *Jubilee* in black literary journals and did not agree that Walker was promoting the antebellum South. Roger Whitlow in *Black American Literature: A Critical History* claimed that *Jubilee* "...serves especially well as a response to white 'nostalgia' fiction about the antebellum and Reconstruction South" ("Walker"). Another, Lester Davis, a contributor in *Freedomways*, "...decided that one could overlook the 'sometimes trite and often stilted prose style' because the novel is 'a good forthright treatment of a segment of American history about which there has been much hypocrisy and deliberate distortion.' He found the 'flavor of authenticity...convincing and refreshing'" ("Walker").

Another aspect of *Jubilee* that made for contention is the main character, Vyry. "Walker's portrayal of Vyry's loyalty to Lillian and Vyry's lack of bitterness has

inspired much anger and bewilderment from readers and critics” (Campbell). Despite being the focal point of a 500-page novel, little is known or understood about Vryy’s inner life. Rarely is she seen thinking. Barbara Christian, a contemporary black feminist critic, explains: “...needing to cover so much territory to render Vryy’s story, Walker...created characters who are not subjects so much as they are the means by which we learn about the culture of slaves and slaveholders and the historical period” (Campbell).

On one aspect the critics of all races and all aesthetics are in agreement: *Jubilee* is not a technical success. Plot and character development get mired in encyclopedic, ethnographic detail. Elizabeth Beaulieu explained:

Walker places history at the center of her narrative, thus often obscuring the personal story of her foremother that she set out to write. It is an odd irony—Walker in 1966 published a novel inspired by and fairly accurate in its depiction of her own family’s history in America, yet the work itself retains the flavor of stock historical novels, epic in scope and inevitable in its personification of the heroine as having universal significance. In spite of the novel’s shortcomings, Walker must be acknowledged for the contribution she made to black women’s literature--namely, the imagining of an enslaved female as speaking subject. (139)

However, the critical brouhaha about *Jubilee* did not affect its popular reception. It was a huge publication event in 1966. By 1977, the novel “had gone through 27 printings [...]” As a paperback, it has sold over one million copies (Pettis 93).

Selling well may be its own revenge on critical dissension.

Conclusion

Each novel in this chapter presents a picture of slavery, but the race of the novelist determined the activities described on the plantations. Both plantation “types,” good or bad, have mulattos, however. Also, these novels reveal differing portraits of the abolitionist; they are no longer evil monsters out to destroy the South, but sometimes they were family members who acted out of conscience. Finally, critical reception to the novels seemed to be determined by the race of the novelist.

A curious pattern emerges. Those novels penned by white writers invariably feature a “good” plantation that is the home of the protagonists and a “bad” plantation, usually belonging to a villainous neighbor. The “good” plantation has the following attributes: no beatings of slaves (although a protagonist may be permitted to slap a slave when frustrated); no white overseer, although perhaps a black overseer or the owner runs the plantation himself or herself; no selling of slaves, not even the elderly who no longer work; no slave ever runs away (unless taken to Canada by a white family member); slaves supplement their food supplies by produce from their own gardens so they have plenty to eat and they have plenty of bright clothes to wear; the slave-owners dispense liquor at Christmas; slaves sing as they work and sometimes serenade their owners in the evening after work; the slaves cry at the funerals of the slaveholders; the mulatto children of the owners are privileged servants in the mansions and playmates with their white siblings. The “bad” plantation is the one that gives slavery its negative connotations. The hellish farm is

usually next door or down the road from the heavenly one and its features are: beatings, whippings, maimings, and physical punishment all day long for slaves of all ages; a brutal white overseer who rapes slave women and girls at night while given *carte blanche* by the slave-owner; slaves are sold at whim as a result of card games or horse races, or, if they are cooks, from whites' fear of poisoning; fugitives are commonplace and they are chased by dogs and vigilantes; the slaves are starving, naked, and diseased; there is no social interaction, meaning no slave singing at any occasion, no gifts to slaves, no notice of a slave birth or death; the owners' mulatto children are sold away as newborns. These novels, each written by a white writer, feature contrasting plantations: *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*; *Follow the Drinking Gourd*; *Sabbath Has No End*; *Deep River*; *The Red Cock Crows*; *Clouded Star*; *Double Muscadine*; *Daughter of Strangers*; *Cloud on the Land*; *Band of Angels*; *Sisters and Brothers*. *All God's Children* by Alston Anderson, a West Indian, includes an eight-page satire of these competing stereotypes of plantation life.

In contrast, two African-American novelists depict the incessant brutality of slavery. In *The Rootless* and *Jubilee* there is no such place as a "good," easy-going plantation. Turpin and Walker chronicle the nightmare of privation, physical violence, and psychological terror that slaves endured from infancy to death (usually an early one). The viciousness makes slaves in *The Rootless* vengeful, killing the slave-owners, whereas slavery makes Vvry in *Jubilee* saintly. With the exception of *All God's Children*, in which everything is a joke, the African-Americans seem duty-bound to counter plantation mythology of how beneficial slavery was to slaves.

Another racial divide occurs in these novels when it comes to family life. White families are destroyed by slaveholding in *Double Muscadine*, *Follow the Drinking Gourd*, and *The Rootless* in particular. Many novels depict the alienation that arises when a planter's child, sibling, or spouse becomes an abolitionist, sometimes one who personally transports slaves to freedom. These narratives portray the war over slavery between family members: *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, *The Red Cock Crows*, *Deep River*, *Clouded Star*, *Cloud on the Land*, *Bridle the Wind*, and *Sisters and Brothers*.

Both *Band of Angels* and *All God's Children* wrestle with existential questions about freedom. What human being is free, and how so? What human is not in bondage to some degree? Who grants this freedom? Nevertheless in both novels white males are infinitely freer to shape their own lives than other characters. These questions are meant to be laughable in *All God's Children*, and they end up being humorous inadvertently in *Band of Angels*. Another divisive factor within white families is the presence of the white fathers' mulatto children on the plantation and serving in the mansion itself which destroys family unity and trust. White wives and children silently accept and/or silently ignore the sexual predatory behavior of the adult white males. *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, *Deep River*, *Double Muscadine*, *Daughter of Strangers*, *Cloud on the Land*, *Band of Angels*, *All God's Children*, and *Jubilee*—all attest to these dilemmas. Unlike novels in previous chapters, these authors demonstrate the destruction exacted on white families for the sale of human beings.

Remarkably, the evisceration of slave family life is not universally acknowledged. Only *Clouded Star*, *Daughter of Strangers*, *Band of Angels*, *The Rootless*, *Sisters and Brothers*, and *Jubilee* detail the physical abuse and emotional trauma experienced daily by slave children. If the child is female, the physical abuse is sure to include rape by white males. The slave parents' inability to protect their children from these horrors in any way leads to insanity for many black adults. (Even *All God's Children* does not attempt to satirize violence against slave children, finding nothing ironic about that subject.) Marriage, the formation of slave families, is an institution not honored by whites as seen in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, *Follow the Drinking Gourd*, *Sabbath Has No End*, *The Red Cock Crows*, *Clouded Star*, *The Rootless*, *Sisters and Brothers*, and *Jubilee*. The slave marriage is arranged for the owners' purposes; sometimes it is for breeding more slaves and other times elderly mates are chosen so that pregnancy does not interrupt the slaves' service. All slave marriages can be disbanded at a moment's notice. Emotional attachment between the slaves is not considered at sale, and of course, the slave parents have no rights to their own children. If the father is "free," his freedom never extends to his children by a slave mother, a major concern for characters in *Daughter of Strangers*. Finally, slave fathers are rendered impotent in protecting daughters or wives from rape by any white male, the central focus on *Sabbath Has No End*. Nevertheless, the novels by African-Americans, *The Rootless* and *Jubilee*, make obvious attempts to show the resilience of the black family in the face of crushing oppression. In *The Rootless*, the slave family goes on a rampage, killing their owners as they die themselves. In *Jubilee*,

Vyry's family thrives due to its unity; parents and children stick together, and they are able to work with whites.

The depiction of blacks' sexuality in these novels is peculiar. Males of African descent do not reproduce or operate as sexual beings at all except in *Sabbath Has No End*, *All God's Children*, *The Rootless*, and *Jubilee* (three of which have African-American authors). Indeed, in *Sabbath Has No End* black males rape white women out of retaliation to white oppression. In *All God's Children*, interracial sex is consensual. Apparently the *idea* of black male sexuality terrifies many novelists whereas female mulattos are *the* objects of white males' desire in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, *Double Muscadine*, *Daughter of Strangers*, *Cloud on the Land*, and *Band of Angels*. In these novels, slave women who are not mulatto enjoy sex with any male—black or white—who happens along according to *Sabbath Has No End* and *The Red Cock Crows*. In *The Rootless*, by African-American Waters Turpin, this black female stereotype is inverted. The degenerate white female owner contracts venereal disease from her indiscriminate sexual liaisons. Clearly the depiction of slave sexuality is a field of contention often determined by the race and gender of the author. Not only are the novels silent about the rape of the African to create the mulatto, but the silence continues about the rape of mulattos. The mulatto slave women either desire or willingly accept sex with any white man, especially if he is the owner or overseer, the better, as in the case in *Follow the Drinking Gourd*, *Double Muscadine*, *Band of Angels*, and *Sisters and Brothers*. The exceptional plot in *Daughter of Strangers* centers on whether Charlotte, the mulatto, will succumb to

Inigo's charms or will; she does not because Inigo is killed off before the consummation. Instead, Dr. Leon Cavallo, a mulatto, weds and reproduces with Charlotte, so Elizabeth Coker extends reproductive hope to mulatto males, but not to Africans. Another exception appears in Margaret Walker's *Jubilee* that never explains why Vyry, a mulatto, is not raped, given her situation from childhood; Vyry mates with two full-blooded Africans. The satiric *All God's Children* stands the hot-blooded mulatto female stereotype on its head by having a mulatto male, October Pruitt, having sex with several white females. The taboo of interracial sex in the thirties through sixties evidently was more alluring to these novelists than marital relations between slaves.

Since the content of these novels fracture along racial and gender lines, it should come as no surprise that the critical and popular reception reveal similar fissures. The reception of white novelists' works is almost uniformly positive, no matter how pedestrian or stereotypic the novel. (The glaring exception is the panning of *Band of Angels* by the celebrated Robert Penn Warren.) The novels by African-Americans were met in two ways by critics: (1) *The Rootless* and *All God's Children* were mostly ignored, receiving one review apiece or (2) *Jubilee* was greeted with a firestorm of disdain from the mainstream critics at time of publication, which by the way, never included African-American critics. The critical assessments from African-American scholars and writers appear only in the African-American press and journals and were largely ignored by the mainstream media. The row was so furious that Walker published a booklet, *How I Wrote Jubilee*, to answer her

detractors. In many ways, the fight over *Jubilee* was about ownership. Who owned the slaves' stories, the children of the slaves or the children of the slaveholders? Which version of slavery is validated? There was no conversation between the black and white critical establishments.

In terms of popular reception, only four novels in this chapter are noteworthy. *Daughter of Strangers* went through four printings in 1950. *Deep River* became an Armed Forces edition in 1944 while *Double Muscadine* was chosen as a Book of the Month Club selection. In a class by itself stands *Jubilee*, which has gone through twenty-seven printings with more than a million copies sold, making a dramatic contrast between critical and popular reception for this work.

As any other time in American history, debates raged about the economic, political, social, legal, and moral rights of black people and white people. Many tomes were written, but in the shadows, twelve novelists decided—for perhaps myriad reasons—to look backward to a time when people could be bought and owned. Slavery troubled the entire country in antebellum America and its consequences continue to plague more than twelve writers now.

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Chapter 5: 1968-2000

“Slave life; freed life—every day was a test and a trial” (Morrison 256).

Cully could have you dying about his old master trying to raise him as a slave and like a son—teaching him to read but not write, to speak but daring him to think” (Williams 126).

“White folks had taken everything in the world from me except my baby and my life and they had tried to take them” (Williams 129).

You know, the future did not belong to us; it belonged to our masters” (Williams 145).

To describe America in the 1960s as “turbulent” is an understatement. Marked by a series of political assassinations during an unpopular war abroad and race riots at home, blood literally flowed in the streets, and significant segments of the U.S. population yearned for social revolution, deep, dramatic upheaval in America’s status quo. Much of this tumult resulted directly from unresolved angst and unaddressed social, political, and economic inequities of slavery. While the country quieted itself, somewhat, and stabilized, somewhat, after the calls of revolution from its children during the 1970s and 1980s, an entirely new generation of historical novelists arose to attempt to give meaning to America’s slave past. These authors’ lives, with the possible exception of Frank Yerby’s, are farthest from slavery; their grandparents did not experience bondage first-hand nor did their grandparents know of anyone who had. These novelists’ knowledge of chattel slavery is largely researched and/or read

about; the oral history about slavery had been silenced by the death of storytellers two generations removed from their grandparents.

This group of writers is atypical from their predecessors. John Ehle is the only white historical novelist in this chapter, and he, a Southerner, pens a story of racial reconciliation. The remaining seven novelists are African-American. Silence is always difficult to interpret, and the reasons for the silence of white historical novelists about slavery as the millennium ended may have varied. Guilt about the past, a past that instigated current race riots, may have made many writers look elsewhere for topic ideas. Perhaps evasion is a way to avoid acknowledgment of complicity in the racial drama. (“My people did not own slaves and had nothing to do with *that* or current troubles.”) For whatever reasons, 1971 was the last time that a white writer in this dissertation focused an entire novel on slavery.

The black writers who found their voice on the subject may have possibly contributed to white silence. Not only might the racial upheavals of 1968-2000 have prompted them to explore the origin of present difficulties, but African-American writers, as a group, saw themselves as correcting the historical record. Novelist Toni Morrison believes that African-Americans “...can, through storytelling, retrieve their ancestors from the ash heap of American ‘history.’ This is the process she calls ‘giving blood to the scraps’...” (Broad 192). The black ancestor resurrected the most in this chapter is the one silenced so long in previous historical novels: the female slave, particularly the slave mother. The five African-American female authors restore the female slave voice in brilliant fashion. In contrast, male authors tend to

write about male protagonists, and the African-American male novelists in this chapter are no different.

Another unique feature in this chapter is that many novels by African-Americans are considered “neo-slave narratives” for the manner in which they develop the form of the slave narrative of old. Even within the slave narrative,

differences arise from gender, specifically ‘sexual abuse and motherhood.’...

Therefore, the interior life of the female slave, the sum of her thoughts and her emotions was at best circumscriptively depicted....In reversing these enforced silences, Butler, Williams, and Morrison are concerned with their female heroines’ claims to selfhood as the novelists allow their protagonists to interrogate the limits of their personal freedom in the thralls of not only a racist but also of a patriarchal society. (Mitchell 4)

Finally, these eight novels contrast to those in previous chapters by their popular and critical reception. Not only are half of them bestsellers, but they serve as catalysts for countless interviews with their authors and a national dialogue among readers. Three took new lives as films, such as “The Journey of August Ehle,” “Sally Hemings,” and “Beloved,” while “Dessa Rose” became a play. Critical response is no less sanguine. While *The Journey of August King*, *Sally Hemings*, and *Oxherding Tale* received uniformly favorable reviews, three, *Kindred*, *Dessa Rose*, and *Beloved* earned raves that have yet to dissipate. Never before had a historical novel helped to clinch a Pulitzer Prize and a Nobel Prize for Literature for its author as did *Beloved*.

This chapter will examine: *The Journey of August King* (1971) by John Ehle;

Kindred (1979) by Octavia Butler; *A Darkness at Ingraham's Crest* (1979) by Frank Yerby; *Sally Hemings* (1979) by Barbara Chase-Riboud; *Oxherding Tale* (1982) by Charles Johnson; *Dessa Rose* (1986) by Sherley Anne Williams; *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison; *A Long Way Home* (1999) by Connie Briscoe.

The only white author in this chapter spends most of his attention on the North Carolina mountains and people of his home and also feels compelled to write about race relations. Indeed, John Ehle (1925-) “has claimed that he has written about more Black characters than have any of his contemporaries...” (Kimball 121); presumably he means his fellow white novelists. As author of eleven novels, six nonfiction books, one play and twenty-six teleplays, Ehle has created a significant oeuvre, complete with black characters (Kimball 121). John Ehle was born on December 13, 1925 in Asheville, North Carolina to an insurance executive (“Ehle”). His A.B. in 1949 from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill was followed by a master’s degree in 1952 from the same institution (Kimball 120). Ehle has taught at his alma mater and at New York University although from 1962-1964 he served as special assistant to Gov. Terry Sanford when he established “the nation’s first state sponsored high school and college for professional training in the performing arts” (Kimball 120-121). His home state has recognized his passionate allegiance and has awarded him the Best by a North Carolinian Annual Award (1964 and 1967), Best Nonfiction Book by a North Carolinian Award (1965), two Freedom Foundation Awards and a Special Citation from the National Conference of Christians and Jews along with the State of North Carolina Award for Literature (1972), the Distinguished

Alumnus Award, UNC, Chapel Hill (1984), the Thomas Wolfe Prize (1984) (“Ehle”; Colby 247). Presently “Ehle does most of his writing at his mountain house in Penland, North Carolina”, while spending “a third of the time in London and Paris” (“Ehle”).

The Journey of August King (1971) does not depart from its author’s passion for North Carolina’s mountains and people. Set in the North Carolina mountains in 1802, the novel concerns the two-day migration (on physical, mental, spiritual, socio-economic and political levels) of a heretofore quiet, diligent, unassuming 44-year-old white widower, August King, as he returns from his annual trip to buy supplies for his small, poor farm. On his way from paying off the mortgage on his farm, he notices a fugitive slave, a teenaged girl, who asks him for help. When he encounters Olaf Singleterry, the fugitive’s owner, staying overnight at the inn where King buys his yearly supplies and where he pays off his mortgage, August King decides to help the runaway—if he sees her again (13-40). The girl, Annalees, manages to follow his cart while avoiding the posse out searching for her (and her partner-fugitive, Sims, from whom she has become separated) (58-66). When she creeps toward his campfire to steal food, they have their first in-depth conversation. King feeds her, pours brandy on her bleeding feet, and lets her sleep in his covered wagon with his three geese (71-75). The next day is spent avoiding neighbors along the road, Olaf Singleterry and his band of slaves on the move, the search party, two hunters who appear convinced that King has the girl in the wagon, and an assortment of physical dangers in the wooded mountains and rivers they cross (116-162). By nightfall they

walk onto the King farm—having abandoned his wagon, his horse, the three geese, and newly-purchased wild boar and a cow in addition to groceries for the year in order to avoid detection (164-170). Once home, King kills a chicken and he and Annalees drink wine. Rather than be tempted sexually, King goes out to his wife's and baby daughter's graves and tells them of his adventures (184-185). Before dawn, he puts Annalees on the path heading north (at least he believes it will end in the North; he himself has never visited Virginia). When Annalees departs, the next night, she is sent off in Mrs. King's dress and shoes—with a twelve pound ham, "all his matches and ...his best pot, so she could cook the ham for herself on the way to the promised land up there somewhere..." (189).

The epilogue describes how later that morning, as King is straightening the house, Mr. Wright, the richest landowner in the area and prospective father-in-law whose daughter is attracted to the handsome widower, appears with his two sons (193-202). Wright has come to help King create a story that will pacify Olaf Singleterry about his loss of property and encourage the neighbors to help King who has lost everything he owned in one day for no logical reason (208). August King did not help Wright at all. To the men there, King "told it all, every detail of it, he told even that he had given her clothes to wear, while Olaf listened, while all of them listened, amazed." Wright believes that King has gone insane from living alone for a year after his wife died. However, some neighbors, including Annalee's owner, want to burn down the King farmstead in retribution. Since King is not trying to save himself, Mr. Wright decides not to use his power to protect King (214). On the third night after

Annalees's departure, August sprinkles his wife's grave with all the herbs in the house, wanting to "say good night to them all, the graves and to her." He sits outside to see if the men will return to burn him out. He hopes Annalees escapes all snares. The novel ends with August talking to his wife's grave: "'I tell you, Sarah, it has been an unaccountable day for arguments....I have felt more strangeness today than on a sad Christmas....But I tell you, ...I've never been so proud'" (217-218).

Slavery, specifically in the form of a fugitive mulatto slave teenager, is what August Kings confronts in his journey. It pits him against all of his neighbors. Slavery is what tries King's identity in an otherwise tranquil, uneventful, quiet life. The 15-year-old slave girl appears like a phantom. Annalees is the mulatto child of Olaf Singleterry who desperately wants her back and has turned the countryside upside down with his reward for her return. Everyone is looking for her but she remains elusive. At the novel's end, she has changed everything but has disappeared although her slave partner in flight, the male slave Sims, is caught and beheaded.

When August King arrives at the Inn, his interaction with the slaveowner Olaf Singleterry, makes him want to help the fugitive slaves, a man and a girl (16). Although Olaf owns between twenty and thirty slaves, he is particularly exercised over the loss of the girl. For her he offers a reward. The reward note illustrates Singleterry's illiteracy and moral code which values the girl as much as a horse. The reward note reads: "Run off Negro man 19 whip scars on back and butt knife scars on arms and shoulders big lips by name of Sims, reward \$50. With him black girl 15, 5 feet 2 inches firm muscled full breasted no scars sound teeth, return her to me

unsullied and I will give you my Virginia riding horse Samson Lee or \$200, your choice. Olaf Singleterry, Hobbs Community near Harristown” (20-21). The search party is interested in gaining a horse. August King wanted to thwart Singleterry who broke the informal social rules of the area by owning twenty to thirty slaves; all other landowners worked their own land or hired other white men to help.

Although King lacks the prosperity of Olaf Singleterry or Mr. Wright, he has enormous resources compared to the slaves. As poor as he is, he is not a slave. The sheer physical deprivations of the slaves jolt August King. When Annalees first approaches, he notices that she “was dressed in an undyed, sack-like dress such as slaves are given to wear...” (10) and that she is trying to flee through woods, barefoot. Later at a campsite he pours brandy on her bleeding feet to prevent infection (75). She has absolutely nothing with her in contrast to King’s wagon loaded with a year’s supply of food and utensils. Annalees is ravenous when they meet and has been eating leaves which has given her diarrhea (68). It is the smell of frying bacon that draws her to King’s campfire. King feeds her pancakes which she eats whole, not waiting for them to cool (74). While on the run, the slave girl had not slept since she was alone in woods at night. King makes a bed for Anna in his wagon with the geese; he sleeps by the fire so it won’t go out (95).

What lifts Annalees into the human realm is her conversation with August King, and conversation is something King has missed in the year since his wife’s death. Through conversation King glimpses the slaves’ family lives. King discovers that Annalees has named herself since her owner had named her Williamsburg after

being told that she was a boy (83). The slave-owner names the black infants, especially those he fathered, according to his drunken whimsy. Singleterry keeps his brown children to be slaves; the white-looking ones disappear and Annalees doesn't know what becomes of them (69). Annalees herself is Singleterry's child with his house servant (114). As a baby, she and her mother slept in Singleterry's house (58). By seven years Anna was serving Singleterry meals that her mother had cooked (70). Once, he was ill for four months and she stood by his bed and did everything but help him use the bedpan; her mother did that. When Annalees was twelve years and Singleterry was sick again, she prayed for him. The next morning Singleterry felt better and credited her for the improvement. From then on, Singleterry made her sleep on a mat beside his bed. She also rode a small horse next to his when he went riding. Nevertheless, Singleterry sells her pony when she's fourteen because she spit at him. He also sells the slave boy with whom she was swimming (71-72). Annalees tells August King: "I'm not ever going back to him if I can help it. There's more to see in this life than his back yard. And I'd rather have all the fears of this jungle than the ones from his moods, for he changes fast as a cat on wet stones" (69). Annalees describes why she ran away: "They were always trying to hurt me...since I lived in his house and had his favor. I used to say he's not my father in my opinion, but they had their own ideas about it." Anna's favored status caused her to not be fully accepted in the slave community to which she certainly belonged. Her mother "...says my father was a white man on the road who told her to go into the woods, so she had to do it." In his interaction with a slave August King comes to know its

horrors.

It is never stated directly that Singleterry has incestuous sexual relations with Annalees and that is why she flees. Singleterry says to King at one point: “Some nigras are worth more than wealth...you get fond of them now and then” (123). Several times Singleterry exhibited jealousy at any male slave’s interest in Annalees. Singleterry even beheads Sims in his attempt to find out where Annalees is hiding (131). One certainty is that there is no protection from Singleterry for Annalees—except King’s daring aid.

Perhaps the lack of sexual contact between Annalees and King strains credulity the most. Even King’s neighbors believe that King wants to take the girl home to “ravish” her (203), especially since he has been a widower for a year. When considering the lack of all restraints—there is absolutely nothing to prevent rape—indeed, it is almost expected to happen, the novelist posits that here again August King differs from his community. First, he had not been socialized to have any contact with black skin. As he is lying in bed at the Inn, thinking about the fugitive, he decided to resist lust: “He would deny himself any pleasure of her body, he thought, as his religion demanded, as his sense of decency required of him” (25). King’s religious code constrains him, and his own “sense of decency,” his private moral code, constrains him. Still King almost succumbs once they arrive home and they are waiting for the chicken to cook. They drink wine and King rubs his wife salve on Annalees’ cuts. Abruptly, he leaves the house and goes to his wife’s grave, “...all the while telling himself what God in Heaven and his own senses told him he

would not do or try to do to the black girl,...what in any case she would expect, asking himself if he was to become like the men in the field who would have raped her..." (184-185). Just as he had gotten Anna to safety thus far by reliance on his own moral compass, he could resist lust, another way King stands apart from the white men of his day. As a whole, *The Journey of August King* is an insightful psychological study of the white male's attraction to the black female, how valuable she is to him despite all that society puts in place to make her seem just the opposite.

In many ways *Journey* is reminiscent of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Both novels center on the exploits of an interracial pair, one slave and one free, one adult, one child, as they stand against a violent and corrupt American society. But *Journey* also stands as the inverse of *Huck* by making the slave a teenager and female and the free person an adult white male. The possibility exists with such characters for the exercise of mature, moral power; August King has enough property, sexual restraint, and wisdom to risk it all for Annalees' attempt at freedom. The open-endings of both novels permit readers to believe what they desire.¹⁷

Despite reversing the characters, both Twain and Ehle create very similar endings—which invoke the impossibility of freedom in the human condition. Both slaves vanish from the plots in the last three pages of each novel. It has been discovered that Jim was set free in Miss Watson's will and Tom gives him \$40 for his patience with their adventures in Mississippi. What becomes of a freed Jim with \$40 to buy his wife and children with the Emancipation Proclamation years away? No

¹⁷ A cottage industry of criticism exists about the conclusion of *Huck Finn*. Read *Satire or Evasion? Black Perspectives on Huckleberry Finn* by James S. Leonard, Thomas A. Tenney, and Thadious M. Davis (1992) for incisive interpretations of the meaning of Twain's novel.

hint is given. In *Journey* a lone teenaged girl, the same age as Huck, sets off on an uncertain path leading north (King has never followed the trail to neighboring Virginia, so he really doesn't know the route) in shoes too big and lugging a twelve-pound ham and a pot. She has a twelve-hour jump on the two hunters who have correctly tracked her to King's farm. Annalees' situation doesn't look good; on the other hand, it never had, and she had gotten far. As for the white protagonists, Huck lights "out for the territory ahead of the rest..." (Twain 318), knowing he can't live in civilization, and August King sits outside his house, three days after Anna's departure, waiting to see if Singleterry and neighbors will burn down his house and barn in retribution for him tampering with Singleterry's property, his slave daughter, Annalees. If his neighbors burn him out or not, King has no food, no livestock, or no equipment to help him start over. He does own the land and his self-respect. He may need to "light out for the territory" with Huck. Still there's reason for cautious optimism in *Journey's* end: three days have passed and he hasn't been punished; three days have passed and he hasn't heard of Annalees' capture (although given his pariah status and isolation, how would he hear?). Again, perhaps what is being suggested is that we all are enslaved and no one is free.¹⁸ Mid-journey, August King speculates: "I'm not free myself,' he said, walking along...'If I'm not free, how can you be free?' He had not been free yesterday and was not free today; he was bound yesterday and today by sets of outrageous circumstances that had trapped him. When was man free ever? The shape of our face, the health of our hand, all the more

¹⁸ R. P. Warren's *Band of Angels* had the white male protagonist wrestle with these same existential questions ad nauseam. No white female novelist and only one black novelist, one with a PhD in philosophy, Charles Johnson, ponders these questions.

important matters tend to be decided for us, by birth or accident or God or fate or chance or accident or whatever... “ (117). The endings of both novels point like a hunting dog to the titles; these tales are *not* about slavery at their ends but about adventure and journey of the white male character.¹⁹

While John Ehle’s novels “have not been bestsellers,” they “have been consistently well reviewed”. *Journey* is no exception, having “a uniformly favorable critical reception” (Colby 249). *Publisher’s Weekly* noted: “The conclusion is not only satisfying but uplifting, in a healthy, old-fashioned way. The novel is full of poetry and beauty in the style of its telling. It is also a brutal tale about human nature at its worst, and in August’s case, at its best” (Colby 249). No less than J. Saunders Redding, “essayist, biographer, historian, and pioneering critic of African-American literature,” judged Ehle to be one of the most gifted of American regional novelists. But Redding went on to complain that Ehle had been

shamefully and inexcusably neglected. I know that this sounds exaggerated, but no living Southern writer of whom I am aware has Mr. Ehle's sympathetic understanding of the Southern way of life nor his deep and loving involvement in the people who live that life on either side of the color line and the doctrinal line. His talents overwhelmingly support his emotional and intellectual commitment. His narrative skill, his projection of character, his sense of the dramatic and of the living realities are something more than first rate. (qtd. in Roberts 55)

¹⁹ In 1996 “The Journey of August King” was released as a film starring Jason Patric and Thandie Newton with Maya Angelou narrating the opening paragraph. Ehle wrote the screenplay—and changed the ending: Annalees successfully escapes, the hunters do not pursue her, and King’s house is burned down.

Critic Terry Roberts continues, “Redding's generous assessment is as valid in 1994 as it was in 1972. Although Ehle has won numerous awards and been published widely abroad, his work--specifically the eight novels set in Southern Appalachia--continues to be generally ignored” (55). In short, many literary critics believe that John Ehle’s talent deserves more critical review and popular acclaim than he’s received. His books sell acceptably well but his is no mediocre craft or statement about American history.

The Journey of August King was followed in 1976 by “...a cultural phenomenon, the first black romance to attract the notice of virtually the entire nation,” was published (Campbell 120). *Roots* by Alex Haley began as an effort to put on paper Haley’s maternal family’s oral history. In the research process Alex Haley returned to Gambia, West Africa and visited his ancestral village. All of this information—and more--was included in the novel²⁰. Haley himself labeled *Roots* as “faction” (Pettis 95), part fact, part fiction.

Therefore, *Roots* will not be included for review in this dissertation for three reasons. First, *Roots* is plagued, ironically, with identity questions. Is *Roots* fiction or journalism? Secondly, this dissertation focuses on novels whose exclusive concentration is the depiction of slavery. Not only can an argument be made that *Roots* is not a novel, but almost one-third of the work is *not* about American slavery. The first 166 pages detail life in Gambia and the last thirty-one pages covers the Haley family from 1895-1964, including the birth and activities of the author himself.

²⁰ Haley settled a plagiarism lawsuit with Margaret Walker out of court. Haley admitted to “disorganized notetaking” from *Jubilee* that resulted in ideas from Walker appearing in *Roots* (People 10).

Hence, because *Roots* is not completely fictional and lacks a total focus on slavery, it will not be considered. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, academe does not need another review of *Roots*.

The first African-American female novelist in this chapter, Octavia E. Butler (1947-2006), like many African-American writers, was born into a family of manual laborers, who, in some respects, were only one step removed from slavery. Her father, Laurice, shined shoes, and her mother, Octavia Margaret (Guy) Butler, worked as a maid to support the family after her husband died during their only child's infancy ("Butler"). When there was no one to look after Octavia during the day, her mother would take the child to work with her where the child witnessed both the insults her mother endured and how to ignore those insults in order to earn a living (Crossley 270). Her mother had worked from the age of ten and Butler's maternal grandmother recounted stories of working the sugar cane fields of Louisiana while raising seven children (Crossley 269). Butler had even lived on her grandmother's chicken ranch as a child for a brief period (Page 44). Her extended family throughout southern California helped raise the child—and critics note "...the positive treatment of such adoptive relationships" in all her works (O'Connor). Butler would always remember in conversation and memoir her mother's sacrifices which included buying the ten-year-old a typewriter and "paying a large fee to an unscrupulous agent so Butler's stories could be read" ("Butler").

Octavia Estelle Butler was born on June 22, 1947 in Pasadena, California. An only child, her mother had had five miscarriages prior to her birth ("Octavia Butler").

A shy, dyslexic daydreamer, “[s]he describes herself in childhood as ‘a perennial out kid’” who was an avid reader and who was always taller than classmates (O’Connor). Butler did not notice racial segregation in her childhood Californian world, living as she did in a racially mixed neighborhood. At ten she started writing “to escape loneliness and boredom” and at twelve “she became interested in science fiction” (“Octavia Butler”).

In 1968 Butler earned an A.A. from Pasadena City College before attending California State University and UCLA. “Unable to major in creative writing, she quit formal work toward a degree...” and enrolled in writers’ workshops, specifically the Writers Guild of America West and Clarion Science Fiction Writer’s Workshop in 1970 for a six-week session. There, she met many established science fiction authors and sold her first two stories (O’Connor). She had found her life’s work, especially after noticing that black women seldom appeared in science fiction. She intended “to insert herself” (Page 45). She did a good job of it.

Octavia Butler’s twelve novels have earned her steady acclaim. She has received two Nebula Awards, three Hugo Awards, a Langston Hughes Medal, the PEN Lifetime Achievement Award, all culminating in 1995 in the MacArthur Foundation’s “genius grant” of \$295,000 (O’Connor).

On February 24, 2006, “Butler died...at her home in Seattle after a head injury resulting from a fall and an apparent stroke” (Page 44). Although her sudden passing stunned many, her life had changed the literary landscape.

Butler’s masterwork, *Kindred* (1979), is informed by the novelist’s sense of family

and American history.

In an interview with *Locus Magazine* (June 2000), Butler said the idea for *Kindred* grew from a comment by a fellow college student, a black guy who wished that he ‘could kill all these old black people that have been holding us back for so long, but can’t because I have to start with my own parents.’ The young man clearly did not understand the true heroism of his people, Butler told *Locus*. ‘He was the kind that would have killed and died, as opposed to surviving and hanging on and hoping and working for change. And I thought about my mother, because she used to take me to work with her when she couldn’t get a baby-sitter and I was too young to be left alone, and I saw her going in the back door, and I saw people saying things to her that she didn’t like but couldn’t respond to. I heard people say in her hearing, ‘Well, I don’t really like colored people.’ And she kept working, and she put me through school, she bought her house--all the stuff she did. That’s what I want to write about: when you are aware of what it means to be an adult and what choices you have to make, the fact that maybe you’re afraid, but you still have to act.’ Butler pays tribute to both her mother and grandmother in her writing. (Young 32)

In this same period “she was exposed to works by black authors—particularly works about Frederick Douglass—at Pasadena City College. She visited Douglass’ Eastern Shore, Maryland and Mt. Vernon, a restored plantation (O’Connor). *Kindred* was published when Butler was 32-years-old, yet it was written during her college years. Her third published novel “...differs from Butler’s other books in that it is placed in

the past rather than the future. Butler was never comfortable with *Kindred's* sci-fi label. "*Kindred* is not science fiction, it is, in actuality, a kind of grim fantasy.... Dana is determined not to tolerate the beliefs of the time, but she eventually recognizes that the whole society is set against her and that she has to put up with it to survive," Butler explains (Young 32).

Kindred is not told in straight chronology, but its narrative melds past and present in a way to challenge readers. The Prologue would appear right before the Epilogue if the story held to chronology. In the Prologue, Dana, the female protagonist, is recovering in the hospital from an arm injury, and her husband, Kevin, has been interrogated by the police for suspicion of spousal abuse. The couple knows that if they tell the truth or tell what they believed had happened, that both would be committed to a mental hospital (10-11). The novel begins on Dana's twenty-sixth birthday, June 9, 1976, as she is unpacking books in the couple's new house in Altadena, California. Over the course of the next three weeks, Dana becomes dizzy and disappears, simply vanishes into air, as she is called repeatedly into the antebellum past by her white great-grandfather, Rufus Weylin, whenever he is about to die. Dana must protect him long enough for him to father Hagar Weylin, a slave and grandmother to Dana.

Although Dana's disappearances are only for minutes over the course of a few weeks, years lapse in the lives of her ancestors who come to know her. Dana begins rescuing Rufus when he almost drowned at four or five years-old; three weeks later (in 1976 time) Rufus dies at twenty-five years, a father and slave-owner. Once, while

hugging, Dana and Kevin Franklin both are transported to antebellum Easton, Maryland, and Kevin remains there for five years (1820-1825) as he is separated from Dana when she time travels back to 1976. Just as the catalyst to pull Dana into the past is impending death for Rufus Weylin, Dana Franklin has to fear for her life in order to return to California. Needless to say, there was plenty to fear for a black woman in the slave era²¹, and *Kindred* presents a conversation between past sensibilities and modern ones. As both Dana and her white husband, Kevin, attempt to fit into the past, assumptions about human relationships that are part and parcel of modernity are also questioned. What makes for family? Is a spiritual connection between individuals more important than sharing a gene pool? How does race inform sexual interactions between men and women? In the end, Dana stabs Rufus as he attempts to rape her. However, the past does not let Dana go and she loses half of her left arm in her final return to California. In the Epilogue, Dana and Kevin return to the Eastern Shore and visit the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore in an effort to discover what happened to the Weylin plantation, specifically the slave children who are Dana's relatives. Historical records yield little and much is left to conjecture.

Kindred differs from all other novels in this dissertation in that its narrative engages in dialogue between antebellum and modern America. Through the mystery of time-travel, Dana and Kevin Franklin, an interracial couple, journey back to the world of Dana's ancestors and interrogate and negotiate slave society as would most

²¹ In early drafts, the protagonist was a black male but Butler changed genders to female because "I couldn't realistically keep him alive. So many things that he did would have been likely to get him killed. He wouldn't even have time to learn the rules [of antebellum life] ...before he was killed for not knowing them'..." (Yaszek 1057).

modern readers. By using a first-person narrator, Butler makes Dana's story the reader's story also; we become "I." Dana and Kevin react to slavery as modern Americans would, meaning they are stunned by a society in which all actions and life possibilities are determined by race and gender.

On her second trip back into the past, Dana is jolted by being defined by a white boy as a "nigger." She and Rufus are discussing Dana's first appearance in Maryland when she rescued Rufus from drowning. The boy's mother was present at that time and interfered as Dana gave mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

'Mama said she tried to stop you...because you were just some nigger she had never seen before...'

'She said I was what?' I asked.

'Just a strange nigger. She and Daddy both knew they hadn't seen you before.'

That was a hell of a thing for her to say right after she saw me save her son's life....

'What's wrong? he asked. 'Why are you mad?'

'Your mother always call black people niggers, Rufe?'

'Sure, except when she has company. Why not?'

His air of innocent questioning confused me. Either he didn't know what he was saying, or he had a career waiting in Hollywood. Whichever it was, he wasn't going to go on saying it to me.

'I'm a black woman, Rufe. If you have to call me something other than my

name, that's it.' (24-25)

Setting aside the irony of Dana's "stranger" status—in another page or two she realizes that the Weylins are her ancestors, giving resonance to the novel's title—the casual use of "nigger" by a white person to any black person surprises Dana. Until this moment readers do not know that Dana is "black," so invisible is her color in her daily life in California in 1976. For Dana's first racial reference to be via *that* word—in the mouth of the boy she had saved from drowning—jolts the modern reader and simultaneously places all readers in the world of slavery. Not only Rufus, but many historical novels casually appropriate racial epithet, and Octavia Butler creates a scene in which a black character, who does not have to accept the epithet, defines herself to white authority. In and through Dana's reaction—"She said I was what?"—black readers especially have a character within an historical novel who expresses outrage at the term²² and defines herself—"I'm a black woman"—in 1815 to a white male. This may be a first in American literature, and it can only happen thanks to Dana's unexplained time travel²³.

On more than one occasion Dana confronts how slaves survived and wonders if she possesses enough strength. During her second trip, she thinks, "I had to get out of the house and to a place of safety before day came—if there was a place of safety for

²² The debate over the propriety of the word, nigger, continues to evolve, and now, in 2006, some African-Americans have decided that the term can be used with impunity—but only in conversation with another black person who understands the affection implied. The argument states that an oppressed people have appropriated the oppressor's language, and by so employing it, take the intended hurt out of the word. Even within those circles of torturous logic and word play, the word, nigger, remains off-limits in interracial conversation, such as the one between Dana and Rufus.

²³ Dana's time-traveling may be a metaphor for what historical novelists do. Both Dana and Kevin are writers by profession.

me here. I wondered how Alice's parents managed, how they survived" (30). Not only is this Dana's immediate concern but it is the challenge for each historical novelist, imagining how slaves survived in a place without protection. When Dana returns to twentieth century California, she tells her husband that she now believes she cannot endure antebellum society. Kevin replies:

'Will you stop, that! Look, your ancestors survived that era—survived it with fewer advantages than you have. You're no less than they are.'

In a way I am.

What way?

Strength. Endurance. To survive, my ancestors had to put up with more than I ever could. Much more....' Had she used the knife and killed the patroller, she would not have come home. The patroller's friends would have killed her. If they didn't catch her, Alice's mother would have been killed. '...So either I would have died, or I would have caused another innocent person to die.' (51)

Dana wrestles with the total lack of choice over her own life coupled with the inability to protect any other slaves.

During their joint visit, Kevin is hired as a tutor for Rufus and Dana "plays" as Kevin's slave-concubine. The Franklins, an interracial couple with a name full of American connotations in a Bicentennial year when the novel is set, experience how the races "settle into" their roles and accept their statuses during slavery.

Time passed. Kevin and I became more a part of the household, familiar, accepted, accepting. That disturbed me too when I thought about it. How

easily we seemed to acclimatize. Not that I wanted us to have trouble, adjusting to this particular segment of history—adjusting to our places in the household of a slaveholder. For me, the work could be hard, but was usually more boring than physically wearing....But for drop-ins from another century, I thought we had had a remarkably easy time. And I was perverse enough to be bothered by the ease. ‘This could be a great time to live in,’ Kevin said once. (97)

The couple’s perspectives on slavery grows directly out of their racial identities. Specifically, Kevin, a white male, does not see Tom Weylin, planter, as malevolent and overbearing towards slaves. Dana disagrees, seeing Weylin as super-controlling and mentions having to witness a whipping. Kevin believes the slaves have “no more work than the people can handle.” Dana adds: “...no decent housing...dirt floors to sleep on, food so inadequate they’d all be sick if they didn’t keep gardens in what’s supposed to be their leisure time and steal from the cookhouse when Sarah lets them. And no rights and the possibility of being mistreated or sold away from their families for any reason—or no reason. Kevin, you don’t have to beat people to treat them brutally.”

Kevin: “...I’m not minimizing the wrong that’s being done here....”

Dana: “Yes you are. You don’t mean to be, but you are.” (100)

Perhaps for the first time Dana sees her husband siding with the white world, the world of the slave-owner.

The novelist does not spare readers or the fictional characters, Dana and Kevin

Franklin, the vicious daily brutalities that enabled white planters, though outnumbered by slaves, to maintain chattel slavery. The beatings, whippings, lashings never cease. As soon as Dana goes in search of Alice Greenwood, a free black child and Dana's great-grandmother, she witnesses the beating of a naked black man, a slave without a pass by patrollers; the victim is Alice's father, hence Dana's great-great grandfather.

By now, the man had been securely tied to the tree. One of the whites went to his horse to get what proved to be a whip. He cracked it once in the air, apparently for his own amusement, then brought it down across the back of the black man. The man's body convulsed, but the only sound he made was a gasp. He took several more blows with no outcry, but I could hear his breathing, hard and quick. Behind him, his child wept noisily against her mother's leg, but the woman, like her husband, was silent. She clutched the child to her and stood, head down, refusing to watch the beating.

Then the man's resolve broke. He began to moan...Finally, he began to scream. I could literally smell his sweat, hear every ragged breath, every cry, every cut of the whip. I could see his body jerking, convulsing, straining against the rope as his screaming went on and on. My stomach heaved, and I had to force myself to stay where I was and keep quiet. Why didn't they stop!...I shut my eyes and tensed my muscles against an urge to vomit.

I had seen people beaten on television and in the movies. I had seen the too red blood substitute streaked across their backs and heard their well rehearsed

screams. But I hadn't lain nearby and smelled their sweat or heard them pleading and praying, shamed before their families and themselves. I was probably less prepared for the reality than the child crying not far from me....

(36)

The confrontation with the reality of violence against slaves makes Dana ill. She has experienced this type of violence only through fictional worlds. To show that the first whipping was commonplace, Dana is "...called over to the slave cabins—the quarter—to watch Weylin punish a field hand for crimes of answering back" (91).

This man also is naked and tied to a tree.

...The whip was heavy and at least six feet long, and I wouldn't have used it on anything living. It drew blood and screams at every blow. I watched and listened and longed to be away....He had ordered all of us to watch the beating—all the slaves. Kevin was in the main house somewhere, probably not even aware of what was happening. The whipping served its purpose as far as I was concerned. It scared me, made me wonder how long it would be before I made a mistake that would give someone reason to whip me. (92)

It wasn't long. Dana begins to teach a slave boy how to read. Nigel is quick-witted and already has scars from beatings from failed escape attempts. Dana uses the deserted cookhouse in the afternoon for a schoolroom; it was a place where slaves assembled to eat their own meals, and where meals for the Weylins were prepared. Dana had just burned Nigel's spelling test in the fireplace when Tom Weylin did something he had never done before, he entered the cookhouse. "It wasn't supposed

to happen. For as long as I had been on the plantation, it had not happened—no white had come into the cookhouse. Not even Kevin. Nigel had just agreed with me that it didn't happen" (106).

Tom Weylin dragged Dana outside while she mouthed to Nigel to get Kevin.

I never saw where the whip came from, never even saw the first blow coming. But it came—like a hot iron across my back, burning into me through my light shirt, searing my skin...I screamed, convulsed. Weylin struck again and again, until I couldn't have gotten up at gunpoint...I thought I would die on the ground there with a mouth full of dirt and blood and a white man cursing and lecturing as he beat me. By then, I almost wanted to die. Anything to stop the pain.

As she vomits, she sees Kevin running toward her but she passes out before he reaches her (107). Her fright enables her to travel back to California but Kevin is left behind for five years. That beating is not to be her last. Upon return to Maryland, Dana attempts to flee on foot from the Weylin plantation to search for Kevin who went north when Dana had vanished. Another slave alerts Tom and Rufus Weylin who pursue her on horseback. Tom, Dana's white great-grandfather, kicks the slave in her face, causing her to lose two teeth. Then he ties her up and lashes her: "What I acted like was a wild woman. If I'd had my knife, I would have surely killed someone...I was totally beyond reasoning. I had never in my life wanted so desperately to kill another human being." They tie her up, rip her clothes off and Weylin whips her. "This was only punishment, and I knew it. Nigel had borne it.

Alice had borne worse....I wasn't going to die—though as the beating went on, I wanted to” (176). It could have been worse, Dana realizes.

Alice experiences “worse” her entire life. When Alice Greenwood Jackson, who is born free, runs away with her slave husband Isaac, they are caught after five days. Alice had been mangled by dogs, beaten, and then dragged behind a horse to town. In addition to the same treatment, Isaac's ears are cut off before he is sold south (158). Alice is sold into slavery to Rufus (146).

Perhaps the lesson Dana learns, in ways Kevin can never, is how the sexual oppression of black women stood at the center of slavery. Sexual violation of slave women, not only by owners but by *any* white male, remained slavery's standard feature. For instance not only did Rufus have children by his slaves, but his father has several mulatto children on the plantation, whom his wife abuses at whim (85). One slave woman, Tess, was passed from Tom Weylin to the overseer before being sold. She complained to Dana: “...you do everything they tell you...and they still treat you like an old dog. Go here, open your legs; go there, bust your back. What they care! I ain't s'pose to have no feelin's!” (182). Later she's sold south. In another example, as soon as Dana is walking alone during her second trip, she has to fight off a white patroller who had returned to rape the slave wife of the beaten man. Dana is upset with herself because she couldn't force herself to gouge out the man's eyes; mentally, she still can't believe that slavery is real or being experienced. She manages to knock her assailant out with a tree limb before she is returned home (42-43). The last time Dana is summoned to Rufus is because Isaac, a slave, is beating

Rufus for raping his long-time childhood friend, Alice, who has married Isaac (117).

The couple only temporarily escapes. Dana is chagrined

...that Rufus had done exactly what I had said he would do: Gotten possession of the woman without having to bother with her husband. Now, somehow, Alice would have to accept not only the loss of her husband, but her own enslavement. Rufus had caused her trouble, and now he had been rewarded for it. It made no sense. No matter how kindly he treated her now that he had destroyed her, it made no sense. (149)

Later, Rufus sends Dana to tell Alice that Alice should sleep with him or be beaten if she resists. Dana tells Alice that she has three choices: acquiesce to sex with Rufus, be whipped and then raped, or run away (166-167). Alice “went to him. She adjusted, became a quieter more subdued person. She didn’t kill, but she seemed to die a little” (169). Alice has four children by Rufus, her owner, but two die. The youngest, Hagar, becomes Dana’s grandmother (208). Dana notes that Alice “...forgave him nothing, forgot nothing, hated him as deeply as she had loved Isaac. I didn’t blame her. But what good did her hating do? She couldn’t bring herself to run away again or to kill him and face her own death. She couldn’t do anything at all except make herself more miserable....But she endured....” (180). Alice begs Rufus to free their children, but he laughs at her. Alice decides to run away when Hagar is a few weeks old, since she loses hope for her children’s freedom (232-235). Before Alice escapes, Rufus sends their two children to his aunt in Baltimore, but he tells Alice that he has sold them. Alice hangs herself and Rufus considers suicide himself

(248, 251). Instead, he decides that Dana should "...take the place of the dead," and he decides to have sex with Dana. "A slave was a slave. Anything could be done to her." Dana stabs him, killing him, in self-defense (259-260).

The last lesson the Franklins and the readers learn is why our knowledge of our own past, the world of American slavery, our families' past, is unknown, unrecognized, and lost to modern life. In the Epilogue, Dana and Kevin visit Maryland after Dana heals from the amputation suffered upon returning to 1976 and California. They visit the site of the Weylin plantation, but it is covered by a cornfield. Dana inquires about Rufus Weylin's grave "[b]ut the farmer knew nothing—or at least, said nothing." Only an old newspaper article mentioned that Rufus had been killed in a house fire. Notice of a slave auction from the estate appeared in newspapers (262). Here the novelist describes the inadequacy of all historical records. There's no trace of what happened to Rufus' mother who was home at the time of the fire or what became of all the slaves, especially the black Weylin children. The Maryland Historical Society has no records (263). It is a story not to be told. Dana's uncle possesses the Bible that lists Hagar Weylin as its first entry. Her parents' names are given, but no one had ever mentioned that Rufus was a white man. "If they knew. Probably, they didn't. Hagar Weylin Blake had died in 1880, long before the time of any member of my family that I had known. No doubt most information about her life had died with her. At least it had died before it filtered down to me. There was only the Bible left" (28). Dana, writer that she is, *creates a story* to explain the house fire that covered up the murder. She speculates

on the different things that may have happened to her grandmother as a child (263). Dana regrets that her murder of Rufus caused the sale and possible break up of all the slave families. Kevin tells her there's nothing she can do to change what has been done, and searching for evidence was useless too: "...you've found no records. You'll probably never know'" (264). In the end, the past is unknowable and unattainable for modern readers. We are scarred by that history, changed forever, by our encounter with the little we know of it, but most of the big parts, such as people's motivations, will be hidden forever and we must create a story to explain the little we know to ourselves. In short, we all must become historical novelists. The novel that began on Dana's birthday ends on July 4, 1976, America's Bicentennial. The fog of personal history differs not from the fog of national history; this story reveals that we all are one, we all are kindred.

Acclaim for this novel, always high, continues to grow with the passing years. Critics rave about both *Kindred's* unique features in the American literary canon and its profound symbolism. Robert Crossley notes, "When *Kindred* first appeared twenty-five years ago, no one had thought of using the fictional conventions of time travel to transport a modern African American to an antebellum plantation" (265). Critic Angelyn Mitchell defines the novel's singularity as: "... what Butler offers: that the past is shaped or constructed, by the present as to what we choose to remember as well as what we choose to forget, and by the way we choose to interpret that which is remembered" (55). Another, "...speaking of *Kindred*...", Pfeiffer argued that with these books Butler 'produced two novels of such special excellence

that critical appreciation of them will take several years to assemble. To miss them will be to miss unique novels in modern fiction” (“Butler”). Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu in *Black Women Writers and the American Neo-Slave Narrative (Femininity Unfettered)* describes *Kindred* as “...brilliant both for the way it explores slave life and master-slave relations in the antebellum South and problematizes our 20th century understanding of the peculiar institution” (119). “Like Dana and Kevin, the reader of *Kindred* may discover a closer kinship with the characters and events of the antebellum South than we often care to admit,” Robert Crossley writes in the Afterward of the 2003 edition (280). In the essay, “Families of Orphans,” Ashraf Rushdy does not waste time categorizing the novel as historical fiction or science fiction²⁴:

The point of generic classification is rendered moot if we accept the connection Frederic Jameson finds between science fiction and historical fiction: what both science fiction and historical fiction do, he argues, is create a ‘violent formal and narrative dislocation’ in their modes of representing the future or the past in order to restore ‘life and feeling to the only intermittently functioning organ that is our capacity to organize and live time historically’ (284). *Kindred* is most fruitfully seen as part of a movement in recent African-American fiction to produce the conditions of historicity by reconstructing the past to endow the present with new meaning.... (136)

²⁴ Butler herself refused the science fiction label for *Kindred*, saying, “there is absolutely no science in it” (Crossley 269).

He continues, "...the most significant fact about *Kindred*—which is that this is a story about how we can make our own sense of family if we are willing to alter the past" (Rushdy, "Families" 143).

Much like the ending of *Huck Finn*, *Kindred's* conclusion has spawned voluminous interpretations about Dana's left arm becoming part of her living room wall, about ending the plot on July 4, 1976, and about the meaning of the Epilogue. Robert Crossley explains the significance of the amputation:

Kindred, one could say, is no more rational, no more comfortably explicable than the history of slavery itself....and in an interview Butler has stated that the meaning of the amputation is clear enough: 'I couldn't really let her come all the way back. I couldn't let her return to what she was, I couldn't let her come back whole and that, I think, really symbolizes her not coming back whole. Antebellum slavery didn't leave people quite whole.... Leaving the book's ending rough-edged and raw like Dana's wound, Butler leaves the reader uneasy and disturbed by the intersection of story and history rather than reassured by a tale that solves all the mysteries. (267-268)

Ashraf Rushdy states:

Dana's lost arm, then, is less a sign of how the peculiar institution brutalized her body...then a symptom of how recovering the past involves losing a grip on the present.... What Dana's physical losses signify is that to flesh out the past means to leave part of one's being there....Clearly, Butler agrees with these assessments of the necessity of remembering the past as a way of

comprehending the present and developing a coherent sense of a historically-defined self. In *Kindred*, however, Butler also demonstrates the genuine physical danger involved in remembering the past. Remembering can lead to wholeness, but it also carries a risk of loss.... She loses her arm, apparently, between ‘homes’—between a past that has a claim on her and a present on which she has a claim. (138-140)

As for the significance of the Bicentennial setting, Robert Crossley explains:

The date of Dana’s final return to Los Angeles is July 4, 1976, the bicentennial of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence of the United States. In bringing the novel full circle from the protagonist’s birthday, Butler deftly connects individual consciousness with social history and invites readers to meditate on the relationships between personal and political identities. (276)

As the Epilogue, when Mr. and Mrs. Franklin, one white, the other black, carried their scarred bodies back to Maryland after experiencing slavery, Ashraf Rushdy claims, “The performances of what Ellison calls ‘unwritten history’ are necessary for African-American subjects precisely because the history is unwritten.” At the Maryland Historical Society visit, “Dana discovers what Ellison had discovered: that ‘our unwritten history looms’ as the ‘obscure alter ego’ of our recorded history” (124). That ‘unwritten history’ is revived at a cost, however, just as it is repressed at a cost” (“Families” 138). Angelyn Mitchell contends that

...Dana and Kevin, both enlightened by their individual and shared experiences, are still together at the narrative’s end suggests Butler’s resolution

of this complex issue. Their interracial relationship can be read as a metaphor for how America may be healed. Their relationship, in other words, represents what is necessary for Americans to do to alleviate the pain of our common history: they each must confront the past. That both races must join together in coming to terms with the past, I believe, is the rhetorical purpose of this metaphor because they both have an investment in the final outcome....By highlighting our mutual need, Butler's liberatory narrative teaches that both black and white Americans must confront their shared past of racism, must acknowledge the pain and the scars of that past, and must live together as kindred. (70)

Not only do the literary critics admire *Kindred*, but all of Octavia Butler's works command "a wide audience" and have achieved "cult status among black women readers" ("Butler"). Robert Crossley notes that critical interest

...is not just is not just academic, nor is it confined to science-fiction fans. In the Spring of 2003 the city of Rochester, New York undertook its third annual event titled 'If All of Rochester Read the Same Book.' An estimated 40,000 to 50,000 people read *Kindred*, discussed it in local reading groups, and for three days had a chance to meet Butler and talk with her about the book at her numerous appearances at universities, libraries, and bookstores. (273)

According to Dr. Roland L. Williams, an assistant professor of African American literature at Temple University, "The book's crossover appeal endures today, and it continues to find a variety of audiences--fantasy, literary and historical" (qtd. in

Young 32). Sales remain strong. Although Doubleday publishers first published the novel, Beacon published the paperback edition in 1988 and then re-issued it on its twenty-fifth anniversary (Crossley 273). By just about any definition, *Kindred* is approaching “classic” status.

Whereas Octavia Butler’s canon has enjoyed both critical and popular success, Frank Yerby has sold millions of books that literary critics love to hate. His only historical novel about American slavery, *A Darkness at Ingraham’s Crest*, was neither a bestseller nor a critical success.

Frank Yerby’s war against racism and embrace of racial ambiguity began on September 5, 1916 in Augusta, Georgia as a child of a black postal worker and a Scotch-Irish mother (“Yerby”). Yerby said in an interview: “...a grandparent was an Indian; I’ve far more Irish blood than Negro. I simply insist on remaining a member of the human race. I don’t think a writer’s output should be dictated by a biological accident. It happens there are many things I know far better than the race problem” (“Yerby”). The second of four children, Yerby was an excellent student throughout his schooling, earning an A.B. from Paine College in 1937, a M.A. from Fisk University in 1938. He entered a doctoral program in education at University of Chicago but did not finish (“Yerby”). As a young adult, Yerby taught at Florida A & M and Southern University before becoming dissatisfied with academe and securing a factory job in Detroit during World War II (“Yerby”). He began working on his first novel at night after manual labor during the day. *The Foxes of Harrow* (1946) sold over two million copies, “...was translated into at least twelve languages, reprinted in

several national magazines...” and became a popular film (“Yerby”). In the 1950s Frank Yerby became an ex-patriate in Europe, settling in Madrid, Spain in 1955. He lived there for the rest of his life, which ended on November 29, 1991 (“Yerby”).

Frank Yerby authored thirty-three novels that sold over fifty-five million books during his lifetime. He had published “twenty-one so-called ‘raceless’ novels before he published his first novel with a Black protagonist in 1969” (Pettis xxii). Four novels were made into movies, but despite public consumption, honors were slow coming. Yerby’s first short story won the O. Henry Memorial Award of 1944 which remained his sole literary award. He was awarded honorary doctorates from both alma maters and the Governor of Tennessee made him an honorary citizen in 1977 (“Yerby”).

A Darkness at Ingraham’s Crest (1979) is a sequel to *The Dahomean*. The protagonist, Hwesu or Wesley Parks, was kidnapped from Dahomey in West Africa in the 1850s and sold into slavery in Mississippi. Wes is a black superman who can do everything *because of his African blood*. Wesley’s masteries include blacksmithing, tailoring, horse-breaking, chemistry, law, jewelry-making, and carving. He’s 6’5” of pure muscle who can withstand getting shot in the stomach on his honeymoon and at another time getting 300 lashes. According to Dr. Joyce Pettis, “With a combination of hypnosis, black magic, common sense, and educated guesswork, ...Wes becomes a veritable magician in order to revenge certain wrongs done to him, among them, a beating. Yerby has so extended ...Wes' superiority that he ceases to be an admirable African and borders on being ridiculous” (58). Wes

says he likes only black people and hates the look of mulattos and whites, but at the novel's end, he marries a mulatto and uses another, Joe Collins, to implement his plans. He confesses at the end a love for Pam Ingraham, the white heir, although they never consummated their affection despite her desire.

Wes wreaks vengeance on all who do him wrong in the most elaborate plots known to man; he tells every slave the details and everybody does what he asks without giving him away. The whites know he's behind the death and destruction but they can't prove it because Wes is a genius, much smarter than all of them. He ends in Boston to live with his fifth wife, a mulatto named Ruby, and to set up a blacksmith shop. There are three white villains who are the source of all evil in this fictional world and they all die at the end. Other slaveholders are well-meaning and there are a goodly number of abolitionists in Mississippi.

Since the purpose of *Darkness* is to prove that Africans have intelligence and culture superior to the slave-owners' and to demonstrate that slavery destroyed both races, little time is spent on plantation life: "...Yerby makes little effort to show the daily existence of slaves or to construct round characters from that population" (Pettis 57). Wes' survival and attainment of freedom is the focal point of the first 702 pages. Sex, especially interracial, drives most scenes. The novel's beginning foreshadows the rest of the plot: Wes, a blacksmith, prays to ancestors as he works metal (Yerby 3). Wes' owner appears with two visitors. Wes dismisses them from his thoughts. "But then White men were a very primitive variety of humanity, and absolutely incapable of anything remotely approaching

his Dahomean's subtlety of thought, which was why he considered trying to explain anything to them above the level that a backward child could grasp, a perfect waste of time" (4). The visitors, Capt Wallace Bibbs and his son Ashton, buy Wes for \$1500. for his blacksmithing skill (6). The new owners look over their new purchase by making Wes undress and they see he hasn't been beaten (7). The new owners want to know if they can use him as a stud and have Wes drop his pants in order to look at his genitals. They ask Wes why he hasn't reproduced. Wes tells them in a bass voice that his wife killed herself rather than have him see her raped by a "slave-stealin' nigger". His first owner has even had a doctor examine Wes and the doctor decided Wes' problem is psychological and that he'll reproduce in time. Even if Wes doesn't, he has many skills that will make him a profitable possession (8).

The critics hated Yerby's thirty-three novels for sentences such as: "So she struck a match—which took her some little time because matches of the 1850s spluttered and sparked and stank outrageously for close to half a minute before bursting half-heartedly into flame" (76) or "Wes got to his feet, bent over, pushed down his trousers. Under them he had only a loincloth on. He straightened up then, night Black, tree-top tall, it seemed to Tolbert Weatherbee. His voice was a tropic tide, murmuring in from southern seas, unimaginably far, slow booming, deep..." (699). Yerby is the master of the awkward phrase who made reading 710 pages feel like reading 1400. *The Charleston News* called *A Darkness at Ingraham's Crest* "a 350-page novel expanded to include another 350 pages of lecturing" (Parker). Charles

Michaud of *Library Journal* describes *A Darkness* as "...another saga of palpitating passions down on the old plantation. All of the elements—murder, miscegenation, adultery, arson, insanity—are here in their many variations. For relevance Yerby has added incipient feminism, occult voodooism, and some black power slogans" (1488). "Betty Lynn Compton characterizes the novel as having 'the sweep of *Gone With The Wind* and the bitterness of *Roots*, a combination that makes it both entertaining and sickening'" (Parker).

Although all of the characters are sexually insatiable, none are more so than the female characters, independent of race. Jeffrey Parker in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* writes:

Yerby's treatment of women in his novels indicates that, in general, women are nothing more than superficial targets for conquest by more 'emotionally mature' protagonists. Although Yerby contends that sex in the novel does not necessarily sell books, his work includes a large number of women whose characters reside solely in a sexual context. There exists no female character who is wholly admirable or complete, or any female character who can stand outside of a submissive relationship with a male counterpart. Women are often subjected to sexual and physical abuse.

Everything said here applies to female characters in *A Darkness at Ingraham's Crest*. Although the novel's Afrocentrism and militant, warrior-hero may have appealed to the black power aficionados of the 1970s, no one is reading *A Darkness* now.

The third historical novelist to publish a novel about slavery during 1979, Barbara

Chase-Riboud (1939-), is reminiscent of multi-talented artists of the Harlem Renaissance, particularly James Weldon Johnson who worked so effectively in a variety of artistic media. Chase-Riboud has won national and international awards in writing, sculpture and drawing, and architecture. Born on June 26, 1939 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, “the only child of middle-class parents, [h]er father carried on a contracting business begun by his father. Her mother's family came from Canada, the descendants of slaves who had escaped across the border on the Underground Railroad” (“Chase-Riboud”; Richardson). Educated in the fine arts, Chase-Riboud received a BFA from Temple University in 1957 and a MFA from Yale in 1960 (“Chase-Riboud”). “Before she became a published writer, Barbara Chase-Riboud was well established as a sculptor of international reputation. Her work in cast and polished bronze, often combined with lengths of wool, silk, and other textiles, is found in a number of major museums and in many important private collections” (Richardson). As soon as she turned to writing, however, she won awards in that medium. Her first book, *Sally Hemings*, “...won the 1979 Janet Heidinger Kafka Prize as the best novel written by an American woman” (“About the Author,” *Hemings*). In 1988 she was awarded the “Carl Sandburg Prize as best American poet for her second collection of poems” (“About the Author”). Other awards include: a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship (1973); New York City Subway Competition for architecture (1973); Academic of Italy for sculpture and drawing with gold medal (1978); Van Der Zee Sculpture Prize (1995); two honorary doctorates from Temple University (1981) and Muhlenberg College (1993)

(“Chase-Riboud”).

As a descendent of Canadian blacks who had escaped slavery via the Underground Railroad, Barbara Chase-Riboud may have been predisposed to believe the Hemings’ family’s oral history that testified to Thomas Jefferson as forefather. Chase-Riboud accepted the Hemings’ version of the story from the first and she was haunted by the character of Sally Hemings, who “wouldn’t let me alone, nor I her.” Chase-Riboud “begged Toni Morrison to write this story...but she was busy with her own work. I tried to convince every writer I knew to take up my task.” None would. Finally, Morrison pushed Chase-Riboud into action by telling her: “Stop talking about it. Just do it, Barbara,” meaning write her first historical novel (Chase-Riboud 346). For Chase-Riboud, Sally Hemings’ story became really plausible when she considered the possible genesis of the relationship in Paris where

...these two personages were taken completely out of their racial and social context and redefined in a France fermenting with ideas of social and personal liberty. Sally Hemings, described in the memoirs of Isaac, a Monticellian slave, as "mighty near white" with long black hair hanging down her back and known as dashing Sally, was white enough to pass as white in Paris and most probably did so. Otherwise, Jefferson's circle in that city would have remarked that in his household he had a blackamoor, a coveted and fashionable status symbol among the European aristocracy at the time, who cultivated the exotic “Moorish” style. Jefferson's friend Maria Cosway had such a blackamoor in her residence in London. On the other

hand, Thomas Jefferson had, for the first time, ventured beyond the provincial and racist slave-holding plutocracy he had been born and raised in. He could perceive Sally Hemings for what she truly was. In France, both of them were free. (346)

Chase-Riboud would soon learn the price for effectively illustrating how the third President of the U. S., the revered Thomas Jefferson, slaveholder, had had children with a slave. This dissertation chronicles numerous fictional tales of slave-owners who had children by slaves but historical record and now DNA testing suggest the Hemings-Jefferson story is not fictional. However, other novels did not center on the sexual life of a widowed President Jefferson. “Everyone involved with publishing *Sally Hemings* including the author underestimated the emotion and controversy that would swirl about a novel that gave flesh, blood, and sinew to a long-held and much discussed conviction that Thomas Jefferson had a slave family by the half-sister of his dead wife.” The reason the story has “legs,” as journalists say, is because the “...conviction was long held by his contemporaries from John Adams, who received Sally Hemings and Jefferson's daughter at the American Embassy in London, to Gouverneur Morris, a New York Congressman who was with Jefferson in Paris in 1789, and long, long denied by others” (Chase-Riboud 345). The author describes how “...the novel was railed against from the pulpit, from CBS “Sunday Morning” and from Monticello itself” (Chase-Riboud 347).

After a page detailing the Hemings’ family (slave) and the Wayles’ family

(white), *Sally Hemings* (1979) begins. Already readers have established in their minds that Sally Hemings and Martha Wayles Jefferson, Mrs. Thomas Jefferson, are half-sisters through their father. A census-taker rides out to interview 56-year-old, reclusive Sally Hemings. Jefferson had died four years earlier and Hemings lives with two grown sons, Madison and Eston, the only Hemings freed in his will. The census-taker character becomes a narrative device that enables Chase-Riboud to tell the Sally Hemings story in flashback. In addition, inclusion of the census-taker, smitten with Sally Hemings and wanting to keep Thomas Jefferson from appearing criminal, explains a historical mystery: both Madison and Eston Hemings were listed as “white” in Virginia’s 1830 census although their mother never is catalogued as white and despite everyone in Virginia knowing their story (Chase-Riboud 16).

Sally Hemings first tells how her family came to be owned by Thomas Jefferson, by providing the brief story of her grandmother and mother who were both owned by and concubines to Jefferson’s father-in-law (24-26). Over the course of a year the census-taker learns of Sally’s trip to Paris, France at fourteen to chaperone nine-year-old Polly Jefferson who was joining her father, the U.S. ambassador to France, and the census-taker learns how Sally returned to America two years later, pregnant with Jefferson’s child (63-150). The census-taker does not confine himself to listening to only Sally’s recollections, but he interviews others about the Hemings-Jefferson affair. Quincy Adams, son of John Q. Adams, and Aaron Burr provide their views (156-161) along

with the verbatim editorial that appeared in Richmond's *The Recorder* on September 1, 1802 and Irish poet Thomas Moore's poem about Jefferson and his concubine that made the rounds in "kitchens and salons" in Virginia, Washington, New York, Baltimore, Boston, and Philadelphia (243-248). Yet it is Sally's voice that dominates the novel, often pleading with the listener-reader to believe that deep, mutual love motivated their thirty-eight year relationship that produced seven children. The novel ends with the former census-taker riding out to Sally Heming's desolate cabin that edges Monticello; he watches as the lone figure walks slowly toward shade to get out of the summer heat (249-344).²⁵

That the man who wrote the Declaration of Independence also owned slaves is such a contradiction that perhaps only art can begin to create a plausible explanation. Such was the task Barbara Chase-Riboud undertook in writing *Sally Hemings*. Immediately some chastised her for imagining too much and speculating too wildly, although she has done nothing more than historical novelists are called to do, engage their imaginations about the facts of history. Nobel laureate Toni Morrison defends the historical novelist in *Romancing the Shadow* when she states: "It has been suggested that romance is an evasion of history (and thus perhaps attractive to a people trying to evade the recent past). But I am more persuaded by arguments that find in it the head-on encounter with

²⁵ Upon Thomas Jefferson's death, Monticello was auctioned to pay off Jefferson's considerable debts. His daughter, Martha Jefferson Randolph, freed Sally, thereby sparing her auction and then got the Virginia legislature to award Sally Hemings special dispensation to live in Virginia after manumission. Virginia law mandated that all freed slaves leave the state within a year of manumission (Chase-Riboud 4-5, 327-336).

very real pressing historical forces and the contradictions inherent in them (Chase-Riboud 350). Chase-Riboud negotiates the “head-on encounter” with “pressing historical forces” by basing her novel on existing documents about a secret affair and by studying the design of a redone Monticello itself.

First Chase-Riboud establishes that Thomas Jefferson, who penned, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness,” never publicly displayed discomfort at owning slaves. He behaved as other slaveholders. As a slave-owner, Jefferson gives away slaves as a wedding gift to his daughter, Maria. “For her wedding, her father gave Maria 26 slaves, 78 horses, pigs, and cows, as well as 800 acres” (217). He never gives away too many. Too well Jefferson knew the dollar amount for each slave, sometimes selling as many as 100 slaves to erase twenty years of debt. Families are broken up in these sales and he uses all his slaves as equity “to finance the rebuilding of Monticello” (202-203). By 1822, Thomas Randolph, son-in-law of Thomas Jefferson becomes governor of Virginia and proposes emancipation of all Virginia slaves and deportation out of the state. Jefferson “remained silent on the issue” and the proposition is defeated in the state house. Jefferson uses not one ounce of his political muscle to support his son-in-law’s bill (311-312). Is fear of bankruptcy the source of Jefferson’s silence on Thomas Randolph’s solution to slavery? Once, he orders a slave “flogged severely in public, not just because he kept running away, which he had done with regularity now

since he was 12, but because he kept running away from *him...*” (263). Throughout his life, Thomas Jefferson remains mired in debt, and his death opened the floodgates to bill-collectors. He leaves everything to his eldest white grandson, Thomas Jefferson Randolph, whose solution is to auction off everything, “the whole of the residue of the personal property of Thomas Jefferson, deceased, consisting of valuable negroes [sic], stock, crops, etc., household and kitchen furniture according to the ad in the *Richmond Enquirer* (326, 331). Jefferson’s will frees four male slaves, two of whom are Madison and Eston Hemings, Sally’s youngest children. “He didn’t free no ... women” Sally was told—and that statement is true for his entire life. Chase-Riboud perhaps best sums up the upheaval for the slave with the slave owner’s demise:

The death of a master, good or bad, is always a catastrophe for the slave. Sometimes he grieves out of real affection for the dead master, but mostly he grieves for the state of his future, which from that moment on is as vague and dangerous as his first journey out of his mother’s womb. Death of the master meant sale, separation from the land, from friends, and, if there were any, from wife and husband. And most of all, from children. The white family always took these outpourings of grief as proof that they were beloved, or of how much the dead master had been. (326)

Most of the novels in this dissertation testify to Chase-Riboud’s accurate description. After several generations of service (the Hemings family was known for exquisite craftsmanship) to the Jefferson-Wayles families, the last surviving Hemings slave,

Sally, is listed in the auction inventory as worth \$50 (327).

Apparently, the three older Hemings children, seeing their owner demonstrated no desire to free them, had made the correct decision in running away and living as white people. Thomas Jefferson Hemings, who would later change his last name to Woodson, “strolled away” from Monticello and lived as a white man (277).²⁶

Beverly, Sally’s second son, flees to the North and lives as a white man (309). Even the daughter flees upon her twenty-first birthday, Harriet Hemings II (the first namesake died) is taken by carriage to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, never to return. Chase-Riboud has Thomas Jefferson making the arrangements for Harriet’s departure into her new, white life. “What no one had told her, and what she had had to fathom for herself, was that there was no freedom without whiteness; that to shed her slavehood was also to shed her color. If she were to escape the dangerous, persecuted and harassed life of a freed slave, she would have to pass from one race to the other, from black to white” (315). Harriet “...would start her new life without home, without family, without friends. She would be white. White. For the rest of her life she would live this lie. She would live in dread, on guard against slips, against chance encounters, against a keen eye. She was, after all, a runaway slave. A fugitive. Madison was right. It was worse than being sold away, she thought....”

²⁶ DNA tests suggest that Woodson was not fathered by a Jefferson (Chaddock 13) and questions exist about whether he is Sally’s first child. Some say the child Sally bore upon her return from France died and Thomas Jefferson Hemings is her second child (Strout 249).

(318).²⁷ In a few sentences, Chase-Riboud depicts the precarious and lonely existence of the runaway mulatto woman “passing” for a white woman.

Perhaps Chase-Riboud’s last image of Sally Hemings illustrates her extreme isolation because as a slave mother she has no children that she can assume will always be a part of her life. The three children who “passed” can never return to Virginia, and if Sally ever leaves Virginia, she can never return to the only home she knows or to the graves of those she had loved. A slave child can be sold away and a fugitive slave also remains beyond reach. Once Sally Hemings decides that her three children should be free or pass for white, she is also agreeing to never see them again. Slave mothers have to love freedom more than they love contact with their child.

The reason so many Hemings can live as white people stands at the heart of this novel. Before Thomas Jefferson entered their lives, the Hemings women had already been victimized by generations of sexual abuse. The “one drop” of African blood that ran through Hemings’ veins came from Sally’s maternal grandmother, a “full-blooded African” who gave birth to Elizabeth Hemings; her father was Capt. Hemings who had wanted to own both mother and child but their owner, John Wayles, would not sell them. As a result, “the African” repeatedly ran away from her owner. She was beaten for each escape attempt. At her seventh escape attempt she was branded with an “R” for runaway on the cheek and she never attempted to flee after that (25). Her mulatto daughter, Elizabeth Hemings, was put out of the house to

²⁷ There’s much debate about why Harriet left Monticello with so much—yet no manumission papers. Many details point to Thomas Jefferson’s collusion in her flight. Yet once she leaves Monticello, she drops out of history; no one knows what becomes of her. *Clotel, or the President’s Daughter* (1853) by William Wells Brown is a historical novel that imagines the rest of Harriet’s life after Virginia.

work in the fields when she was fourteen. She had six children by a slave named Abe who died before John Wayles brought her back into the house when he became a widower. One of John Wayles' daughters, Martha, marries Thomas Jefferson. By 1772, Wayles and Elizabeth Hemings had had four children, all the while he "was still dealing in slaves, buying, selling, and breeding." Sally is one of those four children. When Martha Wayles marries Thomas Jefferson, all of the Hemings came to Monticello. Hence, Martha Wayles Jefferson and her younger half-sister Sally both live under the same roof (26). Elizabeth Hemings is in charge of the twenty-five house servants at Monticello (65). Slavery's incestuous horrors are written in blood.

Enter Thomas Jefferson who has already established himself as the typical slave-owner willing to exploit slaves in any number of ways. Surely, he could and would take advantage of slaves in every aspect but one, the sexual one, his defenders argue. Surely, much later, Thomas Jefferson, widower, in a foreign country without slaves, would not, no never, impregnate teenaged Sally Hemings who may have resembled his dead wife, especially not when he can have any white woman in the world, his friends contend. Jefferson's defenders argue that his deep-seated "ethics" prevent him from having sex with a slave woman who has no right of refusal. These same "ethics" permit him to break up slave families to balance his accounting books and to flog runaways. Such has been the historical debate.

On the other hand, more than one source contemporaneous with Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson testifies to the liaison. Sally Hemings tells all of her children that their father is Thomas Jefferson, and one son, Madison, writes a memoir about

his family's history (Strout 249). No less than John Adams in his diaries vents his disgust at the arrangement, a degradation rooted in slavery. (John and Abigail Adams are some of the few to actually meet Sally Hemings when she and Maria Jefferson arrived at the American embassy in London before making their way to Jefferson in Paris.) In 1789 New York Congressman Morris mentions the liaison; he too spends time with Jefferson in Paris (Chase-Riboud 345). Those who hadn't heard about it before September 1, 1802 certainly read about the scandal from J. T. Callender's editorial printed in the *Examiner*, the *Virginia Gazette* and in newspapers in Washington, DC, Philadelphia, and New York City (Chase-Riboud 244). Dr. Annette Gordon-Reed's groundbreaking new contribution to this argument was that "...records indicate that Jefferson was at Monticello at the time of the conception of all of Hemings' children..." (Hamilton 64-69).

While Jefferson's friends and colleagues attack Callender, Thomas Jefferson himself refuses to confirm or deny fathering Sally's children (245). Thomas Jefferson's silence—and its meaning—is one of the great historical mysteries, yet Chase-Riboud does nothing to explain it. In the novel, none of the Jeffersons ever engage Sally Hemings in conversation about the editorial, poems, and gossip. Sally talks to only her mother about the editorial. On this point the battle is joined for respective descendents: staunch Jeffersonians interpret the silence as evidence of Thomas Jefferson's high-mindedness that refuses to bow to or acknowledge scandal from his political enemies. Staunch Hemings' family supporters believe the lack of denial speaks to the truth. Prof. Fawn M. Brodie who had written *Thomas Jefferson:*

An Intimate History (1974) said that Jefferson's silence was most in keeping with his ethical code, "...for his 'to have denied everything by public lying would have affronted his deepest nature.'" He would not lie to protect himself (Strout 249).

The novel, *Sally Hemings*, posits that the Hemings-Jefferson affair is just that, a thirty-eight year passion, not seven rapes beginning when Sally was fourteen. The hurdle facing Chase-Riboud is establishing equality of passion in the midst of a wicked power differential. Not only does the affair begin when Sally is an adolescent and Jefferson is a middle-aged widower; not only do *all* women lack the legal and political rights of men; but this affair is between arguably the most empowered man in the country, the third President of the United States, and a woman who is Jefferson's *property*, having no right of refusal. In the novel Quincy Adams tells the census-taker:

'...That Jefferson had loved Sally Hemings he had no doubt. Whether Sally Hemings had loved Jefferson was less clear, since she had had no choice. That was the tragedy. That such an unnatural love may have changed the course of history, undoubtedly preventing Jefferson from using his power and genius to turn the tide against slavery instead of being an accomplice to all its darkest and most passionate aspects, was tragic indeed....Why had Jefferson revised his stand against slavery when he returned from Paris? (156-157)

Chase-Riboud chooses not to answer her own question. In *Sally Hemings*, Adams believes Jefferson "...had deceived himself into believing he could love a woman he held in slavery. He had deceived Sally Hemings into believing a man that held her in

such servitude could love her. Adams wondered suddenly if she had realized this finally, or had she loved him to the end?" (160). Unfortunately, it may be a question without an answer in the fictive or historical nonfiction worlds. In "Is it love?" on "Frontline's" series on Jefferson-Hemings, Dr. Gordon-Reed states that the nature of the pair's personal relationship, given human complexity, could be wide-ranging over the course of their lives; nevertheless, that relationship did not change a thing. It did not remove the Hemings' slave status and perhaps most importantly, it did not prompt Jefferson to use his political power for abolition ("Love or Rape?" PBS).

No modern American novel had taken up this subject before, and the immediate critical reaction to *Sally Hemings* was mixed, citing the novel's considerable strengths and deficiencies. Typical is the *New York Times Book Review* in which Martin Levin writes:

The byzantine connection between slave owner and slave mistress is spelled out throughout this novel...But the emotional impact of this relationship is weakened by an anemic narrative. There is little continuous action here. What we get is a series of impressions seen sometimes from one point of view, sometimes from another. These vignettes are filled with anachronisms...and Miss Chase-Riboud is too often carried away by the sound of her own words. What remains, nonetheless, is a vivid portrait, appealing because of the author's passion for her subject.... (*Book Review Digest* 225)

In a similar vein Carole Cleaver of the *National Review* believes *Sally Hemings* fails because of "shadowy" Jefferson:

...Jefferson remains a vague and shadowy figure...Sally is explored in greater depth, but ...it is the author's inability to define Jefferson which makes [Sally's] motivation unbelievable. As presented here he is simply not lovable. Sally Hemings lives as wife to a man for 38 years, bears him seven children, stands by him in sickness and health; yet she is never acknowledged, never freed....This is a tragedy for all. It requires more than well-meaning prose. It requires that sense of universal pathos which creates art. (*Book Review Digest* 225)

This critique takes up the love question, which Dr. Gordon-Reed dismisses as being irrelevant since it doesn't impact the larger question over which Jefferson had jurisdiction: slavery. Still, the novel does not present any sustained conversation between Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson; there is only one brief exchange, two lines about the stairwell in his bedroom.

Marilyn Richardson believes that Sally Hemings, not Jefferson, is the characterization that needs more definition.

There is a curious mix of independence and resignation in Sally's first-person accounts of the course of her life. She never, it appears, seriously contemplates escape or rebellion. As seen by others--by her mother, Elizabeth Hemings, by the artist John Trumbull, and by Abigail Adams--she is by turns foolish and self-indulgent, an ever-present danger to Jefferson's political ambitions, and a symbol of a profound malady at the very center of the lives of those who would presume to shape the destiny of a nation.

(Richardson)

Public acceptance of *Sally Hemings* has never contained ambivalence. Upon publication, the novel was a bestseller, to many historians' consternation. The book was so popular that CBS funded a television movie adaptation, and then abandoned the project because of historian Dumas Malone's successful appeal to CBS president William Paley to not tarnish Thomas Jefferson's legacy in the public mind with titillating speculation.²⁸ The novel continues to have steady sales and was reprinted in 1994.

Prof. Fawn Brodie did not live to see her "psychohistory" of Jefferson somewhat vindicated as has Barbara Chase-Riboud. In 1998, the British science journal *Nature* commissioned a DNA study on the Hemings and Jefferson male descendants. Led by retired pathology professor Eugene Foster, a team of eight scientists compared "the Y-chromosomes from male-line descendants" to discover "a match in Y-chromosome DNA with a descendant of Eston Hemings, Sally's youngest son....The probability of such a match arising by chance is 'safely less than one per cent,' according to Eric Lander, a leading geneticist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology...."

Although many Jefferson family members have contended that Thomas' brother or nephews were the likely father of Sally Hemings' children, Thomas Jefferson remains, by "circumstantial evidence," the most likely sire (Chaddock 13). Both the novel as an imaginative creation and the DNA findings²⁹ leave many unresolved

²⁸ In the last interview of his life Dumas Malone acknowledged that he believed Jefferson and Sally Hemings had "one or two" sexual encounters ("Love or Rape?").

²⁹ The DNA sample from Thomas Jefferson Hemings' descendants did not match Jefferson's descendants as did his brother Eston's (Chaddock 13).

questions, guaranteeing continued conflict not only between the Hemings and Jefferson descendants, but among novelists, scientists, and historians.

Much like Barbara Chase-Riboud, Dr. Charles Johnson has created a wide-ranging body of work testify to his eclectic interests and abilities. Johnson has authored four novels, two collections of short stories, two volumes of essays and two collections of political cartoons (Whalen-Bridge). In many ways *Oxherding Tale* represents all of Johnson's interests.

In many ways Charles Johnson's life has been an outgrowth of his parents' work experiences. Born on April 23, 1948 in Evanston, Illinois, Johnson's family was typical of many African-Americans at that time. Johnson's great uncle migrated to Illinois first and then told others of available job opportunities after World War II; Benny and Ruby Johnson eagerly sought these opportunities (Whalen-Bridge). Charles' father worked three jobs while his mother cleaned a sorority house at Northwestern University "...where Johnson's grandmother also worked as a cook." At the end of each semester his mother brought home texts that the college students discarded, providing Johnson with his first copies of Shakespeare's plays. His mother also gave him his first diary; he is a lifelong diarist to this day (Whalen-Bridge). His father, on the other hand, directed his son into "practical" job pursuits rather than the writing and drawing hobbies in which Johnson spent most of his young life. For example, his father secured a trash-collecting summer job for the freshman college student. He began studying martial arts at this same time, which led to his study of Buddhism (Whalen-Bridge).

By 1971, Johnson had earned a BA in journalism from Southern Illinois University. During college, he had worked as a cartoonist and journalist for the *Chicago Tribune*, a master's degree in philosophy from the same school two years later. He enrolled in a doctoral program in philosophy at State University of New York at Stony Brook but left before finishing ("Johnson"). However, in 1999, Charles Johnson "...was awarded both an honorary and an earned doctorate from SUNY--Stony Brook...but the awarding committee backdated the Ph.D. to 1988, the year his philosophical study, *Being and Race: Black Writing Since 1970*, was published" (Whalen-Bridge).

Prior to becoming Professor of Creative Writing at University of Washington at Seattle, Dr. Johnson worked as a professional cartoonist and a writer for PBS documentaries and shows. He's taught at University of Washington since 1990 (Whalen-Bridge).

Beginning with the Delta Award from Southern Illinois University in 1977, Johnson's work has met with acclaim. He received a Rockefeller Foundation grant in 1977-1978 followed by a Creative Writing Fellowship from National Endowment for the Arts in 1979. "He has averaged, since then, about one major award per year, including a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1988, several international literary prizes, a National Book Award (1990), and a MacArthur Fellowship (also known as a "genius grant") in 1998" (Whalen-Bridge). The 1990 National Book Award was the first to an African-American novelist since Ralph Ellison's in 1953 ("Johnson"). In 2002 "Johnson received an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award for Literature"

(Whalen-Bridge).

Oxherding Tale (1982), a cartoonish novel about slavery with a philosophical overlay, begins at Cripplegate plantation in 1838 in South Carolina. It inverts Frederick Douglass' autobiography. Andrew Hawkins, a mulatto first-person narrator is the offspring of a white woman and a male slave. The white male owner decides to educate his mulatto son with a private tutor who teaches him the philosophies of the world. After Andrew Hawkins's first sexual experience with a slave seamstress, Minty, he desires freedom for both of them. His white owner refuses, agreeing to manumit slaves only upon his death. To distract him from his pursuit of freedom, Andrew is sent by the white owner and his black father to perform sex acts for a year for Flo Hatfield, a rich white nymphomaniac. When Andrew rebels, by punching Flo in the nose during sex, he is sent to the coal mines. Then he runs north, to Spartanburg, passes for white and marries a rich white woman—which reverses the typical slave narrative. When he happens to encounter Minty at a slave auction, it reminds him that he had promised to buy her freedom (and that's why he should have been saving his money). After the death of Minty who has a terminal illness when they reunite, Andrew has an epiphany that "...nothing was lost in the masquerade, the cosmic costume ball..." and he returns to his white wife and "...to the business of rebuilding, with our daughter Anna (all is conserved; all), the world" (Johnson 176).

As much as it is about any one thing, *Oxherding Tale* is a critique of the form and content of the nonfiction slave narrative, particularly the most famous one by Frederick Douglass.

As the two narrative interjections "On the Nature of Slave Narratives" and "The Manumission of First-Person Viewpoint" suggest, the novel is a tale about the successful escape of the protagonist from slavery and the freeing of a novelist from the limitations of genre. Moreover, the text attempts to loose its reader from the confinements of a realist reading practice that disingenuously conceals our own active role in the production of its meaning. (Retman 434)

The slave narrative is flipped on its head, turned inside-out in *Oxherding Tale*, and Johnson perhaps hopes the reader is also jostled out of the normal reading experience. By engaging the subject of slavery, in novel form, Johnson places himself within the African-American writing community while simultaneously breaking from its sympathies.

While most slaves were not raised by their parents and were not taught their own personal histories, Andrew Hawkins' conception and early life is reversed from the famed *The Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, despite his slave status. Like Douglass, Hawkins is a mulatto, but his mother is his owner and his father, a house slave, which again reverses the norm for most historical novels, and most American history, which feature the rape of the female slave by the white male owner. In this case, Hawkins' conception is the result of a drunken wife-swapping attempt between slave owner and favorite slave. The female slave throws her owner out of her bed while the female owner remains ignorant of George Hawkins' identity throughout sexual gymnastics. Andrew says, "Thus, I have been told, was my origin" (7). Both Andrew and readers are free to

remain incredulous about “the truth” of any given story within the novel. In sharp contrast, Douglass is never told anything about his origins and spent most of his life trying to discover his birth year. Douglass writes movingly about his mother and grandmother (“Frederick Douglass”), while fictional Andrew is not mothered by anyone. Whereas Douglass is famously self-taught, Andrew Hawkins is given a private tutor who teaches the slave Greek, Plato, Piano, and Elocution. His white owner, Jonathan Polkinghorne, explains his motivation to the tutor: “...Andrew is my property and ...his value will increase with proper training” (Johnson 12). Despite the logic in the statement, few slave-owners sought a formal education for their slaves, making it illegal for a slave to read and write (and hence, to create their own passes and manumission papers). In addition, 17-year-old Frederick Douglass educated others by starting a school (“Frederick Douglass”) whereas Andrew is perfectly content to keep his education a private matter, without any plans for its use. For Andrew, his first sexual encounter with another slave, with its potential for family formation, prompts him to ask his owner for their freedom. Douglass never hints in three autobiographies at his sexual initiation, nor asks permission to be free. Douglass’ second daring escape attempt is aided by a black seamstress who sewed him a sailor’s uniform, and he would later marry that seamstress (“Frederick Douglass”). In contrast, in the novel, Minty is a seamstress who never uses her skills in behalf of her own or Andrew’s freedom. Douglass’ freedom creates a tireless champion for human rights. Andrew’s request for freedom kept him a slave to sexual pleasure; all desire for freedom dissipates with orgies with a white woman. The

closest any slave comes to forming a political philosophy is George Hawkins who gives Andrew the following conflicted, confusing parody of modern black militancy as he drives his son to a white nymphomaniac. After being asked if he would pass for white, Andrew replies, “No, I don’t think so.” George Hawkins beseeches him not to pass: “You could pass...if you wanted to. But if you did, it’d be like turnin’ your back on me and everythin’ I believes in....Whatever you do, Hawk—it pushes the Race forward, or pulls us back. You know what I’ve always told you: If you fail, everything we been fightin’ for fails with you. Be y’self” (21)³⁰. Douglass, of course, always chose to identify with the slave and tell their story in contrast to Andrew who flees all identification with blackness (upon being sent to work in the coal mines), when he runs no farther north than Spartanburg, South Carolina, and begins life as a white man, William Harris.

As Sonnet Retman suggests, the novel is an exercise in “freeing...a novelist from the limitations of the genre” and “...attempts to loose its reader from the confinements of a realist reading practice that disingenuously conceals our own active role in the production of its meaning....” (Retman 434). Chapter 8, for example, examines the nature and history of slave narratives. There are three types of slave narratives: twentieth century interviews “conducted during the Great Depression by the Federal Writer’s Work Project...” of blacks born prior to 1863; pseudo-narratives commissioned by abolitionists; “authentic narratives” by fugitives. The third type is a cousin to the Puritan Narrative that demonstrated that a member had become a Christian.

³⁰ Each statement, beginning with Andrew’s “I don’t think so” is a pun or a joke within a joke for a mulatto.

Here the narrative movement is from sin to salvation....In point of fact, the movements in the Slave Narrative from slavery (sin) to freedom (salvation) are identical to those of the Puritan Narrative, and both these genuinely American forms are the offspring of that hoary confession by the first philosophical black writer: St. Augustine.

Augustine's confessions move from "ignorance to wisdom, nonbeing to being.

No form, I should note, loses its ancestry; rather, these meanings accumulate in layers of tissue as the form evolves.... It is safe to conjecture that the Slave Narrative proper whistles and hums with this history, to say nothing of the 19th century picaresque novel and story of manners, and all a modern writer need do is dig, dig, dig—call it spadework—until the form surrenders its diverse secrets. (118-119)

By chapter 9, Johnson again disrupts the narrative to make the reader aware of the limits of a first-person narrator. Andrew Hawkins states, "A wonderful biography, you will agree..." reinvents "...unflinchingly, for we all rearrange our past to sweeten it a little. Memory, as the metaphysicians say, is imagination"(109). The novelist writes:

In this second (unfortunate) intermission there is yet another convention of the Slave Narrative to consider, possibly its only invariant feature: first-person viewpoint. By definition, the Slave Narrative requires a first-person report on the Peculiar Institution from one of its victims, and what we value most highly in this viewpoint are precisely the limitations imposed upon the narrator-

perceiver, who cannot, for example, know what transpires in another mind, like that of Ezekiel Sykes-Withers, or in a scene that excludes him; what we lack in authority, we gain in immediacy: a premise (or prejudice) of Positivist science. But the Age of Reason overlaps the age of slavery, and it is not, therefore, unseemly to wonder, despite Dr. Marx's dislike of metaphysics, about transcendental nature of the narrator.

He is, in fact, nobody; is anonymous, as Hume points out in his Treatise....The Subject of the Slave Narrative, like all Subjects, is forever outside itself in others, objects; he is parasitic, if you like, drawing his life from everything he is not, and at precisely the instant he makes possible their appearance. (152-153)

In the Slave Narrative, "...a narrator ...is that world: who is less a reporter than an opening through which the world is delivered: first-person (if you wish) universal. Having liberated first-person, it is now only fitting that in the following chapters we do as much for Andrew Hawkins" (152-153).

Since *Oxherding Tale* is as much about the narrative of history, *how* the story is conveyed, the narrator's position in relation to the story, it spends little time depicting slavery's routines. For example, Andrew states:

While Flo and I luxuriated in the Big House, the sad pattern of slave life at Leviathan remained unchanged. Ginning. Sorting and moting cotton in January. Winter passed with her bondsmen making brooms, mats, and horse collars. There was the bedding of cotton and ridging of soil in March. In April

there was splitting the ridges with plows. Planting seeds. Mending fences. May through August evaporated in endless hoeing. Come September: more picking. Through all this I devoted my year, you'd have to say, to mint tea and clever conversation. (62)

A year later, as a white man, Andrew Hawkins/William Harris attends a slave auction and gets to see anew the life he left or avoided as a slave. When he glances at his cast-off condition, he no longer recognizes it (although "it" is transformed into "her," his beloved Minty). "Trading slaves in 1860, shipping Africans, was illegal, but the practice continued in back-rooms poorly lighted to conceal the physical deformities, the damages to blackmarket goods, each slave lifted onto a high table, a makeshift Block, with someone (a boy usually) standing watch for the sheriff at the door" (150). Andrew/William does not recognize the slave woman being auctioned. Slavery has disfigured his first love, Minty. "From the cholesterol-high, nutritionless diet of the quarters, or a child, I could not tell. She was unlovely, drudgelike, sexless, the farm tool squeezed, with no thought of preservation in the seigneurial South, for every ounce of surplus value, then put on sale for whatever price she could bring. In the interim, Minty has been sold three times since Cripple Gate. He buys Minty to keep his promise from years ago (157). Minty tells Andrew about the slave uprising at Cripple Gate plantations, led by George Hawkins, now oxherd, who had hit his owner in the head, paralyzing him. All the slaves are sold by Anna Polkinghorne, Andrew's biological mother. Minty did not know what had become of any of the sold slaves. "More than this Minty did not know; and she only spoke sketchily of her masters (all

men) who sprang up in her life, one by one, like principals in a gang rape.” Minty is now dying and covered with sores (158-159). Andrew decides to take Minty back to his white wife to nurse her through her illness. He tells his wife: “...there are duties I must discharge, if I am ever to be free....We are born, even slaves, into such richness, and if I cannot somehow repay them, my predecessors and that girl outside, then I am unworthy of any happiness whatsoever, here with you, or anywhere” (161). Nevertheless, Minty cannot be saved (167).

Critical appreciation of Charles Johnson’s work has been contentious, especially in the African-American literary community. In his fiction, Johnson denies racial distinction. Race does not matter in the scheme of the universe. Yet his always-male protagonists don’t choose to pass for black. In *Oxherding Tale* Andrew Harris, slave, who is also William Harris, white man, ponders:

Beneath the sausage-tight skin of slavery I could be, depending on the roll of the dice, the swerve of the indifferent atom, forever poised between two worlds, or—with a little luck—a wealthy man who had made his way in the world and married the woman he loved. All right—be realistic, I thought. Consider the facts: Like a man who had fallen or been rudely flung into the world, I owned nothing. My knowledge, my clothes, my language, even, were shamefully second-hand, made by, and perhaps for, other men. I was a living lie, that was the heart of it. My argument was: Whatever my origin, I would be wholly responsible for the shape I gave myself in the future, for shirting myself handsomely with a new life that called me like a siren to possibilities that were

real but forever out of reach. (17)

Although race does not matter, African culture remains rejected while the “white” world is the standard for normalcy. Later, William Harris pontificates:

You are wondering, I imagine, about differences in the White and Black worlds. Well here is the first: this feeling in both that the past is threatening; in the Black World a threat because there is no history worth mentioning, only family scenarios of deprivation and a bitter struggle—and failure—against slavery, which leads to despair...and in the White World the past is also a threat, but here because, in many cases, the triumphs of predecessors are suffocating, a legend to live up to, or to reject (with a good deal of guilt), the anxiety that these ghosts watch you at all times...a feeling that everything significant has been done, the world is finished. (132)

What themes run through these soliloquies? The African, the black, is consistently devalued and devoid of possibilities (past and future) until he (never she) divests himself of all African associations, “discharges” duties to other slaves and escape into a bright, *white* future of endless possibility. There are African-Americans who cringe at “My knowledge, my clothes, my language, even, were shamefully second-hand, made by, and perhaps for, other men” or “...in the Black World a threat because there is no history worth mentioning, only family scenarios of deprivation and a bitter struggle—and failure—against slavery...”. In the block quote about racial differences, note that whites fear having to compete with past triumphs while for blacks “...there is no history worth mentioning...”. No wonder blackness is to be

escaped, avoided, denied. These passages' poignancy is the deadly seriousness of self-loathing. John Whalen-Bridge in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* writes: "Johnson has paid a price with the most influential critics of African American literature...Johnson's often-repeated denials of distinct racial difference help to explain [Henry Louis] Gates's gatekeeping exclusion of Johnson in lists of significant contemporary African American writers.'" Others see Andrew's quest for whiteness and flight from blackness as a positive one: "...Andrew's struggle is not to recover the identity he forged in slavery but to transcend slavery's limiting particularity" (Parrish 91). In other words, it is not blackness he's fleeing (forget escaping from the coal mines), it is blackness' association with slavery that Andrew evades. Critical appraisal for *Oxherding* remains in flux.

As if Dr. Johnson were not in hot water enough with his depiction of inherent black inferiority, his use of humor in the depiction of slavery problematizes his works also. Satirists are notoriously misunderstood because senses of humor are so varied, particular, iconoclastic. There's always the risk that the reader will not "get it," nor is laughter guaranteed from those who understand the joke. It is important to note in humorous literature what gets joked about or at whose expense is all the hilarity. *Oxherding Tale* is quite consistent. In terms of philosophy, George Hawkins' (Andrew's father) late-blossoming militancy or rebellion is consistently belittled but there is no joke about any philosophy without a black base, such as Buddhism. In terms of characterization, women, and especially black women, are caricatures and completely expendable in the plot. The novel begins with the wife swap that

produces Andrew. "...Andrew's origins are linked to a black paternal presence rather than the black maternal presence found in most narratives" (Retman 421). Both (white) mother and (black) step-mother disappear from the plot as do Flo Hatfield and Minty, for long stretches. One critic describes Minty "...as the explicit female sacrifice in the novel" (Retman 431), but no female is endowed with much purpose other than sex object and the black ones, in particular, are the least of all. Critics smell misogyny where Johnson smells...fun.³¹ Some people do not like caricature, for instance, and they will reject stories delivered in that genre. "Critics of Johnson's Johnson's gumbo of fictional modes have argued that his work, like cartoon drawings, are free to be so various only because they are unfaithful to the texture of felt life, but Johnson defenders praise him as a literary trickster or, to use his own word, 'conjurer'" (Whalen-Bridge). Sonnet Retman notes, "Comedy serves as a last stand against the unbearable realities of slavery by underscoring the anachronisms, contradictions, and absurdities all too present in that violent system. Johnson borrows this dark humor and uses it as a filter for rereading the narratives and inventing his own" (421). Appreciation of Johnson's humor varies.

Johnson's distinctive voice is achieved by melding humor with philosophical reflection. "With *Oxherding Tale*, Johnson again employs humor and philosophy to trace the development of his protagonist from innocence to experience....However, Johnson's integration of philosophical discussion into his narratives has received

³¹ Elizabeth Muther argues in "Isadora at Sea: Misogyny as Comic Capital in Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage*" that Johnson's attitudes toward women, at least as expressed in his creation of female characters, is "contemptuous" (Whalen-Bridge). The women in *Oxherding* are no exception.

mixed responses from critics” (“Johnson”). The title itself “...comes from a series of twelfth-century Buddhist paintings known as the ‘Ten Oxherding Pictures.’ In these paintings, a young man in search of an ox that has strayed from his herd serves as an allegory for the individual's search for the self” (“Johnson”). Some critics find “...the philosophical indulgences...” to be a serious flaw in Johnson’s fiction (Graham) while others believe *Oxherding* has a “...fluid integration of philosophical ideas into the storyline, prose style, and well-drawn characters (“Johnson”). Sonnet Retman observed:

Andrew’s inferences not only reveal his own scholarly achievements, but they also have a notable metatextual effect on the reader. Unless the reader is fairly well versed in philosophy, these references carry limited associations; in other words, through Andrew, Johnson handily signifies on us as well. How much do we know off-hand about the errors in Hegel's Lectures on the Philosophy of History? (428- 429)

There are some critics who believe a grave disservice has been done to Charles R. Johnson, who, after all, did write: “That winter, the worst in South Carolina’s history, five men froze to their horses....In this bitter season, snow sat on the rooftops, where its weight cracked wooden beams like kindling; snow brought a silence like sleep to the quarters, where it frosted the great family house and, like a glacial spell, sealed off the hills, the forests, and the fields in blue ice” (Johnson 9). They argue that he “...deserves more critical recognition as a novelist of ideas and as a mature craftsman. His two published novels provide ample evidence that he is a writer of

achievement; moreover, he is a writer of prowess, and there is every reason to expect that he will get even better as his career progresses” (Graham).

In terms of critical reception, *Oxherding Tale* got “generally enthusiastic” reviews but critics “...often missed the complexity and subtlety that give the novel its power...” Rudolph P. Byrd writes that *Oxherding Tale* is ‘perhaps the most widely taught and admired of Johnson's novels,’ the ‘pivotal work of fiction that constituted the greatest challenge in intellectual and artistic terms’” (Whalen-Bridge). Still it is doubtful that the vast reading public will acquire a taste for Charles Johnson’s peculiar mixture of philosophy and humor.

Sherley Anne Williams (1944-1999) was born on August 25, 1944 in Bakersfield, California to poor parents. She is the third of four sisters whose parents were migrant workers who picked cotton and other crops in Fresno, California (“Williams”). In junior high school Williams began a “...search for books about black people, a search which...would inevitably lead her to herself” (Howard). Sherley’s “...father died of tuberculosis before her eighth birthday, and her mother, a practical woman from rural Texas who had tried to discourage Williams's early interest in reading, died when Williams was just sixteen.” At the death of her mother, Williams returned to the life of a migrant worker to support herself. She remained an accomplished student whose instructors took special interest in her and encouraged her to prepare for college (“Williams”). She earned a AB in history at California State University in 1966 and a master’s degree from Brown University in 1972 (Appiah and Gates 2000; “Williams”). She was approached about entering Brown’s doctoral program, but she

decided that she would rather produce her own work rather than study others' (Howard). Williams returned to California in 1975 and joined the faculty of the University of California, San Diego (Appiah and Gates 2000).

Williams began writing short stories in 1966, after graduating from California State University. "She began her first story because she 'wanted specifically to write about lower-income black women,' whom she felt had been significant forces in her own life" (Howard). In 1972, *Give Birth to Brightness: a thematic study in neo-black literature* expressed how black folklore shaped racial identity (Appiah and Gates 2000). Sherley Anne Williams was influenced by Sterling Brown, Alice Walker, Hughes, Baldwin, Hurston, Gaines, Baraka, and Morrison because they "...make a conscious effort to carry on the past of their ancestors in their writing. If one hears echoes of these writers when reading Williams's work, then that is because Williams has consciously and deliberately added her voice to those who sing the songs of the past" (Howard). In addition, Williams has consciously sought to correct what she deemed as historical inaccuracies (Appiah and Gates 2000).

Recognition of her abilities followed her every attempt:

Williams' prodigious talent won her acclaim in many literary genres. Her first book of poetry, *The Peacock Poems*, was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and a National Book Award. She won an Emmy Award for a television performance of poems from her second poetry book, *SomeOne Sweet Angel Chile*, another National Book Award nomination. Her full-length one-woman drama, "Letters from a New England Negro," was a featured play

at the National Black Theatre Festival (1992)” (“In Memoriam” 64).

A children’s story, *Working Cotton*, “...won an American Library Association Caldecott Award, and a Coretta Scott King Book Award and it was listed among ‘Best Books of 1992’ by *Parents* magazine. “She was named 1987 Distinguished Professor of the Year by the UCSD Alumni Association” (“In Memoriam” 64). Her novel, *Dessa Rose*, “...was named a notable book by the *New York Times*” in 1986 (Appiah and Gates 2000). Too soon, on July 6, 1999, Sherley Anne Williams died in California from cancer at the age of fifty-four (“In Memoriam” 64).

Similar to other novels in this dissertation, such as *Fugitives of the Pearl*, *Black Thunder*, *Sally Hemings*, *Jubilee*, and *Beloved*, Williams’ novel, *Dessa Rose* (1986), is a fictional melding of real characters and events. Williams had read of

[a] pregnant black woman helped to lead an uprising on a coffle (a group of slaves chained together and herded, usually to market) in 1829 in Kentucky. Caught and convicted, she was sentenced to death; her hanging, however, was delayed until after the birth of her baby. In North Carolina in 1830, a white woman living on an isolated farm was reported to have given sanctuary to runaway slaves.... How sad, I thought then, that these two women never met’ (Williams iii).

Via the author’s imagination, these two women, one black and the other white, meet and negotiate their individual paths to freedom. However, the novel’s origins are rooted in the same impulse as other fiction by Williams: “to apprehend that *other* [my emphasis] history,” a slave history that “...eliminated neither heroism nor love; it

provided occasions for their expressions” (Williams iii). Critic Ashraf Rushdy noted that prior to publication, Williams’ editors were concerned that readers would not realize that *Dessa Rose* was not based on true incident and characters, and they wanted Williams to create a preface to that effect. Williams grudgingly complied, but she resented that white male historical novelists were not compelled by editors to distinguish fact from fiction in their novels. Williams believed racial and gender bias was at work. Rushdy adds: “The editors obviously missed the point of her novel, since it was precisely her point that historical constructs were fictional to the extent that they achieved their coherence by acts of exclusion and that fictional renditions could illuminate largely unexplored areas of the past” (141). *Dessa Rose* was written out of a desire to spotlight two characters ignored in traditional history textbooks and to flesh out their lives, imagine their worlds, in ways that only a historical novel can do.

Like *Kindred*, *Dessa Rose* begins with a Prologue and ends with an Epilogue, but Williams uses these narrative devices for different effects. Although both novels employ the Prologue and Epilogue to comment on the central plot or to give extraneous information about the main story, Sherley Anne Williams establishes the centrality of Dessa’s voice in the Prologue and Epilogue; a female slave defines her love for Kaine, another slave and father of her baby, and at the novel’s end, she comments on the struggle and predicts what the future will hold.

The main plot begins and ends with interaction between a slave woman, Dessa Rose, and a white writer, Adam Nehemiah, who is interviewing her as the subject of

his book about slave uprisings (creating a pun on the protagonist's name³²) in Marengo County, Alabama in June 1847. By using an omniscient narrator for the heart of the novel, Williams makes readers privy both to what Dessa tells the white writer in contrast to what she is thinking and to what Nehemiah hears as opposed to what he writes down. In short, readers experience how history gets produced, how errors are written into the record, and why omissions exist. In interviews, Sherley Anne Williams admitted to becoming particularly incensed by William Styron's novel, *Confessions of Nat Turner*, and her novel is a response to the inaccurate historical records upon which Styron based his novel (Beaulieu 29). The Prologue has already established for the reader what Nehemiah cannot understand: the deep love between Dessa and her musician-gardener-lover, Kaine. When their owner smashes Kaine's banjo, Kaine attacks him. The owner retaliates by hitting Kaine in the head with a shovel, killing him. Dessa, already pregnant, fights her owner for murdering Kaine. She is sold to a slave trader who is taking thirty slaves south for sale. One night the slave coffle break free, killing five white handlers, and maiming the slave trader. This rebellion and killings are led by two male slaves and an expectant mother. Although most of the fugitives, including Dessa, are caught a few days later, two leaders are not. As punishment, Dessa will be hanged after the birth

³² “‘Dessa Rose’ becomes not only the protagonist's name and her life story as she has told it, but also a simple declarative sentence testifying to her greatest achievement: *Dessa rose* above slavery's impediments, transforming herself into a strong, assertive individual with infinite capacity to love, to nurture, and to adapt to changing social conditions, and transforming the world into which she brings the child she and Kaine have conceived into a place where freedom is not a distant dream but an everyday reality. Dessa rose to become a woman and a mother in spite of the institution that defined her as an animal and a breeder. Because she could” (Beaulieu 52).

of her child. She is kept chained alone in the sheriff's basement until her baby is born. There, Adam Nehemiah interviews her until one night Nathan and Cully, her partners in crime, reappear and spirit her away. Dessa would later tell another fugitive her story: "...We had *scaped*, honey! And they'd come back for me and we'd scaped again. You didn't do this in slavery'" (Williams 126). Dessa delivers her baby en route to Sutton's Glen, an isolated plantation outside of Charleston, South Carolina where a group of fugitives live with a white woman. Ruth Elizabeth (also known as, Rufel, by the slaves), the white woman, did not start life on a lonely plantation. Her prosperous family lives in Charleston, and she marries Bertie, a gambler. By the birth of their second child, Bertie has disappeared, leaving to gamble to get sorely needed funds to run his plantation, never to return. When Bertie disappears, most of the slaves at Sutton's Glen do likewise. The three who remain are Rufel's personal servants, and they permit runaways to stay at the plantation in return for labor that enables everyone to eat and be self-sufficient. Rufel notes that the newcomers "...seem to work with a better will than darkies on the place had ever done..." (80). Dessa, Nathan, and Cully, leaders of the slave coffle rebellion, join other slaves on the plantation, and before long, one concocts a scheme to liberate them all, including Rufel, from the plantation. The plan involves posing as what they are almost: while traveling in another part of Alabama, the white woman will sell the same slaves repeatedly (the slaves will escape from their new owners and go to a preordained location) until they raise enough money for the fugitives to go west, buy land, and live free while Ruth Elizabeth and her two children have enough to be self-

sufficient for life. Adam Nehemiah, the white writer who has been searching for Dessa since her escape, reappears when the scam is completed and recognizes Dessa on the street, but he is thwarted in his attempt to capture her by the quick thinking and mutual friendship that has developed during these adventures between the fake-slave, Dessa Rose, and the pseudo-slave-owner, Ruth Elizabeth. Slavery is undermined and both the women establish new identities in new lives.

At the outset, the author illustrates the extraordinary physical and mental violence that is the hallmark of chattel slavery. Williams establishes the conditions that would make a pregnant slave kill and repeatedly attempt escape from slavery's clutches. First, Williams portrays the intensity of Dessa and Kaine's passion for each other that found expression for Kaine in his singing and banjo playing. Their union is not the norm for most slave couples. Dessa is proud that she was Kaine's choice for a lover; their coupling was not arranged by "masa" for the purpose of enriching his holdings:

'He chosed me. Masa ain't had nothing to do wid it. It Kaine what picked me out and ask me for his woman. Masa say you lay wid this'n or that'n and that be the one you lay wid. He tell Carrie Mae she lay wid that studdin nigga and that who she got to be wid. And we all be knowin that it ain't for nothing but to breed and time the chi'ren be up in age, they be sold off to anotha 'tation, maybe deep south....' (7)

Kaine is a gardener around his owner's mansion, and he tries in vain to get Dessa transferred from the fields to the house. Dessa tells Adam Nehemiah:

"But Aunt Lefonia say I too light for Mist's and not light enough for Masa. Mist's

as scared Masa gon be likin the high-colored gals same as he did fo they was married so she don't 'low nothing but dark uns up to the House, else ones too old for Masa to be beddin. So I stays in the field like I been'" (7). This situation has been described before in most novels of the dissertation in which the slave-owner's wife is trying to keep her husband from raping the house slaves. Believing that her husband would find mulatto women attractive, the slave mistress keeps Dessa out of her house.

After Masa smashes Kaine in the head with a shovel, Dessa runs from the field for her last look at him. "...Kaine jes layin there on us's pallet, head seeping blood, one eye closed, one bout gone. Mamma Hattie sittin side him wiping at the blood. 'He be dead o' sold. Dead o' sold.' I guess that what she say then'" (8). Dessa's husband and father of her child is about to be forever separated from their family. Dessa immediately attacks the source of all her difficulties—her slave-owner—and is sold to a slave trader. On the coffle, Dessa befriends the males slaves before and behind her, Nathan and Cully. Nathan, seeing the imbalance between the numbers of whites and the slaves, had already created an escape plan that involves tying up the whites and running away, not killing them. But the plan goes awry.

Not long after the camp settled into sleep, one of the white men sought out Linda, a mulatto girl purchased in Montgomery, and led her into the bushes. The other white men didn't even rouse up as the guard thrashed off into the underbrush with Linda, but everyone on the coffle was awake. Every night since Montgomery, one of the white men had taken Linda into the bushes and they had been made wretched by her pleas and pitiful whimperings. The noise

from the underbrush stopped abruptly. Then came the rattle of chains and above it a dull thud, startlingly loud in the stillness, and the rattling of the chains again. In his lust and alcoholic daze, the guard had failed to secure the chain after he removed Linda from it. Someone in Linda's chain group moved and all their chains away. Seeing this as a sign, Elijah whispered urgently for Nathan, who was already moving stealthily toward Dessa's group. Linda appeared in the clearing, her dress torn and gaping, the bloody rock still clutched in her manacled hands. All hell broke loose....she [Dessa]could not remember the trader as distinct from the other white men. She tried to kill as many as she could. (40-41)

All of Dessa's rebellions are viciously squashed. Her body bears the scars of her struggles. For attacking her owner, Dessa is "...lashed her about the hips and legs, branded her along the insides of her thighs. They whipped her below the waist so that her buyer wouldn't notice." For attacking the slave trader, helping to kill other white men, and escaping from the coffle, she was beaten again and imprisoned in a box underground while awaiting judgment. When she is brought out, "[h]er face was swolled; she was bloody and dirty, cramped from laying up there." Nathan is surprised that "...she could stand up; but she did....She stood up" (99). Dessa is sentenced to hang—but after she delivers her child to slavery. This special torture, of being kept alive long enough to ensure that her child will also suffer similar brutalities, is one with special pain to a slave mother. But then again, no one expected a pregnant woman to repeatedly attempt to kill her captors.

The fate that waits Dessa and Kaine's child is briefly described in a passage about Home Farm. Slave babies are separated from their mothers and raised by women too old or ill for fieldwork. At six or seven years, the children begin working, so hard that many died young—or are sold away which is akin to death, never seeing familiar people and places again. In fact, the young slaves quickly understand that the more skilled they become, the more likely sale (37-38). This description of slave life is missing from the works of most of the white historical novelists in this study.

With the insertion of Adam Nehemiah, literary parasite, into the narrative, the novelist permits Dessa to tell as much of her story as she cares to while exposing how literature and history served as an adjunct to slave suppression. Since Styron's *Confessions of Nat Turner* relied on an interview whose "accuracy" was never questioned by Styron himself, the Adam Nehemiah character is Williams' way of attacking how black characters, in general, and slavery, in particular, are produced by white historians and novelists. Sherley Anne Williams hopes all fictional productions, not only black ones, are met with equal skepticism about their validity. In their first meeting, Nehemiah is struck by Dessa Rose's appearance; she did not fit his image of a slave revolt leader. From "...his perch on the cellar steps...[h]e hadn't caught every word; often he had puzzled overlong at some unfamiliar idiom or phrase...or he had sat, fascinated, forgetting to write" (6-7). The physical and linguistic distance he is from his subject makes his translation of her story suspect. Most of all, Nehemiah's belief system does not permit him to "capture" Dessa on paper. Repeatedly, Nehemiah is uncomprehending about the love between the slave

couple that triggered their assaults on “Masa”. After Dessa describes Kaine’s death, Nehemiah asks, ““And what has that to do with you and the other slaves rising up against the trader and trying to kill white men?” (8). Later, the omniscient narrator states that Nehemiah doesn’t believe that the subsequent revolt was caused by a “busted banjo” (and he still doesn’t understand that Dessa loves Kaine) and that he intends to write in his book that there should be more separation between house servants (Kaine) and field slaves (Dessa). In his view, if Kaine had not met Dessa, none of the revolts would have occurred (24). He hopes his current book “about the origins of uprisings among slaves” establishes him as a significant southern author, especially coming on the heels of his first book, the steady seller, *The Masters’ Complete Guide to Dealing with Slaves and Other Dependents* (11, 13). Critic Mary Kemp Davis views Adam Nehemiah as a parody of Thomas R. Gray who had interviewed Nat Turner after his capture and wrote his *interpretation* of the man; William Styron consulted the interview before writing his novel (273).

Other literary critics find varied symbolism in Nehemiah’s character. Andree-Anne Kekeh contends, “Williams unmistakably makes Adam Nehemiah appear as the embodiment of law, history, and intellectual discourse....His status as a historian is not unlike the slave trader’s. He does not sell slaves per se: he writes them down and sells them as books” (221). Kekeh also discovered a nineteenth century pro-slavery clergyman in Boston named Adam Nehemiah who had published *A South Side View of History: Or, Three Months in the South in 1854*” (Kekeh 221). Yet in *Dessa Rose*, the historian does not complete the story; his subject *literally* and physically escapes

his clutches. At novel's end, Nehemiah insists to the sheriff that he can identify Dessa by his description of her in his incomplete draft. As he reads from it, Dessa's white charge, baby Clara, knocks the notebook out of his hands, scattering the pages. No one can read the scribbles on the paper, and Ruth, now a (white) friend of Dessa's, picks up pages that are blank. Nehemiah insists that "it's all here," but the sheriff has seen enough and lets the women leave the jail (Williams 177). The women defeat their subjugator.

Hence, *Dessa Rose* joins the ranks of other "neo-slave narratives" for how it breaks from the traditional nonfiction slave narratives. Like *Oxherding Tale*, *Dessa Rose* interrogates the form of historical narrative. It posits that after great struggle, a hard-won, fragile interracial friendship between women is possible, even likely, between women who are dominated by a patriarchal society. Also it illustrates that sexual relations between white women and black men also were possible in the past as they exist today. After Ruth's gambler-husband disappears (no one knows if he's alive or dead) and she is isolated on the plantation with fugitive slaves who appreciate the refuge and to continue work hard to maintain the plantation's self-sufficiency, true conversation between white and blacks begins. The ex-slaves no longer have to guard what they say to her since she has no legal claim or enforcement powers. Sometimes the black characters hurt Ruth's feelings but eventually they make up because they must work together for mutual profit. Her talks by the river with Nathan, one of the leaders of the slave coffle revolt and Dessa's liberator, lead to sexual passion after he tells her of their money-making scheme in which she is a

crucial player (116, 112). Dessa and the other female fugitives never are as amused as the male slaves at Nathan's affair with Ruth. Dessa sees the danger, his death, if he's caught by Ruth's husband or another white male (126). However, "...the mens thought Nathan's rutting up there with a white woman was a fine turnaround, so Ada said, after the way white mens was always taking our womens" (133). For her part, Ruth comes to know each slave as an individual, not as a thing. "She thought that if white folks knew slaves as she knew us, wouldn't be no slavery. She thought that was what'd ruined her husband—seeing how much money you could make if you owned other peoples. This is why she felt slavery was wrong, because peoples was no more to you than a pair of hands, stock, sometimes not even a name" (160-161). At novel's end, after they escape Adam Nehemiah's desperate grasp, Dessa, out of reflex, calls Ruth "Mis'ess," and Ruth corrects her. "My name is Ruth, she say, Ruth. I ain't your mistress..." Dessa tells Ruth her name, Dessa Rose, and thinks, "...I wanted to hug Ruth. I didn't hold nothing against her, not 'mistress,' not Nathan, not skin....that night we walked the boardwalk together and we didn't hide our grins" (177-178). Their adventure nets \$30,000 in addition to friendship. Although Ruth and her children would travel north while the once-more free blacks head West (with a note from Ruth saying that she is manumitting her slaves), the former slaves regret that American society will not let Ruth and her children live with them. The novel concludes, however, with Dessa triumphant, living out in western territories with her grandchildren to whom she has told her story, made them write it down, and then repeat it to her. "*Well, this the childrens have heard from our own*

lips. I hope they never have to pay what it cost us to own ourselves.... Oh, we paid for our childrens place in the world again, and again..." (181).

Critical and popular reception of *Dessa Rose* has been consistently laudatory over time. When published in 1986, favorable reviews appeared in the *Washington Post*, *Ms.*, and the *Boston Globe* among many others. *The New York Times* gave it two "glowing reviews" and placed "...it for two weeks on its influential recommended reading list..." Shortly after publication it went into a third printing and Williams received six-figure payment for paperback and film rights, unusual for a first novel ("Williams"). By 1999 the *Dessa Rose* was "...in its fourth printing and has been translated in German, Dutch, and French" ("In Memoriam" 64). It was adopted as a musical at Lincoln Center in New York in 2005 ("Williams"). The novel is also the subject of scholarly conferences such as the one at the University of California, San Diego in May 1998, organized "to celebrate the twelfth anniversary of the publication of *Dessa Rose*." Scholars in African-American literature presented papers that acknowledged the novel's "profound impact" on American literature. The conference ended with a readers theater. After Williams' death, her colleagues planned to videotape and broadcast another dramatic reading of the novel ("In Memoriam" 64).

The jubilant reception of *Dessa Rose* is a mere shadow of what was to happen the following year with the publication of *Beloved*.

Geniuses are peppered with questions about their ancestors, their families, their childhoods, their educations, their hometowns—even their diets and sleep habits, all in an effort to explain how they came to be. If the secret of genius-creation were

revealed, perhaps they could be cloned or mass produced. From the start of her extraordinary writing career, Toni Morrison has been interviewed about the forces, places, and people who shaped her life. According to Denise Heinze of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, John and Ardelia Willis, Morrison's maternal grandparents, are responsible for the family settling in Lorain, Ohio. In 1912 the Willis family left Greenville, Alabama and the dead-end prospects of sharecropping, "having lost their land at the turn of the century." John Solomon Willis briefly worked in a coal mine in Kentucky while his wife worked as a laundress. Chloe Ardelia Wofford was born on February 18, 1931 in Lorain, Ohio to George and Ramah Wofford ("Morrison"). She is "...the second of four children raised in a family that had endured economic and social adversity" (Heinze). Morrison "has said she was born into a family of storytellers and considers her father's folktales, her mother's singing, and her grandmother's numbers games all examples of the uniquely black language she absorbed as a child" (Robinson 1343). "In a *Publisher's Weekly* interview, Morrison suggested ways in which her community influenced her. 'There is this town which is both a support system and a hammer at the same time,' she noted. 'Approval was not the acquisition of things; approval was given for the maturity and the dignity with which one handled oneself'" ("Morrison"). Although "there were few books" in her childhood home, Morrison was an avid reader, prompted by the "awe and respect" given her grandfather who had taught himself to read (Heinze). By the time she was a teenager, she took a page from her hardworking parents and "earned money by cleaning houses" ("Morrison").

Upon graduating with honors from high school, Morrison attended Howard University which would play a pivotal role in her adult life. There, she majored in English and minored in the classics and changed her middle name to Anthony, making a nickname, Toni. She intended to teach. In addition, she joined the school's theatre company which gave her her first glimpse of the South when they went on the road (Heinze). In 1953 Chloe Wofford graduated from Howard University and immediately entered Cornell University's graduate school. In 1955, she earned a master's degree; her thesis examined suicide in the works of William Faulkner and Virginia Woolf (Heinze).

Throughout her adult life, Toni Morrison has taught literature and writing at universities across America. Beginning in 1955 at Texas Southern University, Wofford then returned to Howard University in 1957 where she met and married Jamaican architect Harold Morrison ("Morrison"). In 1964, Morrison was denied tenure at Howard because she had not published enough in professional journals. However she would go on to teach at SUNY at Albany and Purchase, Bard, Yale, Harvard, and since 1988, at Princeton University (Heinze).

After leaving Howard University (and her marriage), she began a career as an editor in Syracuse, New York with Random House in 1966 (Heinze). Soon she was promoted to senior editor at Random House in New York City, becoming the first black female editor, where she edited works of Angela Davis, Gayl Jones, Toni Cade Bambara, and Muhammad Ali, among others (Heinze; Robinson 1343). She was editor until 1985 ("Morrison").

Throughout the years, as Toni Morrison was teaching and editing others, she was writing—both book reviews and her own fiction. Her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, was published in 1970 and she critiqued twenty-eight books between 1971-72 for the *New York Times Book Review* (Heinze). “Her reputation as one of the most influential American writers rests not only on her fiction, but also on her work as a literary and cultural critic” (Robinson 1343). To date, Toni Morrison has authored eleven books of fiction and nonfiction along with eight books of children’s literature. She served as editor of five texts (“Morrison”).

The awards for her writing are almost too numerous to mention. Some of the more notable are: the National Book Award nomination in 1975 for *Sula*; National Book Critics Circle Award and American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award, both 1977, both for *Song of Solomon*; National Book Award nomination and National Book Critics Circle Award nomination, both 1987, Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, and American Book Award 1988, all for *Beloved*; Nobel Prize in Literature, 1993; and Commander of the Order of Arts and Letters (Paris, France), all 1994; Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, National Book Foundation, 1996; National Humanities Medal, 2001; subject of Biennial Toni Morrison Society conference in Lorain, Ohio (“Morrison”).

In 1980 she was appointed by President Carter to the National Council on the Arts and was elected to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters in 1981 (Heinze). “Toni Morrison became a novelist for the ages when she was awarded the 1993 Nobel Prize for literature. The eighth woman and the first black American to

win the prize, Morrison expressed surprise and delight at receiving the honor....”

Henry Louis Gates defined her importance to African-Americans by commenting, “Just two centuries ago, the African-American literary tradition was born in slave narratives. Now our greatest writer has won the Nobel Prize” (Heinze).

“The novel that sits at the center of Toni Morrison’s glorious canon is *Beloved*, a work like no other in the American literary landscape for its attempt—and many say accomplishment—in telling what slavery does to human beings. *Beloved* remains one of this century’s most powerful literary renderings of slavery” (McKenzie 6). Like many other historical novels in this dissertation, *Beloved* is based on “a true incident novel is based on a true incident that Morrison discovered in 1973 when she edited *The Black Book*” (McKenzie 6). A newspaper article by Rev. P. S. Bassett, who had visited Margaret Garner while imprisoned, would serve as the writing prompt for the novel. Born in 1833 in Kentucky, Margaret Garner, with her four children, headed to freedom in Cincinnati in 1855 when her owner and a posse discovered her Underground Railroad shelter. She decided to murder all of her children rather than have them re-enslaved, but she “succeeded in killing only her two-year-old daughter (McKenzie 6). The case received extensive media coverage with both abolitionists and slave-owners seeing the case as an opportunity to convince American citizens of the sin or correctness of slavery. If Margaret Garner was charged with murder, abolitionists argued that the charge alone proved her status as a human being. The slaveholders wanted Garner to be charged with destruction of another’s property, a lesser crime, but one that suggested that slaves needed constant control and

supervision to curb their wild impulses and that they should not be entrusted with the upbringing of their own children (McKenzie 6). Garner's act of attempted murder of her child was prompted by the institution of slavery for only in death could this mother exercise control over her child (Bracks 57). In a 1988 interview with Marsha Darling, reprinted in *Conversations with Toni Morrison*, Morrison explains how she altered historical incident for her own purposes. In actuality, Margaret Garner was not tried for murder despite abolitionists' attempts. She was charged under the Fugitive Slave law for the "crime" of running away. Garner's owner returned the Garners back to Kentucky and promptly sold them south. During transport, by boat, Margaret and her baby daughter either "fell or jumped...into the water." They were rescued but the record loses track of them after that point. Morrison does not know what happened to Garner or her daughter (Darling 247-248). However, Morrison is not interested in the events in the Garner story; she is more riveted by characters' inner motivations when faced with the special challenges of enslavement. Morrison, in an interview for *The Los Angeles Times*, commented: "I certainly thought I knew as much about slavery as anybody....But it was the interior life I needed to find out about.' It is this 'interior life' in the throes of slavery that constitutes the theme of Morrison's novel *Beloved*" ("Morrison"). Many literary critics realized that *Beloved* explores not so much the daily rituals of plantation life, but "...the psychic implications, especially for women, of not owning one's body, one's children, one's reproductive capacity, or one's labor" (McKenzie 6).

As in other novels in this dissertation, but particularly those by black novelists

such as S. A. Williams or Octavia Butler, *Beloved* is Morrison's attempt to repair the historical record. According to Rebecca Ferguson in "*History, Memory and Language in Toni Morrison's Beloved*", "Behind the writing of the novel lay Morrison's conviction that (despite the published slave narratives) the records on that subject are still only an outline, and that the experience of slavery had never been adequately described on the imaginative level" (Ferguson 111). Morrison explains, "I know I can't change the future but I can change the past. It is the past, not the future, which is infinite. Our past was appropriated. I am one of the people who has to reappropriate it" (Taylor-Guthrie xiii). Toni Morrison notes:

Yes, the reclamation of the history of black people in this country is paramount in its importance because while you can't really blame the conqueror for writing history his own way, you can certainly debate it. There's a great deal of obfuscation and distortion and erasure, so that the presence and the heartbeat of black people has been systematically annihilated in many, many ways and the job of recovery is ours. It's a serious responsibility and one single human being can only do a very very tiny part of that, but it seems to me to be both secular and non-secular work for a writer. You have to stake it out and identify those who have preceded you--resummoning them, acknowledging them is just one step in that process of reclamation.... (Davis, "An interview" 224)

Beloved is that "reclamation of history," the story of women, slave mothers, largely invisible in the historical record, who represent all those haunted by the past.

Told in a circular fashion, much like the cyclical nature of history, and more like the chaotic nature of memory that eventually reveals, through multiple narrators, what Sethe works hard to forget: the moment when she decided to kill her children rather than have them stolen again by their slave-owner. "...while the slave narrative characteristically moves in a chronological, linear narrative fashion, *Beloved* meanders through time, sometimes circling back, other times moving vertically, spirally out of time and down space. Indeed, Morrison's text challenges the Western notion of linear time that informs American history and the slave narratives" (Sanders 358). Although Sethe intended to murder all her children, she succeeded in killing one, her two-year-old daughter who haunts her house on Bluestone Road.

The story begins in 1873 outside of Cincinnati, Ohio where Paul D, the last of the Sweet Home men, sits on Sethe's porch, waiting for her return. Because Paul and Sethe are reunited after many years, from this point in the novel, there will be a blurring of past and present as these two tell what has happened in the interim and in the process, they create a new life and a new story, together. Reconciling the slave past with the "free" present almost kills Sethe and Paul D, and their most helpless moment forces Denver, Sethe's only child who remains with her, to become an adult and interact with people outside of her home, something she has only done once before when she was seven-years-old. More than the physical damage that is almost indescribable, *Beloved* details the psychic trauma and mental gymnastics that all people, but especially black mothers, negotiated during antebellum America.

Beloved avoids description of the slaves' daily lives, preferring to catalogue

activities: Nowhere do the slaves burst into song as they work the fields. About Grandma Baby Suggs' labor at Sweet Home, Morrison writes, "What she did was stand beside the humming Lillian Garner while the two of them cooked, preserved, washed, ironed, made candles, clothes, soap and cider..." (139). While kneading bread at her job in a restaurant, Sethe chronicles her personal hardships: "Drain her mother's milk, they had already done. Divided her back into plant life—that too. Driven her fat-bellied into the woods—they had done that. All news of them was rot. They buttered Halle's face; gave Paul D iron to eat; crisped Sixo; hanged her own mother. She didn't want any more news about whitefolks..." (188). Sethe's mother-in-law, Grandma Baby Suggs, describes slavery thusly: "Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn't run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen, or seized" (23). After her son paid for her freedom, Baby Suggs "...decided that, because slave life had 'busted her legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb and tongue,' she had nothing left to make a living with but her heart—which she put to work at once" (87). Paul D's life of wandering produces this reverie:

During, before and after the War he had seen Negroes so stunned, or hungry, or tired or bereft it was a wonder they recalled or said anything. Who, like him, had hidden in caves and fought owls for food; who, like him, stole from pigs; who, like him, slept in trees in the day and walked by night; who, like him, had buried themselves in slop and jumped in wells to avoid regulators, raiders, paterollers, veterans, hill men, posses, and merrymakers. (66)

By portraying a small plantation in Kentucky with only six slaves and only one of them female, Morrison at the start prepares the reader to expect a personal, subjective, individual reaction to American slavery. Slavery's enormity is particularized. For example, one slave is named Sixo who embodies the "Sixty Millions and more" mentioned in the dedication. Robert Broad writes, "For the benefit of anyone who might need convincing that the history of African Americans qualifies as suppressed, destroyed, or denied, Morrison lays down her evidence before her book even begins, with her dedication of the novel to 'Sixty Million or more'" (193). This one slave, who stops speaking English, reverting to his native African tongue, cries out "Seven-O" as his last words for his woman is pregnant; he has lived long enough to reproduce, and the next generation, the next million, are imminent. In a 1987 interview with Walter Clemons, Morrison explains the sixty million as

the best educated guess at the number of black Africans who never even made it into slavery--those who died either as captives in Africa or on slave ships...Professor Robert L. Hall of Northeastern University is currently compiling a cultural and economic history of the Atlantic slave trade...and describes Morrison's figure as 'conservative' compared to some others (e.g., claims of 100 million or more Africans lost), he finds "Sixty Million" well above what documented historical analysis supports. At the same time, Professor Hall points out that the numbers one produces 'depend on what one includes' in one's calculations, and he agrees that the entire question of those 'who never even made it into slavery' remains shrouded in uncertainty. (Broad

195)

Morrison has been told by certain historians that as many as 200 million Africans died in the slave trade; she decided to use the smallest number any historian mentioned, sixty million (Angelo 257). With *Sixty Million and More* and the novel's dedication "To Sixty Millions and More," Toni Morrison wants readers to confront the inadequacies of historical record that cannot account for how many Africans were captured in the slave trade and to ponder the identity of the heretofore faceless, the lost, the individual life.

Since the narrative is not in straight chronology because the subjects repress or delicately circle references to their nadirs during slavery, the reader is placed in the same position as the characters: the violence done is never completely behind us, but it appears again and again. In symbolic terms, the past is never behind us; it is reclaimed each time the story is told. For example, Paul D may have been the last slave to see Halle, Sethe's husband, when their escape attempt goes awry. However, he avoids telling Sethe that her husband had suddenly snapped, lost his mind, because at the same moment Paul D was being led around with a bit in his mouth. He is put not only in shackles but he is silenced like a horse.³³ Slowly Paul D reveals that Halle may have

³³ Morrison traveled to Brazil to see the implements developed there to control slaves. Because "this is not a story to pass on," the U.S. has no museum and few written records that chronicle the torture tools used on slaves (Leonard 43). "Slave traders cannot, however, bear all the blame for our culture's "forgetting" of the sixty million. . . . Morrison describes the absence from the American cultural record of slavery's full story: 'I went to slave museums, but they weren't much help: little handcraft things slaves had made. No chains or restraining devices. In Brazil, though, they've kept everything. I got a lot of help down there'" (Broad 193).

witnessed Sethe's assault by Schoolteacher's nephews. That violence—stealing her mother's milk for her nursing baby, then enduring a beating that left her back scarred while nine months pregnant with another baby—that violence made her run barefoot from Kentucky to Cincinnati, giving birth along the way. Of course, the depths of Sethe's reaction to the orgy of pain she endures in order to be free resurfaces when she murders her child. Rather than return to Sweet Home plantation, Sethe intends to kill *all* her children. "My plan was to take us all to the other side where my own ma'am is" (203). She succeeds in cutting the throat of her two-year-old with a handsaw. The sheriff surveys the scene:

Two were lying open-eyed in sawdust; a third pumped blood down the dress of the main one—the woman schoolteacher bragged about, the one he said made fine ink, damn good soup, pressed his collars the way he liked besides having at least ten breeding years left. But now she'd gone wild, due to the mishandling of the nephew who'd overbeat her and made her cut and run. (149)

This mother is determined that her children be free, somewhere.

Not only are slavery's horrors experienced from an individual perspective, but through the character of Beloved, readers relive the Middle Passage, presented as a race memory.³⁴ Morrison recreates the buried-alive closeness of the passage in Beloved's final soliloquy (210) and in the little we know of Sethe's mother who survived the crossing: "She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names, she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him.

³⁴ Morrison has noted that there is no song, story, or poem that survived the Middle Passage. All is silence (Darling 247-248).

The others she did not put her arms around. Never. Never..." (62). The novel pushes readers to confront the experience of the Middle Passage, an experience so horrible that it defied artistic creation, and one could argue, until *Beloved*, recreation.

Juxtaposing the Middle Passage horrors with the Sweet Home plantation does not make slavery any better. The Garners eschew vicious brutalities, keeping their plantation small in scale and engendering personal interaction. There are five male slaves who are "treated like men" (11). Mr. Garner asks their opinions about performing chores, and even allows them to handle guns—but these behaviors happen only in their self-contained world of Sweet Home. These men are not permitted to leave the plantation, and Garner's neighbors express hostility about the latitude he gives his slaves (219, 125). Originally, Baby Suggs is the lone female on the plantation, and after the abuse she had suffered on a large Carolina plantation, Baby Suggs appreciates the difference at Sweet Home: "It's better here, but I'm not. The Garners, it seemed to her, ran a special kind of slavery, treating them like paid labor, listening to what they said, teaching what they wanted known. And he didn't stud his boys. Never brought them to her cabin with directions to 'lay down with her,' like they did in Carolina, or rented their sex out on other farms" (140). Mr. Garner even permits Halle, Baby Suggs' son, to work extra jobs in order to buy his mother's freedom, and then Mr. Garner drives Suggs to Cincinnati and hands her over to an abolitionist family he knows. When Garner defends his version of slavery to the Bodwins, Baby Suggs thinks, "...you got my boy and I'm all broke down. You be renting him out to pay for me way after I'm gone to Glory" (146). The little dignity the slaves are afforded at Sweet Home dies with Mr.

Garner.

As other novels in this thesis detail, the death of the slave-owner is a seismic disruption for slaves and it is no less here. Mrs. Garner, perhaps not wanting to be the lone white person on her farm, sends for her brother-in-law, Schoolteacher, who arrives with two nephews (36). Schoolteacher is so named by the slaves for his study of them. He enjoys the ink that Sethe makes and he writes in a book at night after interviewing them. Sethe explains, "It was a book about us but we didn't know that right away. We thought it was his manner to ask us questions. He commenced to carry round a notebook and write down what we said" (37). Schoolteacher and his nephews measure Sethe's body parts, number her teeth, and study her like a thing (191). Mrs. Garner let Schoolteacher oversee the plantation as he wishes since she had become an invalid after her husband's death. Schoolteacher's quiet abuse made all the slaves decide to escape via the Underground Railroad. Their plans are thwarted; all the men are captured by Schoolteacher and a posse, but the two women, Sethe and Sixo's wife, get away. In the end Sweet Home descends to the same hellish state of its neighbor plantations.

More than most novels in this dissertation, *Beloved* emphasizes the psychic and spiritual wounding of the slave family by chattel slavery. Among the slave characters, none know the nurturing and identity formation that life in a family creates. In her review in the *New York Times Book Review*, novelist Margaret Atwood wrote: "Above all, it [slavery] is seen as one of the most viciously antifamily institutions human beings have ever devised. The slaves are motherless, fatherless, deprived of their mates, their children, their kin. It is a world in which people suddenly vanish and are

never seen again, not through accident or covert operation or terrorism, but as a matter of everyday legal policy" (qtd. in "Morrison"). Then, there is the horror story of Stamp Paid:

Born Joshua, he renamed himself when he handed over his wife to his master's son. Handed her over in the sense that he did not kill anybody, thereby himself, because his wife demanded that he stay alive. Otherwise, she reasoned, where and to whom could she return when the boy was through? With that gift, he decided that he didn't owe anybody anything. Whatever his obligations were, that act paid them off....So he extended this debtlessness to other people by helping them pay out and off whatever they owed in misery. Beaten runaways? He ferried them and rendered them paid for.... (184-185)

Still, the centerpiece of the novel is the "marriage" of Halle and Sethe yet the marriage does not complete each other in traditional fashion. The institution of slavery renders marriage moot. Sethe is bought to replace Baby Suggs as the only slave female at Sweet Home after Halle buys his mother's freedom. Sethe takes a year to select a husband from among the Garners' five male slaves. Halle had worked five years of Sundays to buy his mother; that sacrifice for his mother recommended him as a husband to fourteen-year-old Sethe (11). When Sethe tells Mrs. Garner of her choice, she had expected a wedding. Instead, Mrs. Garner gives Sethe ear rings when "she saw how bad I felt when I found out there wasn't going to be no ceremony, no preacher. Nothing. I thought there should be something—something to say it was right and true.... They said it was all right for us to be husband and wife and that was it. All of it" (58-59).

Since the legality and reality of slave marriage is contested—the slaves have no rights to each other--of course the products of the marriage, slave children, do not belong to their parents. Baby Suggs has had eight children by six different men. All she can remember about her first-born is that she loved burned bread (5). One child was fathered by an overseer who had promised not to sell another son if Baby Suggs had sex with him. He sold the child anyway, and in retaliation Suggs refuses to love the mulatto child. Halle is the only child who had remains with her. They are sold together to the Garners when Halle is ten-years-old (23). Baby Suggs set her motherhood goals fairly low: she always worked as well as she could so white men would not knock her down in front of her children. She believes it makes children crazy to see their mothers publicly and physically abused (208).

Sethe's relationship with her mother is essentially nonexistent and that shapes Sethe's fierce protection of her own children. "...Nan had to nurse whitebabies and me too because Ma'am was in the rice. The little whitebabies got it first and I got what was left. Or none. There was no nursing milk to call my own. I know what it is to be without the milk that belongs to you; to have to fight and holler for it, and to have so little left. I'll tell Beloved about that; she'll understand..." (200). Once, the eight-year-old "who watched over the young ones" pointed to a slave in a distant field as Sethe's mother. Sethe tells Beloved, "By the time I woke up in the morning, she was in line. If the moon was bright they worked by its light. Sunday she slept like a stick. She must of nursed me two or three weeks—that's the way the others did. Then she went back in rice and I sucked from another woman whose job it was" (60). Another slave who had come over

on the same ship as Sethe's mother told Sethe how special she is: "She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names, she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man"(62). Once, Sethe's mother shows her her mark, where she had been branded, so Sethe will be able to identify her mother if her face is not recognizable. Perhaps her mother had a premonition about her end, because Sethe is not able to identify her in death. Sethe's mother is executed in a mass hanging; Sethe never discovered why (61). The lack of interaction with her own mother makes Sethe cherish her ability to mother her own children due to slavery, free of slavery's dictates. Again the past circumscribes the present of each character.

When the time arrives and a woman gives the signal from a cornfield, Sethe hands her three young children, all under six years, to the woman with a wagon. She had thought that she and Halle would catch up with the wagon and her babies, one of whom she was nursing. Little does she know that her return to the farm will result in being robbed of her mother's milk and beaten though pregnant. She responds by doing the unexpected: running anyway and giving birth en route. She acts, not knowing what has happened to the men—one hanged and another burned alive (198). Sethe tries to explain to Paul D:

'I did it. I got us all out. Without Halle too. Up till then it was the only thing I ever did on my own. Decided. And it came off right, like it was supposed to. We was here. Each and every one of my babies and me too. I birthed them and I got em out and it wasn't no accident. I did that. I had help, of course, lots of that, but

it was still me doing it...But it was more than that. It was a kind of selfishness I never knew nothing about before. It felt good. Good and right. I was big, Paul D, and deep and wide and when I stretched out my arms all my children could get in between. I was *that* wide. Look like I loved em more after I got here. Or maybe I couldn't love em proper in Kentucky because they wasn't mine to love. But when I got here, when I jumped down off that wagon—there wasn't nobody in the world I couldn't love if I wanted to. You know what I mean?' He knew exactly what she meant: to get to a place where you could love anything you chose—not to need permission for desire—well now, *that* was freedom. (162)

In this dialogue Morrison explores how slavery had nullified love, normal parental relationships, since love can only flourish with freedom, with choice. Once Sethe discovers what mother's love is during her twenty-eight days of freedom, reflexively and fiercely she protects her children's future. In an interview with Marsha Darling, Morrison stated:

Under those theatrical circumstances of slavery, if you made that claim, an unheard-of claim, which is that you are the mother of these children--that's an outrageous claim for a slave woman. She just *became* a mother, which is becoming a human being in a situation which is earnestly dependent on your not being one....Therefore when she is away from her husband she merges into that role, and it's unleashed and it's fierce. She almost steps over into what she was terrified of being regarded as, which is an animal. It's an excess of maternal feeling, a total surrender to that commitment, and you know, such

excesses are not good. ...This is what the townspeople of Cincinnati respond to, not her grief, but her arrogance. (252)

Sethe tries to explain to Beloved why she had killed her rather than have her re-enslaved: "That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up. And though she and others lived through and got over it, she could never let it happen to her own. The best thing she was, was her children" (251). Paul D sees the danger in Sethe's response to freedom: "For a used-to-be-slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love" (45). Sethe tells Paul D: "I stopped him....I took and put my babies where they'd be safe." "Your love is too thick," he said...." Sethe: "...Love is or it ain't. Thin love ain't love at all" (164). Paul: "...How'd it work?" They ain't at Sweet Home. Schoolteacher ain't got em. Paul: Maybe there's worse. Sethe: It ain't my job to know what's worse. It's my job to know what is and to keep them away from what I know is terrible. I did that. What you did was wrong, Sethe....You got two feet, Sethe, not four,' he said, and right then a forest sprang up between them; trackless and quiet" (165). Sethe defends killing her child as the ultimate protective act for a mother, forced into murder by the institution of slavery.

The contradictions within this murderous love act haunt the entire family. Grandma Baby Suggs refuses to condemn or defend Sethe's choice. She takes to her bed and dies. Sethe is briefly jailed for the act, and Denver, a nursing infant, is imprisoned with her. Howard and Buglar, Sethe and Halle's oldest children, remain frightened of their

mother, recalling her attempt at killing them and run away as soon as they are adolescents, never to return (3). And the murdered child...comes back.

The novel's first sentence speaks of 124 Bluestone Road being a haunted house in which only Sethe and her daughter Denver remain. No one comes near them or the house until Paul D wanders in from out of town. When Paul first enters the house, he too notices the ghost moving furniture. Sethe and Denver are used to the noises and the furniture movements, but Paul reacts angrily, breaking chairs, hurt that on top of everything else, Sethe has to deal with the supernatural too. The ghost departs after Paul's tantrum, and Sethe and Paul begin their love affair. Denver is a little disappointed at the ghost's departure for the ghost was the only companionship she had. Then, a few weeks later, upon returning from a country fair, the three find a fully-dressed, twenty-year-old woman sitting on their porch. As soon as Sethe sees her, her water breaks as it had in labor (50-51). The woman tells them her only name is Beloved, and she doesn't appear to have any place to go. Her predicament is not unusual for black people in 1873; many roam the countryside, looking for family: "Silent, except for social courtesies, when they met one another they neither described nor asked about the sorrow that drove them from one place to another. The whites didn't bear speaking on. Everybody knew" (52-53).

As for her name, Beloved, it is the only word engraved on Sethe's dead daughter's headstone. Sethe had sex with the white engraver in order to pay for it (5).

"Beloved" is the only word Sethe heard of the preacher at the funeral service for her

dead toddler; she had been released from jail, briefly, to attend the funeral.³⁵ Gwen Bergner notes, "... that the word 'beloved' names not only the girl baby returned; in the funeral service the word addresses the mourners of the dead. She writes, 'the address 'Beloved,' in effect, shifts back again away from the child and the memory of events past to the present, people and time" (Harris 350-51). Who is beloved? It is the dead two-year-old and her family; it is the past and the present. Beloved is all Africans.

The novel's epigram from Romans 9:25 ("I will call them my people which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved") engages in similar misappropriation of text and intention as St. Paul, according to Robert Broad in "Giving Blood to the Scraps: Haints, History, and Hosea in *Beloved*." Morrison quotes the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans, but the Apostle is quoting a much older prophet, Hosea. "Here, Morrison enlists St. Paul to emphasize that reclaiming an individual also means reclaiming an entire race or cultural group. This communal reclaiming is exactly what happens when Beloved returns to 124 Bluestone Road: Looking for their "beloved," Sethe and Denver get their people, too. All sixty million of them" (Broad 192)³⁶.

³⁵ "As Gwen Bergner has noted, the word 'beloved' 'is an adjective before it is a noun. As the title of this book its sense as modifier calls attention, before the first sentence, to an absence--the absence of the thing it modifies'" (Harris 350-351). Morrison uses the word not only as an adjective and noun, but in three places in the novel (especially in Grandma Baby Suggs' sermons), Morrison employs the word as two verbs, "be" "loved," a command.

³⁶ "For Morrison's distant evocation of Hosea bears witness not only to the history of an enslaved and oppressed people but also to what can happen to that history. It's not just that St. Paul fails to address the historical context of Hosea's prophecies when he

As a character, who is Beloved? Denver instantly realizes that the 20-year old stranger, who is the age the baby would have been had she lived, is her sister's ghost in the flesh. Sethe and Paul D are slower to comprehend, perhaps because of their inability to make sense of their dehumanization during slavery, they cannot recognize what they know. They spend most of their time together trying to reconcile their slave lives with their free years. It can be argued that Beloved represents not merely Sethe's murdered daughter who was killed to prevent a return to slavery, but Slavery itself: "Since Beloved brings the whole traumatic experience of slavery with her, she not only knows more than she could otherwise have known in her previous short life, but she also contains the *effects* that slavery had, its profound fragmentation of the self and of the connections the self might have with others" (Ferguson 114). Eventually she will become intimate with Paul D in the storeroom (read: memory), thereby alienating him from Sethe. Eventually she consumes Sethe as Sethe becomes riddled with remorse at not being able to explain to her daughter the horrors of slavery, a return to which prompted the murder. Sethe, after losing her job at the

quotes Hosea; it's that Paul suppresses the historical context of the quoted passage in order to use it for his own purposes and directly against the descendants of Hosea for whom and to whom Hosea was, after all, writing. Paul's is a classic case of a writer dehistoricizing a text in order to appropriate that text for purposes that violate, and even contradict, its original meaning....What we see here is a writer working to oppress people by using their own writers and historians against them. This sort of thing should sound familiar to us: How different from Paul's cooptation of Hosea is, say, the absence of the devices of slavery from museums and books that are supposed to tell the truth about the past? Both are acts of historical distortion and extirpation.... Where Morrison might have quoted Hosea directly, she quoted Paul instead. Perhaps she hoped we might notice what St. Paul was up to and relate it to a central issue of the novel and of contemporary African American cultural work: the struggle to reclaim one's people's history even while others distort, suppress, and deny it" (Broad 194-195).

restaurant, starves to death as Beloved grows bigger and bigger, both from Sethe's guilt and perhaps from Paul's baby. No one in the black community sees Beloved since 124 Bluestone and its inhabitants were considered pariahs from the day of the baby's murder. Denver, fearing for her mother's life, ventures into town and begs for food from the black schoolteacher. The black teacher, a savior figure and the opposite of the slave overseer, Schoolteacher, the pseudo-intellectual, organizes black women who begin leaving food at 124. Much of this charity is done out of guilt at past jealousy. No one sends word ahead that Schoolteacher and three other white men are heading towards 124 Bluestone because the black community is jealous of Baby Suggs' good fortune and Sethe's daring accomplishments. The day before the murder, Baby Suggs had hosted a spontaneous feast for ninety people in honor of Sethe's arrival with newborn Denver. The next morning, out of pique or envy, no one warns the Suggs family of approaching recapture (136-138). After the killing, Sethe and Denver become pariahs; Baby Suggs dies. In a response to Denver's story of her mother's desperate condition, the black women decide to meet in front of 124 Bluestone for a prayer meeting. Beloved comes to the front door, naked and pregnant, and those who see her describe her differently, and some don't see her at all (265, 267).

In symbolic terms, this moment represents human response to the past or history: each event is individually interpreted, depending on the observer's vantage point, and some are blind to what happens in front of them. In an interview with Gail Caldwell after the novel's publication, Toni Morrison stated, "The past, until you confront it,

until you live through it, keeps coming back in other forms. The shapes redesign themselves in other constellations, until you get a chance to play it over again” (Caldwell 241). Beloved, representing that “unconfronted past,” does not look the same to those few who note her. Hence, historical record exhibits such subjectivity; everyone sees it from a personal perspective.

In her last moments, Beloved stands as a contradictory image, both as the African ancestor, the beautiful African mother, connecting the mothers and daughters of African descent to their pre-slavery heritage and power, and as the all-consuming devil-child. The spirit of the past has taken on a personality in this novel, and thus Morrison makes the writing of history a resurrection of ancestral spirits, the spirit of the long buried past. Morrison resurrects the devil-child, the spiteful, beautiful painful past, so that Beloved--and the novel—will live on to haunt us. (Krumholz 401)

At that moment of exposure, while Sethe and Denver are distracted, Beloved runs back to the river and simply disappears. “In the place where long grass opens, the girl who waited to be loved and cry shame erupts into her separate parts, to make it easy for the chewing laughter to swallow her all away. It was not a story to pass on. They forgot her like a bad dream....Remembering seemed unwise...” (274)³⁷. Critic “Mae Henderson provides an alternate and equally compelling reading of the final passage of the work, suggesting that the last phrase, ‘This is not a story to be passed on,’ urges

³⁷ “Morrison’s final statement, that ‘it was not a story to pass on’, none the less sustains a paradox in its double reference...Within the frame of the narrative, the black community has chosen to close the door on this particular claim, and we have been shown the reasons why. The narrator, on the other hand, is passing the story on, and to do so is unquestionably to acknowledge its claim, at the very time when the traces seem to be vanishing” (Ferguson 123-24).

that we not ‘pass’ on the story but rather continue to retell it so that its meaning will not be forgotten.” In other words, a possible pun on “passed on” is to allow an opportunity to slide by. In Henderson’s interpretation, Morrison is urging readers to remember (Beaulieu 81). The character’s disappearance signifies “...the story that the slave narrative could not tell” (Parrish 87). The novel ends:

It was not a story to pass on.

So they forgot her. Like an unpleasant dream during a troubling sleep....

This is not a story to pass on.

Down by the stream in back of 124 her footprints come and go, come and go.

They are so familiar. Should a child, an adult place his feet in them, they will fit.

Take them out and they disappear again as though nobody ever walked there.

By and by all trace is gone, and what is forgotten is not only the footprints but the water too and what it is down there. The rest is weather. Not the breath of the disremembered and unaccounted for, but wind in the eaves, or spring ice thawing too quickly. Just weather. Certainly no clamor for a kiss.

Beloved. (Morrison 275)

The import of ending the novel on “Beloved” also summons a host of interpretations. Obviously, it reminds readers one last time of the ghost of the past, but it also serves as the opening word in a marriage ceremony; it may represent Sethe’s union with Paul D. Finally, “[i]t may also be the injunction with which Morrison wishes to leave us: be loved...” (Beaulieu 78). Since the novel’s last word takes us back to the title

and the dedication (“Sixty Million and more”) and the epigram (“I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved”), return to the beginning—and remember. In a *Time* magazine interview, Morrison confessed, “I thought this has got to be the least read of all the books I’d written because it is about something that the characters don’t want to remember, I don’t want to remember, black people don’t want to remember, white people don’t want to remember. I mean, it’s national amnesia” (Angelo 257). Memory will fail because of a lack of will and evidence to support it. The footprints are washed away. Valerie Smith writes: “The novel reminds us that our critical acumen and narrative capacities notwithstanding, we can never know what they [slaves] endured. We can never enjoy a complacent understanding of lives lived under slavery. To the extent that *Beloved* returns the slaves to themselves, the novel humbles contemporary readers before the unknown and finally unknowable horrors the slaves endured” (354).

Some contemporary readers and writers view *Beloved* as a healing experience. Perhaps Barbara Neely, novelist and short story writer, defines the novel’s importance to black readers best:

I’ve always said that probably our major difficulty in this country as black people is not what is happening to us externally, but what is and is not happening to us internally, beginning with a serious emotional exploration of slavery and what it has meant in reference to our perception of the world--the ways in which we raise our children, the way we manage our relationships, all of that. There is this huge and festering sore within all of us that we won’t even

get near, let alone feel. And then comes *Beloved*. (Beaulieu 155)

According to Marilyn Sanders in ““A different remembering: memory, history, and meaning in *Beloved*“:

Morrison’s purpose is not to convince white readers of the slave’s humanity, but to address black readers by inviting us to return to the very part of our past that many have repressed, forgotten or ignored. Yet, as readers, if we understand Toni Morrison’s ironic and subversive vision at all, we know that our response to the text’s apparent final call for silence and forgetting is not that at all. Instead, it is an ironic reminder that the process of consciously remembering not only empowers us to tell the difficult stories that must be passed on, but it also empowers us to make meaning of our individual and collective lives as well. (363)

In terms of critical reception, the novel’s reviews were nothing short of “a literary phenomenon” (Heinze). Morrison has achieved a rare plateau for “critical acclaim as well as commercial success; *Dictionary of Literary Biography* contributor Susan L. Blake called the author ““an anomaly in two respects’ because ‘she is a black writer who has achieved national prominence and popularity, and she is a popular writer who is taken seriously’” (“Morrison”). The novel was “lavished with praise.” For examples:

Leonard (*Los Angeles Times Book Review*, 30 August 1987) stated that, without *Beloved*, ‘our imagination of the nation's self has a hole in it big enough to die from.’ He felt *Beloved* ‘belongs on the highest shelf of American literature,

even if half a dozen canonized white boys have to be elbowed off.’ Walter Clemons in *Newsweek* (28 September 1987) declared, ‘I think we have a masterpiece on our hands here.’ (Heinze)

“Morrison’s novel has provoked and amazed literary critics; a virtual industry of *Beloved* (and, by extension, Morrisonian) scholarship has evolved...” (Beaulieu 58).

“Acclaim for *Beloved* came from both sides of the Atlantic” (“Morrison”).

Black woman writer or simply American novelist, Morrison is a prominent and respected figure in modern letters. As testament to her influence, something of a cottage industry has arisen of Morrison assessments. According to a *Time* article, the author ‘has inspired a generation of black artists,... produced seismic effects on publishing ... [and] affected the course of black-studies programs across the U.S.’ Several books and dozens of critical essays are devoted to the examination of her fiction.... Popular acceptance of her work has seldom flagged.... The author’s hometown of Lorain, Ohio, is the setting for the biennial Toni Morrison Society Conference; a 2000 gathering attracted 130 scholars from around the globe. (qtd. in “Morrison”)

According to Charles Larson, writing in the *Chicago Tribune Book World*, each of Morrison’s novels “is as original as anything that has appeared in our literature in the last twenty years. The contemporaneity that unites them--the troubling persistence of racism in America--is infused with an urgency that only a black writer can have about our society.” (qtd. in “Morrison”). Larson’s comment about Morrison’s originality was prescient. In 2006, the *New York Times* polled 125 novelists and writers to select

“the most important novel of the last twenty-five years.” The winner? *Beloved* received the most votes. A. O. Scott wrote, “With remarkable speed, *Beloved* has, less than 20 years after its publication, become a staple of the college literary curriculum, which is to say a classic.” It “...has inserted itself into the American canon more completely than any of its potential rivals” (Scott). Not only is the novel a darling of literary critics and in academe, but it has been a bestseller since publication.

The final novel to be considered in this dissertation is written by the youngest author of all here. An African-American, Connie Briscoe (1952-) was born on December 31, 1952 in Washington, D.C. She earned a BS in 1974 from Hampton University and a MPS in 1978 from American University. *A Long Way Home* is Briscoe’s first historical novel although she has written three other novels about contemporary life for African-American females (“Briscoe”). Briscoe first learned of the sisters Ellen and Susan as a child in her grandmother’s bedroom. On the bureau were portraits of two white-looking women. In “Author’s note” she writes:

...over the years, I talked to relatives; collected old letters, photos, Bibles; and visited libraries and archives... Unfortunately, given the nature of slavery, the fact that the Madisons had all of their personal records destroyed, and that many records were lost in the Civil War, there were some things that I couldn’t uncover. What I did learn is here, but much of it is also my imagination—what I think life must have been like for Susie, Clara, Susan, and the thousands of women like them. (Briscoe 348)

A Long Way Home (1999) shares much in common with *Jubilee* and *Sally Hemings* since it is the fictionalized story of Briscoe's great-great-grandmother who was born on Montpelier, President James Madison's plantation in Virginia. The tale begins in the 1820s, looking at four generations of female slave life in Connie Briscoe's past. The author imagines the lives of Susie and her daughter Clara who are Ellen and Susan's grandmother and mother respectively. Despite the passage of time, Susan's life is little different from that of her grandmother on a plantation with "good" slave-owners, James and Dolley Madison. The slaves' lives are torn asunder by the death of James Madison and the ascension of his drunken stepson, "Mass Todd," to proprietor. Slave families are wrecked by sale to various owners, and the novelist's family is no exception. Barely an adolescent, Susan is sold to her white father's family where she becomes the personal slave to her half-sister. Bereft of all the places she knew and the people she loved, Susan nevertheless makes her way in the world, eventually marrying a freedman and starting a family. The Civil War terminates Susan's servitude with her half-sister's family, and when she is free, she reunites with her sister Ellen and stepfather from whom she was parted almost thirty years earlier. She never saw her mother again after her sale.

No doubt Connie Briscoe wants readers to see how bad slave life was on a "good" plantation—of a Founding Father no less. Slavery, a story not to be told is woven into the fabric of this nation's conception. Only through the use of imagination are the stories of the slaves, the stories of their agonies at the hands of the great framers of the Constitution, only now can descendants, far enough away from persecution,

attempt to envision unspeakable trauma. Although Madison slaves are seldom whipped—only once or twice—during the Madisons’ tenure, they work like animals, from nine years of age (17, 27). The novel focuses on the chores of the “house slaves” who are constantly occupied given the frequent guests at the plantation. The slave women rise before dawn to empty chamber pots and to bring in fresh water from the well for the obligatory non-stop cleaning and cooking (3, 20). Sometimes Clara, Briscoe’s great-great-great-grandmother, stands all evening holding a candle for dinner guests (36). Even house servants appreciate getting away to the deplorable slave cabins because at least they can be away from serving whites. Nevertheless, the drafty cabins are a source of much sickness (39-40).

On weekends, the slaves are permitted slightly less work, but there was no such thing as leisure. The slaves work only half of Saturday and “...they would gather in the grove for a night of food, games, and dancing.” Slaves from nearby plantations might also slip in for visits (31). On Sunday slaves are permitted to go to church before serving dinner (47, 52).

The relative tranquility of Montpelier for slaves is not to be trusted, according to Clara’s father who lives on a neighboring plantation. Although James Madison claims his slaves are “like family,” Clara’s father explains:

‘You family to them folks only so long as they need you and it don’t hurt ‘em none to keep you. Mass Jimmy better than most, but he going to think about his white family first. In hard times, us colored folks always the first ones to

suffer 'cause the truth is Mass Jimmy and all the rest of 'em can do whatever they want to you, me, your mama, and all the rest of us....' (45)

No, Montpelier is not like the Jones plantation where slaves are “beat unmercifully” for stealing food, nor are slaves allowed to marry a slave from another plantation. (Slave reproduction must enrich Mr. Jones and no one else.) Therefore, slaves are always running away from this plantation, unlike Montpelier (23).

The most devastating feature of slavery at Montpelier is sale. Under James Madison, no slave is sold who “...didn't want to go” (28). What makes a slave family desire a new plantation? The Madisons do not repair ramshackle slave cabins in order to pay off the gambling debts and drunken debaucheries of “Mass Todd” (42). Once James Madison dies, “One by one they were being kicked out—from the field, the house—often screaming and begging not to be sold away from their loved ones” (73). Families are no longer sold as units; individuals are sold to the highest bidder. Because of a family lawsuit between James Madison's brother and wife, all the slaves are threatened with sale as a resolution to the conflict (95). Dolley Madison sells as many slave families as she can to Henry Moncure who rents half of Montpelier (99). Eventually, Susan, Clara's daughter, will be sold, “...plucked away from her family as casually as you would pluck the feathers from a chicken” (148).

As much as the novel is about anything, it is about the rape of the female slave and the absolute lack of protection from sexual abuse, especially for house servants. Soon after he inherits the plantation, Mass Todd comes to the attic to rape nineteen-year-old Clara. He is beat up by Clara's mother and the other slave women who sleep

there. Slave women "...had taken to carrying big sticks to bed...since Mass Jimmy's death" (69). Although Clara avoids this attack, her new owner, Henry Moncure, becomes the father of her two daughters. Readers are not shown any interactions between Moncure and Clara, but given her house slave status, her collusion with or acceptance of sexual relations with white men is not required. For their part, male slaves cannot respond to abuse to female slaves without getting killed. Nevertheless, when Clara's father hears of Todd's attempted rape, he threatens to kill Todd who is absent from home that day (85-86). For his outburst he is demoted from driver to field hand, prompting him to run away (87). Clara's future husband offers to protect her from Todd, but Clara realizes that "no amount of pride in a black man would help her fight off these white beasts. She had to do that herself. She had learned that when her daddy tried it" (101). Clara's daughters are thrown into a similarly dangerous world with no protection. However, Susan, a "...motherless child, alone and missing her mama, but still having the courage and fortitude to build the best life she could in an alien environment, is the heart of this novel" (McHenry).

A Long Way Home arrives at its heartfelt destination. The novel received favorable reviews with a 150,000 book printing and a \$350,000 promotional tour ("Briscoe," *Publisher's Weekly*).

Conclusion

The civil rights movement affected all aspects of American culture, so American literature, including the writers, the readers, and the publishers, was no exception. Protests over the hundred years of racial inequities since slavery produced an

American culture eager for authorial voices and opinions and fictional characters that had been largely invisible in prior chapters. Therefore, of the eight novels in this chapter, seven were written by African-Americans and five of them are female. The lone white male novelist, John Ehle, produced a novel about a Southern white man who had had little contact with slaves who impetuously risks all his worldly goods to free a young fugitive. Unusual for this pairing, there are no sexual fireworks; Ehle preferred to show a white Southern male with sexual restraint. The other male authors, Frank Yerby and Charles Johnson, include many more white characters than their African-American female novelist-counterparts. In addition, both African-American male novelists create black male protagonists who, through their own efforts and talents, triumph over slavery, going so far as to be free sexual agents, selecting their own partners, something that rarely happened according to historians. This type of protagonist never appeared in Frank Yerby's mammoth literary canon until the 1970s and some critics accused him of pandering to the black militancy of the 1970s. Not only did male slaves select female slaves as sex partners, but the novels of Yerby, Johnson, and Williams broke a taboo; all these works featured a male slave having sex with a white female who had encouraged the contact. (In Johnson's *Oxherding Tale*, the fugitive slave, while posing as a white schoolteacher, goes so far as to *marry* a white woman.) These historical novelists use their imaginations to create an antebellum past unlike those of their predecessors. Yet as Ashraf Rushdy reminds us, historians often construct works like novelists—selecting certain characters and events to highlight while ignoring others and using their

imaginations to recreate unknown worlds (141).

The freedom to love, and the freedom to protect that love, is the test of true freedom for Americans so it is not unusual that all of these novels interrogate that proposition. *Sally Hemings*, both the book and the character, is one long meditation on the boundaries on love between a slave and her owner, especially when the owner is none other than Thomas Jefferson, architect of the Declaration of Independence. What becomes of the children they produced? Since many believed (prior to recent DNA tests) that Thomas Jefferson would never have a love affair or sexual contact with any slave, the novel's speculations created a firestorm of controversy at publication. With its time-travel motif, *Kindred* tests what is the nature of love between a modern black woman and white man, and how is it warped when literally thrown transported to the past. Its interracial passion between a couple without the celebrity status of Jefferson and Hemings posed no problem for readers. Perhaps because the situation between the white male and the slave woman has received so much attention, Yerby, Johnson, and Williams speculated about an alternative coupling of a slave male with a white woman. Finally, the heartbreak in *A Long Way from Home*, *Dessa Rose*, and *Beloved* exists because the slaves have no means of saving loved ones from sale; slave relationships can be severed forever on the whimsey of the slave-owner. Being sold and dying are essentially the same thing for slaves' families.

The most unique feature of this historical period is how women were set free to tell their own stories and some decided to give voice to those muted in fictional and

historical record: slave women. In previous chapters, readers experienced slavery through the perspectives of “good” masters and bad, through white wives and daughters of slave-owners, through abolitionists and rebellious male slaves. We were told the slave rape victim enjoyed it, even encouraged it. By 1968, writers appeared who were willing to imagine what slavery must have been like for various women: for a girl on the run from an abusive master-father; for a house servant with no one to protect her from the brutal whimsies of master or mistress; for rape victim’s relationship with the rapist’s child; for the lash across the breasts and back; for the not-knowing whatever became of parents, siblings, spouses, children; for all they would do, all they would kill, to be free. In and through these novels, readers reclaim the minds, the bodies, the spirits of these silenced characters.

The African-American female writers especially explain the 100-year absence of the slave woman, as a full-blooded character like others, and not in caricature. What took her so long to appear? Why was not she worthy of the psychic energy to summon? These writers revealed that the slave women’s disappearance from both history and novels was deliberate. The texts themselves included characters whose sole purpose is to obfuscate the slave female from history. A schoolteacher-writer figure appears in *Oxherding Tale*, *Dessa Rose*, and *Beloved*. This character’s sole *raison d’être* is to distort or erase America’s slave past. (In contrast, the modern protagonists in *Kindred* are both professional writers who cannot write at all about the trauma experienced in antebellum Maryland, thereby obscuring the entire experience.) According to literary critic Timothy Parrish, “...whereas the writers of

slave narratives were intent on inventing their free selves, contemporary African-American writers have been intent on inventing their slave selves” (81). Annalees, Sally, Dana and her grandmother Hagar, Dessa Rose, Sethe, and Susan have been given voice in the national dialogue about slavery.

In terms of time, these novelists are farthest away from the slave past, and all of them question how they know what they know of American slavery given the problematic renderings of it in history and literature. Chase-Riboud, Yerby, Butler, Williams, Morrison, and Briscoe in interviews detail the years of research spent before writing their novels. Often excursions were made to scout out sites. They knew their stories would be contradicting fictional antecedents in particular, and they wanted to establish, as much for themselves as anyone else, that their imaginings were as possible as others’. Yet these novelists were not motivated by the same goal in their research and writing. For instance, Charles Johnson makes much of what he perceives as a sharp contrast with Toni Morrison’s work. He believes that “she is trying to recover an essentialized, racialized African-American identity” whereas he does not believe that race shapes individual destiny in America (Parrish 83). Timothy Parrish continues, “Unquestionably, Morrison looks to the past with a more longing eye than Johnson does, but the formulation that Morrison seeks the past while Johnson looks to the future risks refusing each writer her or his complexity. The real lesson is that the meaning of the slaves’ heritage remains fluid--a kind of ongoing collective work” (97). Both novelists’ approaches to the questions of historical recovery and race are valid.

Neither Morrison nor Johnson, or any of the writers in this chapter, believe that “...the experience of slavery, however we define it, can be known exactly for what it was” (Parrish).³⁸ Recreating the factual past is not the quest of any historical novelist; they leave that to historians. Some historical novelists attempt to reclaim the past in order to play a dirge for those never-buried while others return to the past to create new life and new possibilities for the present.

³⁸ Critic Ashraf Rushdy differentiates between slave characters, Sethe, Dessa, and Dana: “Like Morrison’s Sethe, whose back is marked as a sign of her mental scarring, or Dessa, whose genitalia are scarred as a sign of the sexual commodification of black women..., Dana loses part of her body to history, part of her fundamental integrity to the past....Unlike Dessa or Sethe, who lose parts of their body *in* the past, Dana loses parts of her body *to* the past. Dana’s lost arm, then, is less a sign of how the peculiar institution brutalized her body...then a symptom of how recovering the past involves losing a grip on the present” (“Families” 138).

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Chapter 6: **Conclusion**

Bernard DeVoto writes, “...the most realistic historical novel is at bottom only an effort to understand and justify ourselves by projecting into the past the most comforting reasons why we should have turned out to be what we are. Our guilt will rest less heavily on us in the dark if we could not have become other than what we are....Fiction makes a fine show of objective imagination about the past, but behind it is a secret wish and an urgent need. The historical novel is a pure form of social myth” (49).

Toni Morrison observes, “There is a necessity for remembering the horror, but of course there’s a necessity for remembering it in a manner in which it can be digested, in a manner in which the memory is not destructive. The act of writing ... [*Beloved*], in a way, is a way of confronting it and making it possible to remember” (qtd. in Darling 247-48).

From *Oxherding Tale*: “Memory, as the metaphysicians say, is imagination” (Johnson 109).

In many ways the silence about Thomas Jefferson’s intimacy with the slave, Sally Hemings, can serve as the template for American novels. Jefferson chose not to admit or deny fathering children by Sally Hemings. In analogous fashion, American novelists, in vast numbers, choose not to focus on slavery’s influence in the culture while not denying its import. Only thirty-five American historical novels challenge this evasion by depicting slavery and its effects on characters and country. The

American literary canon reveals that most novelists and readers want to think about and talk about something else—almost anything else but chattel slavery. Even Toni Morrison feared for an audience for *Beloved*. In an interview after *Beloved's* publication, she stated: “I thought this has got to be the least read of all the books I’d written [meaning, *Beloved*] because it is about something that the characters don’t want to remember, I don’t want to remember, black people don’t want to remember, white people don’t want to remember. I mean, it’s national amnesia” (qtd. in Angelo 257). Slavery’s pain and shame overwhelmed even those of literary bent. A few historical novelists relied on oral histories of their families as writing prompts. Mostly, American slavery is a story *not* to be told in American historical fiction.

Nevertheless thirty-two novelists decided to craft a novel about the peculiar institution. They split, almost evenly, by gender and between defining themselves as “black” or “white.” (Frank Yerby of black and white parents spent much of his life deciding that he was both—or neither.) The authors are the children of slaves and slave-owners, and some are children of neither. In other words, they reflect the diversity of races and economic interests in America.

The chapters divide along racial lines with clear patterns emerging among the white novelists. Among the authors writing from 1875-1906, all the characters were stereotypes of heroes or villains, and none focused on the harm slavery did to their black characters, preferring to spend more time on the love affairs of the white characters. Thomas Nelson Page, in his literary works, achieved notoriety as one of the South’s great apologists or excusers of slavery. He insisted that the Civil War and

freedom did more harm to blacks than slavery. This same apology would be echoed by Sallie May Dooley, Roark Bradford and Howard Odum during the period 1907-1936 in Chapter 3. However, Evelyn Scott and especially John S. Cochran defended the abolitionist cause. Most portraits, even those by the apologists, inadvertently hinted at the dehumanizing nature of slavery. By 1937-1967 white historical novelists, Henrietta Buckmaster, Willa Cather, Elizabeth Coker, Julia Davis, Anne Parrish, John Weld, and Janet Stevenson, pronounced that slavery was a great wrong that destroyed both slave and slave-owner. Many portrayed the abolitionist cause. In this period Robert Penn Warren remained as the South's lone apologist, who portrayed the white male slave-owner with conscience, especially when it pertained to his mulatto mistress or slave children. Another feature of the white historical novelists was the depiction of the protagonists' plantations; these slave-owners never, ever hit a slave (except maybe once), gave the slaves a measure of autonomy on the plantation, and freely supported the slaves' material needs. The horrid plantation that gave chattel slavery such a bad name was always elsewhere in the distance and seldom discussed. The destruction of the slaves' family life on the "good" plantations surfaced only in these novelists' obsession with mulatto characters, usually female. The rape of the female slave and/or the existence of the mulatto concubine was a strong sub-plot that few white characters acknowledged, preferring silence about the matter. Chapter 4, covering the years 1937-1967, contains the last, intense focus on slavery by white historical novelists while John Ehle is the only white novelist to write about slavery in 1968-2000, the most recent period, and he inverts *The*

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, telling a tale of a white male, a non-slaveholder in North Carolina, who helps a fourteen-year-old female mulatto escape to freedom at great personal cost. It would take over one hundred years for white historical novelists, particularly those with southern roots, to stop pretending that slavery did no harm to blacks or whites.

The African-American historical novelists emerge, not surprisingly, with a different depiction of slavery, but they too are not monolithic in their perspectives. Frances Harper and Pauline Hopkins are the earliest African-American historical novelists, and their works feature mulatto protagonists and their interactions with white society. Harper's mulattos work for advancement of the black community while the tragedy in Hopkins' novels is how the beautiful mulatto women are stymied in their attempts at melding into the white world. For Hopkins, the "drop of black blood" is a curse. Precious little time is spent by either novelist in the antebellum South. Toni Morrison believes she understands why the generation closest to slavery did not care to think about what they had endured. In an interview, she observed:

I suspect the reason is that it was not possible to survive on certain levels and dwell on it. People who did dwell on it, it probably killed them, and the people who did not dwell on it probably went forward. They tried to make a life. I think Afro-Americans in rushing away from slavery, which was important to do--it meant rushing out of bondage into freedom--also rushed away from the slaves because it was painful to dwell there, and they may have abandoned some responsibilities in so doing. It was a double-edged sword, if you

understand me. There is a necessity for remembering the horror, but of course there's a necessity for remembering it in a manner in which it can be digested, in a manner in which the memory is not destructive. The act of writing the book [*Beloved*], in a way, is a way of confronting it and making it possible to remember. (qtd in Darling 247-48)

The next black historical novelists, Arna Bontemps and John Paynter, both writing during the period 1906-1936, focus on real-life heroic episodes, showing slaves' courage, leadership, and rebelliousness. The African-American writers in Chapter 4, 1937-1967, Alston Anderson, Waters Turpin and Margaret Walker, do not shy away from portraying the crushing brutality of slavery nor hesitate to depict two black adults in a sexual relationship (only mulattos married and reproduced in Hopkins and Harper, the earliest black historical novelists in this study). Alston Anderson felt distant enough from slavery to joke about slavery's many absurdities, including the sexual taboos in fiction. By 1968-2000, the African-American historical novelist has more to say about the slave experience than any other race. Connie Briscoe, Barbara Chase-Riboud, Toni Morrison, and Sherley Anne Williams base their novels, to varying degrees, on actual events or people. Even a great deal of research was performed by those who divorced themselves from specific events or personages. Octavia Butler, Frank Yerby, and Charles Johnson base their imaginative musings on much reading of African-American history. Johnson, in particular, inverts the slave narrative in an attempt to declare "race" a dead issue in contemporary life, thus employing an old literary form, the slave narrative, to comment on modern times. All

of these historical novelists are aware that they do not know what it is like to be slaves, but, as Morrison attested, they believe they need to honor those who for so long were invisible in the fictional world.

While the African-American novelists never experienced slavery nor knew its constraints intimately, they, with the sole exception of Toni Morrison, know what it is to be ignored and/or misunderstood by literary critics—and probably because of their color. Their knowledge of slavery was questioned in ways that white historical novelists' knowledge was not. The research abilities of professional scholars such as Arna Bontemps, Waters Turpin, Margaret Walker, and Sherley Williams, were doubted while the same issues were not raised for Sallie May Dooley, George Morgan, Frances Gaither, Anne Parrish, Janet Stevenson, or Thomas Nelson Page. (Speculation about the research processes of Professors Charles Johnson and Toni Morrison were not questioned.) Absurd plots and blatant stereotypes in historical novels by white authors would be applauded by the mainstream publications while rigorously researched and careful writing too often were ignored—until *Beloved*. In addition, any judgment of white critics about black novelists was considered gospel while black literary critics were not sought for their insights by mainstream publications until the 1970s. Although African-American historical novelists never experienced slavery, they have experienced racial prejudice as evidenced by responses from the publishing and critical worlds.

Just as the publication of *Beloved* made obvious an absence of the slave's inner life in the American literary canon, this dissertation sheds light on an original subject.

Future Research Possibilities

There remains much to explore about the depiction of slavery in American novels. Since slavery began before the establishment of the federal government, there are eleven novels whose subject was slavery while it operated over its 200-year tenure; hence, these novels do not have a retrospective examination but are contemporaneous with slavery's existence. Slavery did change according to region and era, and perhaps a researcher could look at these novels and their authors in terms of cultural differences and impact. The novels are: *Clotel, or the President's Daughter* by William Wells Brown (1853); *The Bondwoman's Narrative* by Hannah Crafts (1850); *Kate Beaumont* by John DeForest (1872); *Blake* by Martin Delaney (1861); *Aunt Phillis' Cabin or Southern Life as It Is* by Mary Henderson Eastman (1852); *Swallow Barn* by John P. Kennedy (1832); *The Black Gauntlet: a tale of plantation in South Carolina* (1860); three works by Harriet Beecher Stowe: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), *Dred* (1856), and *The Minister's Wooing* (1859); *Toinette* by Henry Churton (1874).

Another group of works to examine are historical novels about slavery published after 2000. The subject is one that African-American authors, in particular, will probably not cease exploring through fiction. The novels published on the subject since 2000 include: *Walk through Darkness* by David Anthony Durham (2002); *The Known World* by Edward P. Jones (2003); *Property* by Valerie Martin (2003); *The Wind Done Gone* by Alice Randall (2001); *Cane River* by Lalita Tademy (2001).

Finally, given how racism still lingers in the publishing world and in the area of literary criticism, recovery of black writers from the trash heap of invisibility will be

necessary for quite some time. It is a shame that Alston Anderson's *All God's Children* (1967) has never found the appreciative audience or received the critical attention that such a serious novel deserves. There are more authors out there, awaiting the determined scholar who is willing to seek and to save unique novels that participate in the American cultural dialogue.

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