

THE CAMBRIDGE  
COMPANION TO  
SLAVERY IN AMERICAN  
LITERATURE

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**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

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[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107625983](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107625983)

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First published 2016

Printed in the United States of America

*A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Tawil, Ezra F., 1967– editor.

The Cambridge companion to slavery in American literature / [edited by] Ezra Tawil.

New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2016. | Series: Cambridge companions to literature | Includes bibliographical references and index.

LCCN 2015040752 | ISBN 9781107048768 (hardback)

LCSH: Slavery in literature. | American literature – History and criticism.

LCC PS169.S47 C36 2016 | DDC 810.9/3552–dc23

LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2015040752>

ISBN 978-1-107-04876-8 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-107-62598-3 Paperback

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## The Poetry of Slavery

Recent developments in the seemingly unconnected fields of scholarly editing and avant-garde poetry have brought renewed attention to the intertwined histories of poetry and slavery. Two massive anthologies of Anglophone poetry about slavery appeared at the turn of the twenty-first century: James G. Basker's *Amazing Grace: An Anthology of Poems about Slavery 1660–1810* (2002) and Marcus Wood's *The Poetry of Slavery: An Anglo-American Anthology, 1764–1865* (2003).<sup>1</sup> These volumes, which overlap in terms of coverage, effectively establish a transatlantic canon of Anglophone poems about slavery stretching from the Restoration of the British monarchy to the end of the American Civil War. Concurrently, a remarkable number of contemporary African American and diasporic poets published poems and poetic sequences that turn to the history of slavery to shed new light on repressed or forgotten aspects of the slave system, and to explore the continuing reach of its violence. These book-length poetic projects – among them Thylias Moss, *Slave Moth* (2006), Natasha Trethewey, *Native Guard* (2006), Camille T. Dungy, *Suck on the Marrow* (2010), Kevin Young *Ardency: A Chronicle of the Amistad Rebels* (2011), and M. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!* (2011) – are formally quite different from one another. Some are conventional lyric sequences; others are experimental, multi-generic, or constraint-based poems.<sup>2</sup> They have independent roots and diverse poetic aims, and yet it is hard not to see them as part of a larger movement to come to grips with a historical legacy that has proved more powerful and elusive than can be captured in descriptive or demystifying prose.

What does the study of poetry have to add to the history of slavery? How and where does the history of poetic form intersect with the growth, debate over, and ultimate abolition of chattel slavery? This is in part a question about the role of poetry in progressive politics: which aspects of the slave trade and the slave system were illuminated by abolitionist poets, and what resources did they bring to bear on the struggle to eradicate the institution? But it is also a question about the history of poetic genres, the ability of

particular traditions and forms to mobilize discourse about land, value, and human labor (the georgic); to enact the conferral of personhood or the exchange of sympathy (apostrophe; sentimental verse); to explore the nuances of cultural types (dramatic monologue); or to permit the collective expression of hope and frustration (hymns and songs).

One of the signal benefits of poetry to antislavery poets, cultural historians, and contemporary avant-garde poets alike is its conspicuous artificiality. While slave narratives and other forms of first-person testimony have been closely tied to the question of their veracity, the poetry of slavery has been able to exercise a good deal of license, trading in mimicry, parody, impersonation, exaggeration, time travel, wish fulfillment, and the conjuring of other worlds. Frederick Douglass complained bitterly in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) about the limits imposed on his speech by the conventions of the abolitionist lecture circuit. Worried that Douglass's eloquence might damage his credibility, his abolitionist handlers asked him to stick narrowly to a simple narrative of experience: "Give us the facts," said Collins, "we will take care of the philosophy."<sup>3</sup> Douglass was expected to adjust his speaking style to suit his auditors' expectations:

"People won't believe you ever was a slave, Frederick, if you keep on this way," said Friend Foster. "Be yourself," said Collins, "and tell your story." It was said to me, "Better have a *little* of the plantation manner of speech than not; 'tis not best that you seem too learned."<sup>4</sup>

For enslaved poet Phillis Wheatley, however, eloquence was the aim and not the obstacle. Although she too had to be concerned about her credibility – her 1773 *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* famously includes both a letter from her master and an attestation by eighteen prominent citizens testifying to the poems' authenticity<sup>5</sup> – Wheatley gained cultural status because of her poetry's elevated diction, her engagements with philosophy, and her successful imitation of Alexander Pope, Virgil, and Ovid. The difference between Wheatley's and Douglass's ability to claim their own eloquence isn't simply a temporal one – that is, the difference between neoclassical standards of value and an emergent romanticism. Rather, it suggests the different expectations readers and auditors brought to poetry and to narrative. Poetry's long association with decorum and the work of the imagination shifts questions of authenticity to a different register.

Take, for example, William Wells Brown's strategic turn to poetry within his first-person *Narrative of William W. Brown, A Fugitive Slave* (1847). Describing the early part of his escape, in which Brown and his mother slept

by day and traveled at night, Brown inserts a few stanzas of white abolitionist poet John Pierpont's well known poem, "The Fugitive Slave's Address to the North Star" into his narrative as a fitting account of his own experience: "every night before emerging from our hidingplace, we would anxiously look for our friend and leader – THE NORTH STAR. And in the language of Pierpont we might have exclaimed . . ." <sup>6</sup> This is not Brown's own poem; it was written by a New England minister and antislavery politician who, unlike Brown, never experienced slavery firsthand. Brown acknowledges that these are Pierpont's lines and that he and his mother never actually recited this poem on their journey. But the discrepancy between Pierpont's generic, hypothetical fugitive and Brown's and his mother's actual escape from bondage matters less to Brown than the fact that the poem gives him elevated language with which to describe their thoughts and feelings during their flight. Turning to poetry frees Brown from what Douglass called the "circumstantial statement of the facts," <sup>7</sup> permitting him to invoke another kind of authenticity.

I cannot hope to be comprehensive in my treatment of the range of poetic genres to which antislavery (and a small number of proslavery) poets turned to write about the institution. But by emphasizing the different kinds of traction poets working in different genres were able to gain on the slave system, I hope to counter the inevitably homogenizing force of Basker's and Wood's anthologies. Despite the editors' detailed headnotes, the sheer act of gathering scattered poems into a single volume strips them from the contexts of their circulation, making them look misleadingly similar to one another. In what follows I'll emphasize the embeddedness of poems concerning slavery in a variety of social contexts and their appearance in a variety of print formats ranging from elegant volumes to children's books, songsters, newspapers, pamphlets, and broadsides.

The multi-media appeal of antislavery poetry was crucial to its commercial success and to its political force. The strong relations poetry maintained with theater, oratory, song, and visual art and its extraordinary mobility across print formats help to explain why poetry was regarded as a potent tool in the antislavery struggle. And yet slavery is not just one theme among others in a poetic tradition that remained stable across the centuries it took to abolish the trade, emancipate the enslaved, and petition for some measure of acknowledgment and redress. The history of Anglo-American poetry was itself transformed by its encounter with the slave system. Twenty-first-century poets who have returned to this history in powerful ways understand the pressure that slavery's dehumanizing violence put on many of the assumptions underwriting the poetic conventions they have inherited. They also demonstrate the galvanizing effect on poetic form that

can be produced by a commitment to looking squarely at the legacy of slavery.

### African Chiefs

Anglophone poetry concerning slavery emerged along with England's rise as a naval power in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, accelerating in the late eighteenth century with the growth of organized abolition. Basker takes Aphra Behn's novel *Oronooko, or the Royal Slave* (1688) as a landmark for English interest in and awareness of New World slavery, but it was the runaway success of Thomas Southerne's dramatic adaptation of Behn's novel (1695) that would prove most consequential for the Anglo-American poetic tradition. Southerne's play established a particularly influential nexus of exoticism, nobility, thwarted resistance, and tragic sentiment around the figure of the enslaved African prince. The politics of Southerne's tragedy are equivocal at best: Oronooko's nobility makes him an exception to the ordinary slave trade; he refuses to join the slave rebellion until he learns that his wife has been threatened by rape; and the play concludes with the royal couple committing a drawn-out murder-suicide, preempting while also carrying out the retribution of the colonial authorities. But the dramatic interest of the play, and a series of explicitly antislavery revisions to the text in the latter half of the eighteenth century, kept *Oronooko* before the public and spawned a host of poems that traded on the doomed nobility of the play's title character.<sup>8</sup>

In Southerne's play, where heroic tragedy is interlaced with a comic plot, the speech of the noble Oronooko is distinguished by being written in blank verse. Tormented by the loss of his domestic life and by memories of an African pastoral paradise, the stoic figure of Oronooko testifies mostly to the incompatibility of nobility and bondage; he is an African foil for the idea of English liberty.<sup>9</sup> In her *Slavery, A Poem* (1788) British abolitionist Hannah More recognized Southerne's power to move his audience while also calling attention to the political limitations of his selective account of the injustice of slavery:

O plaintive Southerne! Whose impassioned page  
Can melt the soul to grief, or rouse to rage! . . .  
No individual griefs my bosom melt,  
For millions feel what Oronooko felt:  
Fired by no single wrongs, the countless host  
I mourn, by rapine dragged from Afric's coast.<sup>10</sup>

Despite More's attempt to shift emphasis from "individual griefs" to those of "the countless host," the enslaved African chief remained a remarkably

durable figure in Anglo-American poetry, one that was confidently deployed for abolitionist ends despite its equivocal pedigree. For example, American poet Sarah Wentworth Morton's "African Chief" (1792) shares so much of Oronooko's story as to be a telegraphic invocation of the familiar spectacle of chained nobility.<sup>11</sup> Morton's innovation is to insert this stock figure into history, comparing her African chief's doomed rebellion to historic battles against long odds, including legendary defeats of Spartan, Roman, and Persian forces as well as the successful American Revolution. Morton pointedly asks "If these exalt thy sacred zeal, / To hate oppression's mad control, / For bleeding Afric learn to feel, whose Chieftain claimed a kindred soul."<sup>12</sup> For Morton, political action waits on sentimental education, one that extends the lessons of history to fictional types. Poetry's role is to recirculate these types, encouraging readers to "Bend piteous" over the figure of a generic "tortured slave" so that they won't remain "Unpracticed in the power to feel."<sup>13</sup>

In his "The African Chief" (1826), William Cullen Bryant invokes all the staples of the genre: exceptionality, exoticism, homesickness for an idealized Africa, and the incompatibility of nobility and slavery. Bryant's poem, however, centers on the African chief's bid to purchase his freedom first by divesting himself of valuable jewelry and then by offering his captors gold that had been hidden in the "platted locks" of his hair. Structurally, this scene gives agency to the African chief as an active party to, not merely the object of, commercial exchange. And yet in dramatizing this failed transaction Bryant repeatedly denies the enslaved African the status of an equal trading partner while also suggesting ominously that Christian slavery is motivated by something beyond mere avarice. Early in Southerne's play, Oronooko exonerates his captors by appealing to shared principles underlying mercantile exchange: "If we are Slaves, they did not make us Slaves; / But bought us in an honest way of trade."<sup>14</sup> For Bryant, however, slavery cannot be understood within the framework of global commerce. The enslavement of the African chief is not an ignoble or unjust transaction, but an incomprehensible one; it exceeds the market logics through which we are invited to view it.<sup>15</sup> Despite (or perhaps because of) the poem's irresolution, it was widely reprinted in antebellum periodicals, including thirteen years later in William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator* in the immediate wake of the *Amistad* mutiny. This instance of reprinting, directly following an occasional poem addressed to "Cinquez" that draws heavily on Bryant's,<sup>16</sup> suggests the continued power of the figure of the African chief as an axis for readerly identification. Antislavery poetry is one site for the resuscitation and circulation of the conventions

of heroic drama, albeit in abbreviated form, morally weighted but under the sign of paralysis and in a minor key.

### Global Trade and the Poetic Problem of Slave Labor

A more thoroughgoing critique of global trade's reliance on slavery – one that gets beyond the static tableau of the enslaved African chief – emerges out of the poetic tradition of the georgic, a classical genre revived in eighteenth-century Britain to celebrate and reflect on the nation's rising imperial power. Kevis Goodman has argued that eighteenth-century poets and readers gravitated toward Virgil's *Georgics*, an “ambivalent and plangent celebration of empire,” in part because their “awareness of their own nation's territorial ambitions and liabilities was similarly vexed.”<sup>17</sup> Virgil's didactic poems of rural labor and those of his eighteenth-century imitators traded on the double meaning of cultivation – both husbandry and refinement – transforming elaborate accounts of rural life into a justification of the poet's labor. Laura Brown, Suvir Kaul, and others have shown how poems such as Pope's “Windsor Forest” (1713) and James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730) forged connections between the British landscape and the nation's far-flung imperial interests, honing techniques for understanding and representing the new scales of empire. Critics disagree as to whether these poems transmute (and thus disguise) imperial violence or register a pervasive unease, an undercurrent of horror at the exploitation that underwrote British mercantile prosperity.<sup>18</sup> Whether through Pope's use of synecdoche and carefully balanced antitheses or through Thomson's “microscopic eye,” which discovers teeming worlds just beyond ordinary sensory perception, the descriptive conventions of eighteenth-century georgic inevitably draw lines of connection between an idealized, temperate Britain and the horrors of the tropics, that dangerous, uncontrollable zone Britons must learn to govern if such prosperity is to continue.

If the violence that underwrites global trade registers in the imperial center as a disturbance in the field of perception, it looms more threateningly at the colonial periphery, where slavery threatens to upend the equipoise of the georgic itself. Creole poet James Grainger's four-book poem *The Sugar Cane* (1764)<sup>19</sup> stands as a testimony to the limits of the genre, the capacity of slavery to stretch its conventions to the breaking point. Grainger's poem was ridiculed in its time for its awkward disclosure of colonial ambition and for its mechanical treatment of georgic motifs. Grainger takes the genre's emphasis on instruction oddly literally, appending elaborate footnotes full of medical advice for treating tropical diseases and, in tone-deaf imitation of Virgil's treatment of animal husbandry, offering tips on matching slaves



from different tribes to specific plantation tasks. However, sugar cultivation cannot easily be yoked to the development of English national character; as a luxury good, sugar is too closely associated with corruption, excess, and threats to English liberty. And, of course, coerced labor cannot be virtuous labor; slavery breaks the rhetorical bargain whereby the farmer's daily care for crops and cattle stands in for and guarantees the poet's work of representation. Grainger takes pains to indicate his support for abolition in the West Indies, arguing that "Servants, not slaves; of choice and not compell'd; / The Blacks should cultivate the Cane-land isles" (4.242–43). And yet the brutality of the slave system keeps cropping up in his poem: in his acknowledgement of the ever-present threat of violent insurrection (4.81–88); in the reversal of the polarity of local ease and distant toil whereby the celebration of Caribbean natural abundance produces an indictment of the suffering of Scottish and enslaved Peruvian miners (4.165–82), and in inadvertent allegories of the corrosive effects of the system as a whole. Grainger reprises Thomson's invocation of a frightening natural world just beyond one's senses, but in the Caribbean, these terrifying organisms are at one's fingertips (not concealed from view by a benevolent God). Moreover, these creatures aggressively break down the small distance between the natural world and the observing subject:

Fell winged insects, which the visual ray  
 Scarcely discerns, their sable feet and hands  
 Oft penetrate; and, in the fleshy nest  
 Myriads of young produce; which soon destroy  
 The parts they breed in, if assiduous care,  
 With art, extract not the prolific foe. (4. 257–60)

The syntactic reversibility of winged insects and the slaves' "feet and hands" makes it momentarily unclear where to locate the source of destructive agency, a distinction that becomes moot once the "prolific foe" has begun to reproduce itself. Slavery cannot be held at a distance, but destroys the system from within, while art is aligned not with cultivation but with the probably doomed medical project of extraction.

Slavery's ability to overwhelm the georgic poet and disrupt his verse is nowhere more clear than in Timothy Dwight's *Greenfield Hill* (1794), an exuberant celebration of the prospects of a newly independent America. Part 2, "The Flourishing Village,"<sup>20</sup> is a direct rejoinder to Oliver Goldsmith's lament for rural depopulation, *The Deserted Village* (1770). Dwight's poem seeks to praise and inculcate "sweet Competence" (2.157), a self-regulating virtue by which Americans refuse European luxury and social distinction in favor of the classless harmony of a society built on subsistence agriculture.

But this paean to “thrift and neatness” (2.193) is interrupted by the work song of a passing slave. Dwight seizes the opportunity to praise the benevolence of American servitude, articulating a vision of Northern slavery understood as shared labor, a condition in which the slave is protected from ill treatment by law and religion (2.195–208). Dwight’s meditation on the slave’s “Lost liberty” (2.213), however, causes the poem to veer badly off course, leading to a disquisition on the incompatibility of slavery and virtue (2.221–53) and a lurid description of slave torture, conveniently offloaded to the British West Indies (2.279–344). Dwight cannot maintain his composure when his thoughts turn to slavery, “The uncur’d gangrene of the reasoning mind” (2.256). Neither can he maintain the ideal of a benevolent servitude, sequestered in the North, when even the mildest form of the institution recalls West Indian horrors. Indeed, Dwight’s poem can only be rescued from its descent into jeremiad by changing the subject altogether.

Critics have puzzled over the sudden demise of the georgic in the late eighteenth century, attributing its decline to changes in taste and the rise of genres such as the novel that also sought to represent ordinary life. Suvir Kaul has argued that antislavery poems such as William Cowper’s *The Task* (1785) take up the georgic’s imperial ambitions in another register, pursuing British commercial power under the sign of abolition instead of coerced labor.<sup>21</sup> Evidence from the colonial periphery, however – including Southern U.S. poet William Grayson’s clunky proslavery georgic *The Hireling and the Slave* (1852) – suggests that the labor conditions of modernity may have stretched the surprisingly elastic georgic formula beyond repair. Neither chattel slavery nor wage slavery could be brought within the compass of the georgic without threatening the values it sought to celebrate and transmit.

### Enslaved Poets and Organized Abolition

Campaigns to abolish slavery were mounted at different times in Great Britain and the United States, and so the publication of abolitionist poetry in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries tends to come in waves. British abolition and abolitionist verse gathered force with Lord Mansfield’s decision in the *Somerset* case (1772), built toward the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, and crested with the abolition of slavery in the British colonies in 1834. American abolitionist poetry began to take off with the founding of the American Antislavery Society in 1833 and merged with wartime verse with the outbreak of hostilities in 1861. National frameworks for historical and literary study have disarticulated the two movements and verse cultures

but it is important to remember that abolitionists from the United States and United Kingdom were in constant conversation with one another. For instance, enslaved poet Phillis Wheatley drew on her Methodist connections to publish *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773) in London, dedicating her volume to the Countess of Huntington, an active promoter of the antislavery cause. Though Wheatley is most often treated as an American poet, she and her mistress were colonial British subjects when she wrote these poems and the success of her volume owed much to the support of British abolitionists. While modern readers often find Wheatley's poetry disappointingly reticent on the subject of slavery, her characteristic restraint needs to be weighed against the audacity of her transatlantic address to such powerful figures as William Legge, Earl of Dartmouth, British Secretary of State for the North American colonies.

Likewise, Elizabeth Barrett Browning first published her dramatic monologue "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" in *The Liberty Bell* (1848), a gift book produced and sold by the Boston Female Antislavery Society to raise money for the American abolitionist cause. Browning's poem, which dramatizes a fugitive slave's tortured confession of her flogging, rape, infanticide, and flight, owes much of its performative force to its transatlantic publication. In this poem, Browning sets the speech conditions for an indictment of American slavery that her fugitive slave speaker manages to deliver despite stopping short of uttering the curse she promises in the opening stanzas. This curse clearly isn't Browning's to proclaim, but the form of the dramatic monologue permits both poet and reader to inhabit the persona of one who is justified in calling for revolutionary violence: "From these sands / Up to the mountains, lift your hands / O Slaves, and end what I begun" (363). In her extravagant use of apostrophe, deictics ("these sands," "this land," "this mark upon my wrist"), and first-person address, Browning seeks to overcome her dislocation from the scene of American slavery, cultivating identification with her wronged speaker while disavowing responsibility for the vengeance the poem all but calls into being.<sup>22</sup>

Wheatley's references in her poetry to her own condition as a slave couldn't be more different than those of Browning's speaker. Wheatley characteristically subordinates the question of slavery to evangelical piety or the urgent public concern over the survival of colonial liberties under tightening British control. In her poem addressed to the Earl of Dartmouth, the "iron chain / Which wanton *Tyranny* with lawless hand / Had made, and with it meant t' enslave the land"<sup>23</sup> refers not to chattel slavery but to the oppressive foreign policy of Dartmouth's predecessor. Wheatley does instance her own enslavement as a reason for her acute understanding of

colonial grievances, and yet she depicts slavery's violence as affecting not her own person so much as the rights and sympathies of her father:

Should you, my lord, while you peruse my song,  
 Wonder from whence my love of *Freedom* sprung,  
 Whence flow these wishes for the common good,  
 By feeling hearts alone best understood,  
 I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate  
 Was snatch'd from Afric's fancy'd happy seat:  
 What pangs excruciating must molest,  
 What sorrows labour in my parent's breast?  
 Steel'd was that soul and by no misery mov'd  
 That from a father seiz'd his babe below'd:  
 Such, such my case. And can I then but pray  
 Others may never feel tyrannic sway?<sup>24</sup>

The subtlety of Wheatley's argument here is worth emphasizing: reframing the middle passage (as she does in "On Being Brought from Africa to America") as a story of Christian redemption, she casts herself as a model sympathizing subject and not as an object of sympathy. Wheatley rests her claim to be accepted as an equal in Christian piety and disinterested sympathy on the evidence of her poetic practice itself. As in her occasional poems (many of them elegies), which circulated in manuscript among white women of her acquaintance, Wheatley intercedes on behalf of others, generalizing away from the specificity of her condition. Her readers understood the high degree of literacy and authorial self-control displayed in her poems as an assertion of equality and a powerful riposte to proslavery arguments about the natural inferiority of black people. Both Thomas Jefferson, who derided Wheatley's poetry as "below the dignity of criticism," and Afro-British writer Ignatius Sancho, who was appalled by her Boston patrons' insensitivity to the spectacle of "Genius in bondage," register the mere fact of the publication of her collection of poems to be an event of historical importance.<sup>25</sup>

Wheatley wasn't considered an explicitly antislavery poet, however, until abolitionists began recirculating her poems in the 1830s. Garrison and Isaac Knapp reprinted many of Wheatley's poems in early issues of their antislavery newspaper, *The Liberator*; in 1838 Knapp also published a new edition of Wheatley's poems bound together with the recently republished *Poems by a Slave* (1837), a short collection of verse by enslaved North Carolina poet George Moses Horton.<sup>26</sup> Although Horton's poetry is formally quite different from Wheatley's, Knapp sought to promote Horton by association with an established figure and to claim Wheatley's verse for the antislavery cause.

Horton began his career as a poet by composing love poems for University of North Carolina undergraduates. Possessed of reading but not writing literacy, Horton would compose at the plow and wait until he was tasked with bringing produce to market to ask the commissioning student to transcribe his verses.<sup>27</sup> Horton was taught to write by transplanted Northerner Caroline Lee Hentz, who sent copies of his poems to her hometown Massachusetts newspaper from which they were widely reprinted in abolitionist newspapers.<sup>28</sup> Horton was soon taken up as a cause célèbre by members of the American Colonization Society. As Leon Jackson has shown, the first pamphlet collection of Horton's verse, *The Hope of Liberty* (1829), was published without his consent and possibly without his knowledge as part of a campaign to encourage voluntary black emigration to Liberia. Given away to donors on the assumption that the accumulated sum would be used to manumit Horton and transport him to Monrovia, *The Hope of Liberty* both was and wasn't his own.<sup>29</sup>

Horton's early printed poetry often takes the frustrations of the slave experience as its subject, though not with the kind of autobiographical specificity students schooled in lyric reading have come to expect.<sup>30</sup> Circling around the question of whether freedom is to be found in this life or only in the afterlife, "The Slave's Complaint" and "On Liberty and Slavery" begin with a pile-up of rhetorical questions and can only find a form of temporary resolution in apostrophic appeals to "Heaven!" and "Dear Liberty!"<sup>31</sup> "Division of an Estate" more successfully dramatizes slaves' panic and fear in the wake of a plantation master's death, but the poem does so not by exploring the subtleties of individual reactions to the news, but by comparing their collective state to that of confused and abandoned livestock. The "dull emotion" of slaves waiting to hear their fate defies narrative unfolding; it is a "dark suspense" without resolution, anxiety without agency.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Horton's riddle poem "Troubled with the Itch, and Rubbing with Sulphur" obliquely registers the hopeless complicity of the slave in his own degradation. Horton never names the "Itch" that scratching not only fails to ameliorate, but ends up intensifying. However, his emphasis on the futility of all the remedies he tries – applying sulphur to his body makes it loathsome to the point of self-repugnance – points to slavery as the unnamed condition that "oft deprives me of my sleep, / And plagues me to my heart."<sup>33</sup>

It is not surprising that the writing of enslaved poets would be marked by reticence and obliquity, that their depictions of slave passivity would be complicated by the need to work with and around the constraints placed on their own agency. Poetry written by white and free black abolitionists bears a different relationship to the helplessness of the slave, explicitly yoking

depictions of slave passivity to a call for action. Scholarship on sentimental fiction has taught us to be wary of the appeals for sympathy made by such poems: the spectacle of slave suffering may produce not sympathetic identification but revulsion or vicarious pleasure, passions that distract from or damage the cause; even successful identification with the suffering slave may produce sentiments that don't translate into political action. Moreover, the white women who powered the antislavery movement in both Britain and the United States found a potent image for their own limited agency in the figure of the slave, redirecting some of the rhetorical energy of antislavery discourse toward their own predicament.<sup>34</sup> Although these dynamics have been more extensively studied in prose than in poetry, they can be seen in small compass in many of the subgenres of antislavery poetry, poems that center on the figure of the slave mother, the fugitive slave, the slave auction, or the slave ship.

Such verses were produced in great numbers, circulating in antislavery periodicals and pamphlets, often anonymously or pseudonymously under indistinguishable, generic titles. The popularity of poetry written in standard meters with simple rhymes and short stanzas – relatively undemanding poems that focused on familiar types – cries out for new techniques for reading at scale. And yet differences between and among seemingly stock antislavery poems can be instructive. For instance, Northern abolitionist Maria White Lowell and free black Marylander Frances Ellen Watkins Harper both wrote poems called “The Slave Mother” (as did many other abolitionists). Both poems center on the agony produced by the slave system's treatment of children as property; both appeal to women's solidarity and foster women's sense of their own power through the spectacle of the intrusion of capitalist values into the domestic sphere. Lowell's poem centers on a slave mother's despair at her light-skinned daughter, whose very existence tells the story of the mother's rape. Harper, by contrast, refuses to specify the race of her generic slave mother, maintaining a strategic generality as a spur to readerly identification. Lowell's slave mother prays for the death of her child, averting her gaze to break the chain of substitutions whereby the child's face predicts “the woman's loathsome doom.”<sup>35</sup> Instead of redirecting our gaze, Harper's poem asks the reader to serve as a witness to the separation of mother and child, beginning with the question “Heard you that shriek?” under the presumption that anyone with the ethical imagination to hear the poem's unvoiced cry will act to prevent all slave mothers from being subject to such trauma. These two utterly conventional poems with identical titles, shared tropes, and even similar turns of phrase mobilize the agency of the woman reader in strikingly different ways.<sup>36</sup>

Abolitionist poetry raises numerous problems of interpretation, in part because of its profusion and in part because it is difficult to understand in formal terms outside of the contexts of its production and circulation. I have written elsewhere about how Harper's poetry takes on new significance once we understand the antislavery movement's reliance on oratory and its use of popular print to extend and recast oral performances. Harper's status as a poetess helped to leverage her career as an antislavery orator, while her travel to scattered communities on the abolitionist lecture circuit gave her an efficient way of circulating her poems outside of conventional publishing. In keeping with their modes of circulation, many of her pamphlet and newspaper poems eschew the lyric I, acting instead as vehicles for representing common reactions to the news and making stock figures drawn from the literature of reform available for readers to claim as their own. Harper's poems served as instruments of exhortation, nodes for the condensation and transfer of oral authority, and vehicles for collective assent.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, many of the antislavery poems of prolific Quaker poet John Greenleaf Whittier are so abstract and gestural, so emptied of all but moral posturing, that they remain difficult to comprehend without extensive knowledge of the shifting fortunes of the struggle. Whittier added explanatory headnotes to these poems when he published a collected edition in the late nineteenth century, but their elusive generality is best explained not by filling in their historical contexts but rather by his poems' indexing their conditions of publication: the need to respond quickly to unfolding events, the simulation of speech in a culture that favored oral performance, and the reprinting of verse across a variety of periodicals that coordinated abolition's scattered forces.<sup>38</sup>

A full treatment of abolitionist poetry would need to take into account not only the surprisingly broad range of print formats in which it circulated,<sup>39</sup> but also the ready adaptability of poetry to abolitionists' multi-media assault on the slave system. Many antislavery poems drew on poetry's privileged relation to visual and aural culture. Ekphrastic poems, such as Sarah Sanford's *Poem on Seeing Biard's Picture of a Slave Mart* (1846), extended the reach of works of visual art that would ordinarily be accessible only to the elite. The French painting on which Sanford's poem is based hung near J.M.W. Turner's *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying* in an 1840 British Royal Academy exhibition. Sanford's poem decisively claimed Biard's controversial image for the antislavery cause, broadcasting its significance to a Boston audience and beyond.<sup>40</sup> Both Whittier and Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote poems inspired by Hiram Powers' "Greek Slave" (1844), explicitly attaching the scandal of this white marble sculpture's demure, chained nudity to the larger cause of abolition. Walt Whitman's

blazon of the slave at auction in *Leaves of Grass* (1855) seeks to displace commercial with aesthetic (and erotic) values, while Whittier's "The Branded Hand" (1846) was printed as a handbill with a woodcut illustration in a bid to align the "slave-stealer's" heroism with heraldic tradition.<sup>41</sup> Cheap anti-slavery tracts and children's books were frequently illustrated with images designed to drive home a moral that was also rendered memorable through rhyme.

Antislavery poems were also frequently set to music, gathered into songsters such as William Wells Brown's *Anti-Slavery Harp* (1848) so they could be collectively sung at ordinary meetings of abolitionists. Harper's poems were also performed by vocalists at historic gatherings, such as William Nell's 1858 commemoration of the Boston Massacre.<sup>42</sup> These poems, which often invoke a counterfactual state of affairs – a freedom yet to come – helped relieve weary activists from the burdens of the present and orient them toward a future they could have a hand in shaping. The alternative temporality of antislavery hymns is also common to slave songs, which, as Max Cavitch has argued, offered the enslaved relief from the monotony of enforced labor, opening up space for "a rhythmic protest against the mechanization of time and movement."<sup>43</sup> Slave songs were understood by elite readers as a kind of American folk poetry and began to be collected in the antebellum period under the sign of an emergent antiquarianism.<sup>44</sup> Printed slave songs raise difficult questions of love and theft, appropriation and authenticity, but, as Cavitch notes, such songs were "not only disseminated among white readers but also 'returned' in a more durable and conventionally literary form to African Americans."<sup>45</sup> The problematic authenticity of slave songs, however, didn't hamper their circulation in print, where the songs' elusiveness, the possibility of misrepresentation, and the certainty of white misapprehension are clearly part of their appeal. Recall that it is printed poetry's simulation of spontaneous oral performance that Frederick Douglass turns to in his *Narrative* (1845) order to represent the vitality of slave dissent. For Douglass, the occasional and improvisatory nature of slave songs grants them meaning that is indecipherable to the overhearer. Nevertheless, these "rude and apparently incoherent songs"<sup>46</sup> prepare their auditor to apprehend the cruelties of slavery, even if a deeper understanding invariably arrives later, in tearful recollection. Tonally misleading, dislocated in time, and full of unapprehended pathos, these songs set the coordinates for a subversive, syncopated poetics that poets in the black tradition will claim as a resource from W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) through the present day.



### Memory and Forgetting, Repression and Return

Emancipation and the end of the war brought changes not only to the lives of the formerly enslaved (and their masters), but also to the means of circulation of popular poetry. It took decades for the black press to replace the abolitionist newspaper network and lecture circuit. During this time, black authors relied on small publishers, local and regional periodicals, and the religious press; they continued to have difficulty accessing the large-scale audiences forged by white publishers who knitted together regional markets into a national book trade system.<sup>47</sup>

Despite the lack of coordinated publishing venues, poetry remained important to the postwar work of black institution building. While many poets were eager to replace the figure of the suffering slave with that of the heroic freedman,<sup>48</sup> others took care to draw connections between the struggles of newly free black communities and the recent slave past. Harper's "Aunt Chloe" sequence (1872) narrates the experience of the war from the perspective of an enslaved woman who is emancipated, achieves a measure of independence, and is finally reunited with her children (reversing the seemingly inevitable trajectory of "The Slave Mother"). Harper's folksy ballad stanzas depict the divided loyalties of the enslaved, the tense wait for battlefield news, the joy that accompanied emancipation, and the all too easy manipulation of black votes under Reconstruction. Aunt Chloe's feigned ignorance of politics is a cover for her considerable shrewdness; a comic figure, she extends the strategic dissimulation of the slave into perplexing new conditions where exploitation thrives despite the promise of enfranchisement. Importantly, in this sequence Harper locates the origins of the postwar campaign for literacy within slave communities; literacy is not something brought to the South by Northern reformers (such as Harper herself).<sup>49</sup> One slave in "Learning to Read" hides reading matter (and his ability to read) through the conspicuous display of illiteracy, lining his hat with the greased pages of a book. Like this figure, Harper promulgates a politics and a poetics of deceptive simplicity.

Paul Laurence Dunbar's dialect poetry similarly trades on the ignorance of the slave in ways that proved both popular and controversial. A generation removed from slavery, Dunbar modeled his dialect verse on that of Midwestern humorist James Whitcomb Riley. William Dean Howells' prefatory endorsement brought national attention to Dunbar's third volume of verse, *Lyrics of Lowly Life* (1896), which, like his early collections, includes both poems written in Standard English and poems written in a literary approximation of African American vernacular. Dunbar's dialect verse draws uncomfortably close to the minstrel and plantation traditions,

inviting readers to mistake poems full of subtle ironies for racist nostalgia. “The Deserted Plantation,” for instance, self-consciously references Goldsmith’s lament for rural depopulation, calling attention to the abandonment of the Jim Crow South by the formerly enslaved. Its critical edge is blunted, however, by the idiom through which the tale is told; the socio-economic transformation of the South is signaled not through the departure of the workers who sustained the plantation economy, but through the unexplained absence of racist caricatures drawn from the minstrel stage.<sup>50</sup> Dunbar suppresses the potentially radical implications of his poem in the closing stanzas, in which a loyal freedman regrets the loss of slave culture and vows fidelity to the image of the Old South. Similarly, the preacher who delivers “An Ante-bellum Sermon” comes perilously close to voicing a sharp-edged critique of the persistence of inequality in the postwar United States. Dunbar makes comic fodder of the obviousness of the ruse by which reference to Egyptian bondage served as kind of code among the enslaved: “I’m still a–preachin’ ancient,” the preacher insists, “I ain’t talkin’ ‘bout to–day.” Dunbar expects the canny reader also to notice that his antebellum sermon stands to contemporary black readers as Egypt did to the enslaved, but the poem draws up short in a way that can be read either as buffoonery or as a protest against the still deferred promise of equality:

An’ we ‘ll shout ouah halleluyahs,  
 On dat mighty reck’nin’ day,  
 When we ‘se reco’nised ez citiz’ –  
 Huh uh! Chillun, let us pray!<sup>51</sup>

Dunbar’s use of dialect broadcasts ordinary African Americans’ exclusion from high culture; to the extent that these poems proved surprisingly popular among white readers, standing in as an accurate depiction of black speech and attitudes, they also perpetuate this exclusion. And yet in his dialect poems Dunbar invents a literary language that carries a double relation to the reading public, reassuring white readers while calling attention to the still sizeable gap between black culture and full literary citizenship.<sup>52</sup>

For the most part, modernist poets had little interest in engaging either the history of slavery or the poetry that had opposed it. Alain Locke’s *The New Negro* (1925) reflected a widely shared desire among Harlem Renaissance writers to sweep aside “the unjust stereotypes of [the Negro’s] oppressors” as well as “those of his liberators.” Locke decried the “Old Negro” as a “stock figure,” blaming white writers for perpetuating this “historical fiction,” but also “the Negro himself,” who upheld such stereotypes “through a sort of protective social mimicry forced upon him by the adverse circumstances of dependence.”<sup>53</sup> Langston Hughes is a partial exception to the general

rule of the modernist turn away from slavery. Hughes understood the blues poems collected in *The Weary Blues* (1926) and *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927) as direct descendants of slave songs. Moreover, the title poem of the pamphlet he published to take with him on his reading tours, *The Negro Mother and Other Dramatic Recitations* (1931), reprises and updates the antebellum topos of “The Slave Mother.” It was not until late in his career, however, in “Prelude to Our Age: A Negro History Poem” (1951) and “A Ballad of Negro History” (1952) – both published in black periodicals – that Hughes turned in earnest to the task of using poetry to record and celebrate the long arc of African American history.

The single work that most inspired twenty-first-century poets’ creative return to the history of slavery is Robert Hayden’s modernist collage poem, “The Middle Passage” (1944). Hayden’s poem interleaves lines from a sailor’s diary, a court deposition, lists of slave ships, hymns and prayers, a revised version of Ariel’s song from *The Tempest*, and stanzas and refrains of Hayden’s own devising to evoke the horrors of the slave trade. One of Hayden’s key interventions in this poem is his decision to abandon the slave persona and even the primacy of black testimony. The callous cruelty of official sources and the riveting words of terrified sailors do plenty to suggest the gothic extremity of the ordinary business of slave transport. As in T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” (1922), Hayden’s arrangement of textual fragments gives them metaphoric density and resonance; he relies on the documentary authority of his sources to carry the feel of history even under the sign of ironic reversal. Strikingly, Hayden’s deliberate echoes of “The Waste Land” and Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (1798) show how close canonical Anglo-American poetry comes to the topic of the transatlantic slave trade without actually naming it. Hayden’s redeployment in the high modernist mode of fragments drawn from the texts of slavery serves as a lasting reminder that American culture has by no means moved beyond this history, but is still caught in a middle passage of its own.

Recent poems by a number of black poets seek to bridge the gap between avant-garde poetic practice and the history of slavery, a history that remains unacknowledged and unexplored by much experimental American art. Some of this work rewrites familiar narratives about slavery in the light of insights drawn from scholarship. For example, Thylas Moss’s verse novel *Slave Moth* returns to the tense erotic triad of master, mistress, and slave girl featured in the scholarly recovery of Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). Moss transforms this familiar story by altering the relations of knowledge and power, endowing her slave girl Varl with literacy that her jealous mistress lacks. Moss uses Varl to explore the explosive

question of the slave girl's sexual desire, a topic broached but carefully controlled in Jacobs's text. Moss's choice to write a verse novel rather than a neo-slave narrative permits her, like her heroine, to indulge in extravagant fantasies and generative wordplay, and to bring to the fore the question of seemingly frivolous ornamentation. The conceit by which Varl articulates her desires by embroidering them on pieces of cloth she wraps around her body transforms the text itself into a cocoon, a figure for metamorphosis that is inseparable from ornamental elaboration.

Kevin Young's *Ardency* and M. NorbeSe Philip's *Zong!* draw in different ways on Hayden's insight that the traces left by the slave system in the dominant culture are powerfully self-condemning and can prompt much-needed reflection on the haunting of the present by the past. Young retells the story of the *Amistad* mutiny not simply as one of heroic resistance, but also as one of profound linguistic and cultural difference. The poem begins with a section dedicated to the translator, Covey, and dramatizes the imprisoned Mendi's growing literacy – in English but also in the painful contradictions of evangelical American culture. When the poem finally arrives at Cinque's story, it is presented as a multi-vocal, multi-perspectival "Libretto," followed by an afterword that chronicles the return of the Mendi to Sierra Leone. In Young's hands we are not allowed to forget that slavery is tied up with the violent misuse of language. His poem uses American culture's strangeness to the Mendi to pry open double meanings that lurk in hymns, in literacy textbooks, and in the language of enslavement. Philip takes this focus on the language of slavery a step further, generating her entire book-length poem from the text of the court decision in *Gregson v. Gilbert* (1783), a British case that determined that slaves thrown overboard to their deaths during transit could be compensated by insurance as lost cargo. Philip's strategy of radical fragmentation – she not only rearranges words on the page but divides phonemes so as to make the language of the legal text moan, shout, chant, and mourn – is designed to address a double trauma: the unrecoverability of the identities and voices of the dead, and the law's inability to recognize the humanity of the enslaved. Using the language of the law to force readers to grapple with its silences, Philip rejects legal and literary language's ordinary presumption of legibility, order, and meaningfulness. Applying increasingly stringent constraints to bear on her manipulation of the text of *Gregson v. Gilbert*, she seeks to surrender authority over her poem, "to create disorder and mayhem so as to release the story that cannot be told, but which, through not telling, will tell itself."<sup>54</sup> Philip experiments with the idea that arbitrariness and deliberate inauthenticity might produce a form of mourning that could acknowledge without erasing irreparable loss; fictional characters begin to emerge from her lines of verse

and the imagined names of murdered Africans appear in ghostly procession at the bottom of the page.

Like many of their predecessors, Moss, Young, and Philip are drawn to poetry as a tool for understanding the history and legacy of slavery because the extremity of the institution seems to call for the extravagance of its conceits, and because the ordinariness of its violence returns us to the power and the opacity of language. The success of these works suggests that grappling with slavery forces poets not only to come to terms with the capacities and limits of their art, but also to think in new ways about what poetry has been and might be.

## NOTES

Thanks to Ryan Kernan, Andrew Parker, and Evie Shockley for their help in thinking through the twists and turns of this history.

1. James G. Basker, ed., *Amazing Grace: An Anthology of Poems about Slavery 1660–1810* (Yale University Press, 2002) and Marcus Wood, ed., *The Poetry of Slavery: An Anglo-American Anthology, 1764–1865* (Oxford University Press, 2003).
2. On the sudden, seemingly uncoordinated surge of African American poetry concerning slavery, see Evie Shockley, “Going Overboard: African American Poetic Innovation and the Middle Passage,” *Contemporary Literature* 52, no. 4 (2011): 791–817.
3. Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York: Miller, Orton, & Mulligan, 1855), 361.
4. *Ibid.*, 362.
5. Joanna Brooks reconsiders Wheatley’s agency in securing this attestation in “Our Phillis, Ourselves,” *American Literature* 82, no. 1 (March 2010): 1–28.
6. William Wells Brown, *The Narrative of William W. Brown, A Fugitive Slave* (Reading MA: Addison Wesley, 1969), 29.
7. Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 362.
8. See “Adaptations of Oronooko” in Aphra Behn, *Oronooko; or the Royal Slave*, eds. Catherine Gallagher and Simon Stern (New York: Bedford / St. Martins, 2000), 103–40. Basker notes that Southerne’s play was performed 315 times in the eighteenth century (29).
9. For a reading of the vexed politics of Southerne’s play, see Diana Jaher, “The Paradoxes of Slavery in Thomas Southerne’s Oronooko,” *Comparative Drama* 42, no. 1 (2008): 51–71.
10. Basker, *Amazing Grace*, 336.
11. Wood, *Poetry of Slavery*, 456–57.
12. *Ibid.*, 458.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Basker, *Amazing Grace*, 30.
15. For an account of antislavery poets’ attempt to justify Christian commerce by depicting slavery as “outside the parameters of civilized trade” see Philip Gould,

- Barbaric Traffic: Commerce and Antislavery in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 43–85, 49.
16. *The Liberator*, October 11, 1839.
  17. “Georgic,” in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, eds. Roland Greene et al., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 556–57.
  18. Classic studies of the ideology of British georgic include John Barrell, *English Literature in History, 1730–80: An Equal, Wide Survey* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983) and Laura Brown, “Imperialism and Poetic Form,” in *Alexander Pope* (New York: Blackwell, 1985), 6–45. Suvir Kaul takes up the long poem’s particular charge to represent Britain’s imperial ambitions in *Poems of Nation, Anthems of Empire: English Verse in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000). Kevis Goodman provides an incisive survey of the debate over the ideology of locodescriptive poetry in *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism: Poetry and the Mediation of History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1–37.
  19. James Grainger, M.D., *The Sugar-Cane: A Poem* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1764). Eighteenth-Century Collections Online.
  20. Timothy Dwight, *Greenfield Hill: A Poem in Seven Parts*, Part II (New York: Childs and Swaine, 1794), 31–53. Early American Imprints Series 1.
  21. See in particular “The World of Antislavery Poetry” in *Poems of Nation*, 230–268.
  22. For the transatlantic resonances of Browning’s poem see Trica Lootens, “States of Exile,” in *The Traffic in Poems: Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Transatlantic Exchange*, ed. Meredith L. McGill (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2008), 15–36. For a reading of the poem’s withheld curse in the context of Garrisonian abolition, see Caleb Smith, *The Oracle and the Curse: A Poetics of Justice from the Revolution to the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 171–75.
  23. Wood, *Poetry of Slavery*, 408.
  24. Wood, *Poetry of Slavery*, 408.
  25. Quoted in Joseph Rezek, “The Print Atlantic: Phillis Wheatley, Ignatius Sancho, and the Cultural Significance of the Book,” in *Early African American Print Culture*, eds. Lara Langer Cohen and Jordan Alexander Stein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 19–39, 30, 21.
  26. For a history of the rediscovery and recasting of Wheatley’s poetry in the 1830s, see Max Cavitch, “The Poetry of Phillis Wheatley in Slavery’s Recollective Economies, 1773 to the Present,” in *Race, Ethnicity and Publishing in America*, ed. Cécile Cottenet (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 212–30.
  27. Horton gives a brief account of his early career as an extemporaneous poet in the autobiography that prefaces *The Poetical Works of George M. Horton, Colored Bard of North Carolina* (Hillsborough: Heartt, 1845), iii–xx.
  28. For a reading of this pivotal moment in Horton’s career as “disembedding” him from a successful patronage economy and placing him in a network of charitable and market relations that were beyond his control, see Leon Jackson, *The Business of Letters: Authorial Economies in Antebellum America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 53–88.
  29. As Jackson pithily notes, The American Colonization Society “did not wish simply to free Horton . . . they wished to be free of him.” Jackson, *Business of Letters*, 72.

30. On lyric reading, see Virginia Walker Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
31. Wood, *Poetry of Slavery*, 462–64.
32. Wood, *Poetry of Slavery*, 464–65.
33. Wood, *Poetry of Slavery*, 465–56.
34. See Karen Sánchez-Eppler “Bodily Bonds: The Intersecting Rhetorics of Feminism and Abolition.” *Representations* 24, no. 1 (October 1988): 28–59 for an analysis of the asymmetries that structure feminist abolition in the antebellum United States. Moira Ferguson discusses a similar dynamic in British context in *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670–1834* (New York: Routledge, 1992).
35. Maria Lowell, *The Poems of Maria Lowell, with Unpublished Letters and a Biography*, ed. Hope Jillson Vernon (Providence: Brown University, 1936), 54.
36. Racial disgust – in particular, the mother’s unnatural recoil from her mixed-race child – is crucial to both Lowell’s poem and Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s “Runaway Slave,” but wholly absent from Harper’s treatment of the same motif; it may be a mark of white women abolitionists’ ambivalence toward the acts of sympathetic identification their poems nonetheless promote.
37. See “Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and the Circuits of Abolitionist Poetry” in *Early African American Print Culture*, 53–74.
38. Michael Cohen ventures such a reading in *The Social Lives of Poems in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).
39. Erika DeSimone and Fidel Louis have recently published an anthology that gathers together poetry published in black-owned periodicals: *Voices Beyond Bondage: An Anthology of Verse by African Americans of the 19th Century* (Montgomery, AL: NewSouth Books, 2014). Daniel Hack has noted that poems that were nominally about other topics were often put to antislavery uses when reprinted in African American newspapers. See his “Wild Charges: The Afro-Haitian ‘Charge of the Light Brigade,’” *Victorian Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Social, Political, and Cultural Studies* 54, no. 2 (Winter 2012): 199–225.
40. Wood, *Poetry of Slavery*, 339–42.
41. *Ibid.*, 633–34, 511–13.
42. See the program for the *Commemorative Festival, at Faneuil Hall, Friday, March 5, 1858. Protest Against the Dred Scott Decision* (Boston: E.L. Balch, 1858).
43. Max Cavitch, “Slavery and Its Metrics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Poetry*, ed. Kerry C. Larson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 94–112, 100.
44. See for example “Negro Minstrelsy – Ancient and Modern” in *Putnam's Monthly* (January 1855), 72–79.
45. Cavitch, “Slavery and Its Metrics,” 102.
46. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Boston: Antislavery Office, 1845), 14.
47. On postwar African American publishing see James Danky, “Reading, Writing, and Resisting,” in *A History of the Book in America*, ed. David D. Hall, vol. 4, *Print in Motion: The Expansion of Publishing and Reading in the United States*,

- 1880–1940, eds. Carl F. Kaestle and Janice A. Radway, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 339–58.
48. See for example Albery Allson Whitman’s “The Freedman’s Triumphant Song” (1893). Ivy Wilson notes that a number of Whitman’s long, narrative poems grappled with the dual challenges of emancipation and immigration by rewriting the slave past; see “The Color Line: James Monroe Whitfield and Albery Allson Whitman” in Larson, *Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Poetry*, 208–24.
  49. Harper toured the South in the immediate postwar period, giving lectures in black communities and to “mixed” audiences, making a quick transition from antislavery activist to racial uplift speaker. See Frances Smith Foster, ed. *A Brighter Coming Day: A Frances Ellen Watkins Harper Reader* (New York: Feminist Press, 1990).
  50. For Dunbar’s use of dialect to voice both nostalgia and critique, see Michael Cohen, “Paul Laurence Dunbar and the Genres of Dialect,” *African American Review* 41, no. 2 (2007): 247–57.
  51. Paul Laurence Dunbar, *The Collected Poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar*, ed. Joanne M. Braxton (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993), 14–15.
  52. Nadia Nurhussein discusses the deliberate inauthenticity of Dunbar’s dialect verse in “Paul Laurence Dunbar’s Performances and the Epistolary Dialect Poem,” *African American Review* 41, no. 2 (2007) 233–38.
  53. *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke, (1925; repr. New York: Atheneum, 1968), 3–4.
  54. M. NorbeSe Philip, *Zong!* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 199.