

PERFORMING BODIES AND PERFORMATIVE TEXTS:
THE BODILY CULTURE OF THE ANTEBELLUM UNITED STATES
AND FLESHY WRITING

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Abstract

“Performing Bodies and Performative Texts” explores the reciprocal relations between black and white Americans in antebellum culture as both performers and observers. This dissertation covers the roughly twenty-year span, from the Amistad revolt in 1839 to the beginning of the Civil War in 1861, when the lived experiences of slaves were introduced ever more audibly and visibly through live testimonials at antislavery fairs in the North. Looking at sentimental novels, slave narratives, and the popular press in this period, I introduce the concept of “fleshy writing” as it helps us understand the bodily performances of racially and sexually embodied subjectivity.

My dissertation moves in three important directions. First, it spotlights how participation in abolitionist discourse shifted antebellum American concepts of the conventional democratic subject from a disembodied-white-male to a corporeal-sensorial-performing individual. By expanding scholarly discourses on transcendentalism and sentimentalism, I maintain that this new bodily culture explains the dynamics between institutionalized power’s authority and an individual’s agency, between a performer’s expressiveness and an observer’s spectatorship, and between verbal performance and written texts. Second, my research envisions the body not only as a private and subjective site but also as an aggregate of politicized spaces. Through corporeal experiences, an individual could recognize and resist how dominant discourse controls over the self. Finally, my dissertation theorizes fleshy writing in order to explain how a subjective perception of the bodily experience constitutes a writer or storyteller’s language of agency. Fleshy writing reveals the process of ideological construction of the black body through various observers’ records of a black performer, and, by exemplifying how the black body produces a written text, breaks down the nineteenth-century cultural and political hierarchies of body/mind, illiteracy/literacy, and performance/written text.

In advancing these directions, “Performing Bodies and Performative Texts” shows how performative aspects of antebellum culture are key to approaching themes of the collective double-consciousness of being *seen* and of *seeing*. The performance of ex-slaves’ bodies on actual and conceptual abolitionist stages prompted their observers to reconsider the integrity and political expressiveness of the human body as regulated by the States, commodified in a capitalist economy, and brutalized under slavery. At the same time, because free (both black and white) Americans were forced to prove their legitimacy under proslavery laws such as the Fugitive Slave Act, these Americans then identified themselves as the performing counterparts of the enslaved. The moments of a politicized body’s display in public stressed the human body as a means of affirming the humanity and civic interiority necessary for a democratic subject. By examining bodily representations and written texts about them in this period, “Performing Bodies and Performative Texts” argues for antebellum writers’ recognition of their own performing bodies as these bodies engage in collaboratively building American democracy through abolitionism.

This dissertation consists of five chapters. The first two chapters argue that a black performer and a white observer reciprocally constructed each other in the era of antislavery movements. By juxtaposing Amistad African captives and Madison

Washington from Frederick Douglass's *The Heroic Slave* (1852) as black performers, I point out that the interventionist nature of performance at antislavery meetings functioned as an educative tool to shape civic interiority of both black and white Americans. Chapter 1, "Staging Blackness: Amistad Africans on the Abolitionist Stage," discusses the racial tensions between white observers' spectatorship over black performers and these performers' resistance to being made into spectacles. While white abolitionists tried to sensationalize the black body in public for their propaganda, the Amistad Africans frustrated them by performing their own rather than the abolitionists' stage directions. Furthering this performer-observer relationship, Chapter 2, "Performing Bodies: Frederick Douglass's *The Heroic Slave*," suggests the example of a black performer who invites a white observer/reader to his situational stage and teaches him how to participate without ogling and thus fetishizing the black body in pain. Witnessing the former slave Washington's heroism, a white sympathizer, Mr. Listwell, matures into an active abolitionist who performs for Washington's rebellion on the board of the *Creole*.

If abolitionists tried to appeal to observers' sentiments by exhibiting ex-slaves' bodies in public, sentimentalist women writers turned a private home into a place where public discourses on slavery would be tested. The next two chapters reveal that the domestic sphere functions as a symbolic stage on which a white mother figure disciplines her black daughter into normative forms of blackness that keeps her inferior in terms of physical appearance, race, gender, and class. By analyzing Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859), I explore how a white mother figure confirms her identity by restricting her black daughter's body, and how a black daughter outgrows her white mother figure through rebellious performance. Chapter 3, "Topsy-Turveydom: Topsy's Mother-Making Performance in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," illuminates Topsy's versatile performance that not only offers a spectacle for white observers but also reveals Ophelia's dependency on Topsy's proper performance to legitimize her motherhood. However, I do not overlook how Stowe ultimately uses Topsy as a vehicle for Ophelia to become a feeling subject rather than making Topsy into an alternative heroine who can overcome Ophelia's racism. Chapter 4, "Staging whiteness: Frado's Performance of Pain in Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*," extends my critique of Stowe and argues that Wilson creates a construct of white femininity and respectability that belies conventional maternal stereotypes of the time. Mrs. Belmont justifies her whiteness by exploiting Frado's body as a mere material for the household, and other white women characters sympathize with Frado to affirm both their morality and inability to help her. Frado invalidates the authority of these white mother figures by theatrically mocking them as if their white motherhood is at best performance rather than innate virtue.

In addition to these characters' performances in antebellum literature, some African Americans made their observers write down about their expressive but kaleidoscopic bodies, in order to maintain their performing bodies independent of white spectatorship. The last chapter, "Performative Texts: Sojourner Truth's (R)evolving Stage and Immortal Body," argues that a performer's recognition of his or her corporeality enables the performer to create a written text as a conceptual stage, by examining Sojourner Truth's *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1850, 1875, 1884). Because

of her illiteracy, Truth had two amanuenses and various contributors to help produce her *Narrative*. Despite these different writers' incongruous portraits of Truth in the *Narrative*, my project reveals that the lack of her own authorial voice paradoxically highlights Truth's control over their writings. I argue that because her story was not being fixed by one scribal voice, Truth could weaken the authority of literate others and present herself as a central force of various observers' writings collected in the *Narrative*. By tracing the process of the amanuenses Olive Gilbert's and Frances Titus's *Narrative* writings through the existing three manuscripts, I argue that Truth's *Narrative* exemplifies a fleshy writing. In this writing, Truth demonstrates her agency that transcends the categories of illiteracy, the black body's materiality, and ungendered black womanhood within which her observers once attempted to pin her down.

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Introduction

In Southern proslavery newspapers, subscribers often advertised for the return of runaway slaves. These newspapers detailed the appearances of the escapees, what they were wearing at the time of their escapes, their names, and distinctive behaviors. On May 28 in 1849 the *Baltimore Sun* had an advertisement to catch a runaway slave for a reward of one hundred and fifty dollars: “Ran away from the subscriber on the 25th inst., negro man OTHO ADAMS, about six feet high, weighs about 200 lbs, bright mulatto, good looking, round face, curly hair, had on a black fur or silk hat, black close coat, dark striped pants, dark striped silk vest, stripes pale; boots, silk cravat with yellowish stripes; yellow silk handkerchief.”¹ The advertisement depicts Otho Adams as a well-dressed light-skinned, and “good-looking” man. His luxurious outfit and brownish complexion may have been essential to his disguise as a white man and his successful escape. This implied visual passing for a white gentleman emphasizes the centrality of performance in the determinations of slavery and freedom. In the vortex of pro-slavery institutions and antislavery movements in the early nineteenth-century U.S, the performative aspect of its contemporary culture and society emerged as a key to understanding the rhetorical apparatus of an antebellum subjectivity.

Runaway advertisements both differ from and resemble antislavery newspapers’ articles on impostor fugitives. William Lloyd Garrison’s *Liberator* reports many cases of impostor fugitives who appealed to abolitionists and their sympathizers’ generosity. One of the renowned women abolitionists, Abby Foster, sent a letter to the *Liberator*. The

¹ http://www.afrigenas.com/library/runaway_ads/balt-1849.html

letter starts by warning credulous abolitionists against one female impostor: “I ought to have written you [Garrison] before this, in reference to an impostor who has, for a long time, been palming herself upon the abolitionists of the country as a fugitive slave.”

Foster continues to picture the impostor’s behavior. “From her manner and story” about “suffering she endured” under slavery, the writer found that she was not a fugitive. After inquiring about the impostor, Foster learned that “she had passed by various names, and told a variety of stories.” For instance, “In Salem, Ohio, she was known as Helen Orlena Tecumseh; in Detroit, Orlena Tecumseh; here [Worcester, N.Y] Mary Smith.”²

According to David Waldstreicher, advertisements such as Otho Adams’s case offer “the first slave narrative” in a sense that they were the first published stories about slaves and their victorious escape for freedom (247).³ If runaway advertisements provide the first slave narrative, these articles on impostor fugitives offer counternarratives of fake runaways. These narratives about antebellum blacks’ switched identities illustrate that performance was required for them not only to survive but also to be human in the society where the humanity of black people was often denied.

These two examples render highly distinct views on slavery and abolitionism, as the former is written by a slave owner looking for his runaway slave and the latter by an abolitionist who was wary of impostor fugitives. Nevertheless, both of them similarly

² *Liberator*. 05 August 1853, page 122, Issue 31.

³ It is impossible to figure out exactly how many slaves disguised to escape for the pursuit of freedom because only a few remaining advertisements serve as the main archive for this research. Waldstreicher maintains that these runaway advertisements are “rhetorical to the core” as they function as slave narratives from slave owners’ perspective. Written by slave owners, these advertisements “not only reveal but also exemplify the profitable contradictions of the mid-Atlantic labor system” (247).

suggest that a dialogic and dialectic relationship between African Americans' fraudulence and blackness existed in the public sphere of antebellum America, and that this relationship was built on a complex set of bodily performances of race. Many critics have pointed out that the line between fact and fiction in slave narratives was blurred as it was unexceptionally policed, transcribed, and edited by white abolitionists (Cohen 103). Just like the female impostor used various names, African Americans in these narratives needed to create a different kind of self that could preserve their humanity by moving in and out of white surveillance. However, not only because of white abolitionists' intervention in publishing slave narratives or in presenting ex-slaves' testimonies but also because of the visual and tangible materiality of the black body, both runaways and free blacks needed to exaggerate and manipulate what their bodies could express. These theatrical displays of black Americans—Otho Adams's possible passing for a white gentleman and the female impostor's transformation into a fugitive—exemplify the complicating negotiations between bodily identification, fraudulence, and constructions of blackness.

The seemingly secure evidence of bodily blackness that was assumed by Southern and Northern whites determined the basic code of black performance. At the same time, African Americans challenged these codes to protect themselves from white observers' spectatorial control over them. By cutting a fine figure, Otho Adams deleted the marks of enslavement, such as ragged clothes and an emaciated body frame that characterized many of Southern black slaves.⁴ His performance enabled him to escape the category of

⁴ Many runaway advertisements depict slaves in poor clothes and with lanky bodies shaped by their hard toils. For instance, one advertisement to seek a slave named Peter describes him in "a

what antebellum Americans expected to see in a majority of black slaves. In contrast, the female impostor acquired runaway narratives on “sufferings” under slavery, in order to enter that category. Her vulnerable and sickly body supported the invented stories that moved many Northern white sympathizers to help her. Despite their stark contrast, both stories similarly reworked and defamiliarized stereotypes of what antebellum white Americans wanted to believe as stable about blackness. Their performances of “trespassing” on the black body demonstrate that African Americans did not remain abstract markers of republican civic virtue such as property ownership that Southern slave owners claimed to justify slavery, or self-regulative sympathy that Northern whites maintained for moral suasion on behalf of the black other.⁵ Through public displays of this “replicated” authenticity on the periphery of the antebellum public sphere, African Americans questioned the normative and otherwise exclusive conventions of white Americans’ racial and gender politics.

“Performing Bodies and Performative Texts” explores the reciprocal relations between black and white Americans in abolition’s public sphere as both performers and observers. This dissertation covers the roughly twenty-year span, from the Amistad revolt in 1839 to the beginning of the Civil War in 1861, when the lived experiences of slaves were introduced ever more audibly and visibly through live testimonials at antislavery

lightish coloured Kersey Jacket, considerably too large for him, a Pair of brownish Fustian Breeches, blue Worsted Stockings, half worn Shoes, [. . .]” (*Pennsylvania Gazette* 27 August 1761). Regarding runaways’ physical characteristics, these advertisements use words referring to scars, disability, and complexion such as “scars cut on each arm,” “both his legs cut off,” and “slender in body.” See Billy G. Smith and Richard Wojtowicz.

⁵ Regarding the formation of antebellum Americans’ civic virtue in the context of abolitionism, see Christopher Castiglia’s *Interior State*.

fairs in the North. Looking at sentimental novels, slave narratives, and the popular press in this period, I introduce the concept of “fleshy writing” to denote the bodily performances integral to racially and sexually embodied subjectivity.

My dissertation moves in three important directions. First, it spotlights how participation in abolitionist discourse shifted antebellum American concepts of the conventional democratic subject from a disembodied-white-male to a corporeal-sensorial-performing individual. While engaging in scholarly discourses on transcendentalism and sentimentalism, I maintain that the new subject emerged from the dynamics between institutionalized power’s authority and an individual’s agency, between a performer’s expressiveness and an observer’s spectatorship, and between verbal performance and written texts. Second, my research envisions the body not only as a private and subjective site but also as an aggregate of politicized spaces. Through corporeal experiences, an individual could recognize and resist how dominant discourse controls over the self. Finally, my dissertation theorizes fleshy writing in order to explain how a subjective perception of the bodily experience constitutes a writer or storyteller’s language of agency. Fleshy writing reveals the process of ideological construction of the black body through various observers’ records of a black performer, and, by exemplifying how the black body produces a written text, breaks down the nineteenth-century cultural and political hierarchies of body/mind, illiteracy/literacy, and performance/written text.

Abolition’s Public Sphere

I look at how the active engagement of antebellum African Americans in representing the black body, particularly in the North, to enter the public sphere of

antislavery movements. Discourses on slavery and abolitionism were multiplied when free blacks, former slaves, women, and working class Americans as important members of the public provided political narratives that were “all the more unsettling for being incongruous” in the abolition’s sphere (Fanuzzi 1). Jürgen Habermas’s “public sphere,” theorized in his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, was developed to explain bourgeois citizens’ participation in public discourses in early modern Europe, and assumes a homogenously bourgeois and male-dominant public whose individual concerns are equated with an abstract form of “public concern” or “common interest.” Developing Habermas’s concept of the public sphere, I build on how Houston Baker, Jr. distinguishes the black public sphere from Habermas’s bourgeois one. Instead of a homogenous community of subjects and the nostalgic connotations of the liberal public sphere, African Americans have recombined discordant cultural elements into “performative articulations of a public” (“Public” 12-15). Agreeing with Baker, I argue that antebellum African Americans on the periphery of the abolition’s public sphere changed that sphere from an unvaried site for bodiless and abstracted white-male individuals to a dynamic space. In this space, the white public’s preconception about blackness was contested and the antebellum subjectivity emerged in a visual and corporeal form.

Before the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, Ralph Waldo Emerson envisioned a disembodied subjectivity, imagined in his famous “transparent eyeball,” that might transcend the material reality of laws, political and economic systems, and religious institutions. In order to maintain an individuality free from social discourses,

transcendentalists like Emerson strove to realize a notion of transcendental subjectivity while devaluing the reality of the body's materiality in their social reform projects.⁶ However, the Fugitive Slave Acts revealed the impossibility of the transcendentalist disembodiment that could establish discourse-free individual subjectivity. In his famous speech, "The Fugitive Slave Law,"⁷ Emerson claims that he did not know slavery until he was able to "feel" sentiments not from a transcendental perception of injustice but from a specifically physical experience with slavery:

I have lived all my life without suffering any known inconvenience from American Slavery. I never saw it; I never heard the whip; I never felt the check on my free speech and action, until, the other day, when Mr. Webster, by his personal influence, brought the Fugitive Slave Law on the country. (780)

In Emerson's mind, his private body's feeling is equal to the acknowledgment that leads him to take action for justice. He learns about slavery through his independent sensorial experience, which leads him to a moral judgment on the unjustifiable law: "The new Bill

⁶ After going through the series of the deaths of his beloved wife, aunt, and son, Emerson discovered that the mortality and susceptibility of the body were problematic. Then, he claims that the body is "Not Me" in *Nature*. In another early essay, "Compensation" (1841), Emerson separates the body from the mind by describing a struggle between the two. He argues that the "soul says Eat; the body would feast. The soul says, the man and the woman shall be one flesh and one soul; the body would join the flesh only. The soul says, Have dominion over all things to the end of virtue; the body would have the power over things to its own ends" (159-60). For more discussion on Emerson's concept of corporeality in the context of slavery, see Carolyn Sorisio's *Fleshing out America*, Chapter 4 "Saxons and Slavery: Corporeal Challenges to Ralph Waldo Emerson's Republic of the Spirit."

⁷ He delivered two addresses on the same subject: one was in Concord on May 3, 1851, and the other was at the Tabernacle in New York City on March 4, 1854. The passage this essay quotes here is the first speech in 1851.

made it operative, required me to hunt slaves, and it found citizens in Massachusetts willing to act as judges and captors” (784). While confessing his insensitivity to sufferers under slavery in the past, Emerson now comes to “see,” “hear,” and “feel” slavery because his own freedom of speech and action is subject to public surveillance that maintains slavery. As a result, he cannot help “suffering [. . .] inconvenience from American Slavery.” Because the Act forced every citizen in free states to assist in returning runaways to their owners, Northern whites became visually embodied as a target of the legal enforcement no less than the already corporalized black Americans. Slavery served as a critical stimulus for antebellum Americans to understand how the distinctive corporeality of individual bodies appeared to be important in the public sphere.⁸

This dissertation looks at how African Americans in the antebellum period entered arenas dominated by fantasies of an all-white-male public sphere. Even though the experience with slavery embodied contemporary Americans’ concept of subjectivity in general, African Americans in this period not only became distinctively corporeal but also were required to manipulate their corporeality as a tool to reinstate black humanity. The emergence of (impostor) runaways might best be described not as publics like Emersonian citizens but as “counterpublics.” When I use the term “counterpublics,” it most broadly denotes a group of those excluded from the discourse of normative (if it

⁸ Many critics have pointed the limitation of Harbermas’s public sphere that homogenizes the public. One of them, Michael Warner, calls Harbermas’s belief in bourgeois public sphere a “fantasy of publicity,” as such self-abstraction is always imaginary. Warner argues “the ability to abstract oneself in public discussion has always been an unequally distributed resource” (Warner 382).

means “not racialized, materialized, and commercialized”) body, citizenship, and civic virtue. Nancy Fraser defines counterpublics as other publics that “contested the exclusionary norms of the bourgeois public, elaborating alternative styles of political behavior and alternative norms of public speech” (61). By following Fraser’s revisionist historiography, I find these “alternative styles” in the black body’s performance in the public sphere of antebellum America. This performance does not limitedly indicate theatrical productions but also expansively includes political meetings like antislavery fairs and literary scenes where the black body was exhibited and subject to white observers’ spectatorship.⁹

The abolitionist counterpublics consisted of black abolitionists, African captives, black children slaves, and black women leaders who were excluded from the mainstream of American abolitionism. They might be “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses” (Fraser 67). They functioned as “spaces of withdrawal and regroupment,” on the one hand, and as bases “for agitational activities directed toward wider publics,” on the other (Fraser 68). My examination of the black body’s performance adds one more function of the antebellum counterpublics; that is, they served as a reflexive model of the abolitionist public by offering what Fraser means by “oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser 67). In the above examples, the female impostor displayed her body in public to manufacture it as a living evidence of the cruelties of slavery. Similarly, to evade

⁹ Although few African Americans as observers attended the black body’s performance (see my discussion on African American audiences at the antislavery meeting for Amistad Africans in Chapter 1), this dissertation regards black performers’ observers as whites because the absolutely large number of these observers consisted of whites.

slave hunters and suspicious Northerners, Otho Adams chose to visualize his distinctive physique instead of hiding in the woods. Through these calculated exhibitions of the black body, the two could obtain access to the abolition's public sphere. Both the female impostor and Otho Adams withdrew their identities in the ways that observers could hardly guess what they really were. Furthermore, the two (unintentionally) agitated the public who naively wanted to see in the runaways what they believed to be essential blackness. Most importantly, through this withdrawal of their identity and following agitation, the female impostor and Otho Adams's expressive black body turned their observers' eyes to themselves. The article on the female impostor indicates that its writer, Foster, had to examine her own preconception of fugitive slaves and break it out. Ironically, the article's title, "Look Out For an Impostor!," urges the reader to "look into yourself for an impostor." Likewise, despite its purpose to capture the runaway slave, Adams, the readers of the *Baltimore Sun* could not but critically reexamine what they knew about the blackness that these black people would exemplify.

The Bodily Culture of Antebellum America

Subjectivity is both culturally constructed by societal elements and shaped by an individual's critical capacities. In other words, an individual's exercise of independent agency is possible in the very individual's recognition of the self as a product of these societal elements. The rhetoric of corporeality reflects the antebellum American concept of subjectivity. To prove this, I delve into how antebellum writers' notions of the subjective self and the material body signal *fleshy* resistance to the disciplining of an individual subject. The term "fleshy" shows how physical experience leads an individual

subject to recognize both the disciplined body and its fight against disciplinary forces, and to demonstrate the body in a way of proving the individual's humanity. The meaning of "fleshy" will be further discussed in the later part of this introduction.

The bodily culture of antebellum America became obvious when an embodied subject with a visible, material, and sensorial body appeared to be centered in antislavery movements. Language of human corporeality was prevalent throughout politics and a variety of aesthetic forms during this period. The lived experiences of slaves were introduced ever more audibly and visibly through live testimonials at antislavery fairs in the North. Runaway and emancipated slaves graphically portrayed the cruelties of Southern slavery on the abolitionist stage, rousing antislavery sentimentality among feeling observers. The performance of former slaves' bodies prompted these observers to reconsider the integrity and political expressiveness of the human body that had been regulated by the States, commodified in capitalist economy, and brutalized under slavery. In addition to antislavery politics, many art productions such as theater and literature portrayed bodies in pain as a conduit for agitating readers to be sensitive to sufferings of the black "other." Abolitionist writers such as Lydia Maria Child and Harriet Beecher Stowe believed that discovering readers' bodily sentiments for enslaved blacks would lead them to participate in producing discourses, which had excluded blacks and women from political power.

The model set by Karen Sánchez-Eppler's *Touching Liberty* has been extremely influential to my conceptualization of bodily culture. She suggests that the social and political structures of the body politic were closely related to "the fleshy specificity of

embodied identities” in antebellum America, as this relation was hidden under “the constitutional language of abstracted and implicitly bodiless” subjects (1). I borrow the word “fleshy” from Sánchez-Eppler to use it in the almost identical sense that this critic regards the human body as an emblem of all other systems including the nation-state. She highlights a dialectical relation in which society conditions how the body is perceived while the body represents the social order. If the body of African Americans and women serves as “an inescapable sign of identity,” this sign is also “insecure and often illegible” (15). For this reason, as Sánchez-Eppler argues, difficulties in interpreting the body structured antebellum discourses on abolitionism and feminism: “[T]he social and political goals of feminism and abolition depend upon an act of representation, the inscription of black and female bodies into the discourse of personhood” (15). Therefore, political identities cannot be separate from embodied identities.

Although it should be remembered that Sánchez-Eppler’s contribution to introducing human corporeality as a tool of subjective recognition of the self’s location in political discourses, I want to overcome her tendency to underrate the body as an auxiliary way to enter the realm of mind and spirit. For example, she focuses on how abolitionism and the women’s rights movement depended on the bodily representations and reactions aroused by sentimental literature; reading sentimental literature became a bodily act, as “the feelings in the story are made tangibly present in the flesh of the reader” (26-27). However, in claiming so, Sánchez-Eppler apparently prioritizes the incorporeal aspect of subjectivity to the body; the body only serves to guide readers to discover their feelings and states of mind. Accordingly, she unintentionally moves back

to the mind-body duality established by the very Enlightenment ideology that justified the colonization of Africa and its enslavement. For this reason, Lindon Barrett criticizes Sánchez-Eppler, arguing that “it is paramount to recognize that the body in question in the sentimental literacy transaction *never* enters the transaction on its own terms” (424).

My own formulation of bodily culture enlarges on Sánchez-Eppler’s formulation by depending on Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s non-dualistic exploration of embodied experience. In his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty maintains that our lived experience of the body denies the detachment of subject from object, mind from body, spirituality from materiality, and reason from sentiment: “Probably the chief gain from phenomenology is to have united extreme subjectivism and extreme objectivism in its notion of the world or of rationality” (xxii). In the sense of Merleau-Ponty’s theorization of the subjective body, the corporeal aspect of antebellum America illustrates that African Americans and women, whose bodily materiality had denied their humanity as equal as that of a disembodied-white-male subject, appeared to be a body-subject not a body-object.

The bodily culture in this dissertation does not mean that the human body serves as a tool for empirical knowledge or as a result of behavioristic determinism that designate the human condition. Rather, this culture explains that bodily perception is not merely the result of individual body parts’ functioning, but also a set of embodied acts through which humans understand and shape the society.¹⁰ If individuals experience

¹⁰ I follow Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s critique of empiricism and intellectualism (or rationalism). He contends that both of them are markedly flawed positions: “In the first case consciousness [empiricism] is too poor, in the second [intellectualism] too rich for any phenomenon to appeal compellingly to it. Empiricism cannot see that we need to know what we are looking for,

external political forces that shape social role and identity, they can respond to and challenge these forces through the creative restaging of the body. As the cases of the female impostor and Otho Adams suggest, slavery and abolitionism affected antebellum Americans' demonstrations of their bodies. The human body per se became the embodied rhetoric of an individual's perception of and response to their antebellum society. It not only exposed the contemporaries' corporeal vulnerability but also required them to perform a certain type of racialized consciousness.

Without assuming that white Americans kept themselves from this consciousness and its expression through their bodies,¹¹ I focus on African Americans in both reality and fiction because their body's vulnerability to the unjust systems and materiality made their performance more noticeable than that of whites. Carol Henderson argues that African Americans have created moments of resistance against oppression by allowing "for the reconceptualization of literal and figurative bodies with certain delimiting social structures" (*Scarring* 6). Runaway slaves, in particular, had to invent a new bodily identification to slip away from slave hunters' watchful eyes. For example, Ellen Craft dressed as a white planter and her husband, William, pretended to be her personal servant

otherwise we would not be looking for it, and intellectualism fails to see that we need to be ignorant of what we are looking for, or equally again we should not be searching" (28).

¹¹ Agreeing with her, I would argue that both white and black Americans became part of the bodily culture. White abolitionists did not necessarily have what Lauren Berlant has called the "privilege of abstraction" (*Anatomy* 34). Just as what happened to William Lloyd Garrison, white abolitionists were in danger of being captured by a hostile mob and tarred with the pages of his own publications (J. Thomas 188). White members in the abolition's public sphere could not remain abstract and invisible, just as African Americans whose corporeal attributes made them subject to slavery and proslavery laws. As Robert Fanuzzi maintains, the reception of Frederick Douglass's oratory suggests that "white abolitionists would abandon the promise of their own disembodiment into a historical image of the people and their investment in the articles of literate citizenship in order to identify their movement with the particularity of his body" (84).

on their way from Macon, Georgia to slavery-free Philadelphia.¹² In addition, because white abolitionists acknowledged the power of black bodies' performance, former slaves introduced on the abolitionist stage were asked to follow particular requests and sometimes broke from them by exhibiting their bodies more independently. Frederick Douglass exemplifies how a runaway slave transformed himself from an agent for William Lloyd Garrison¹³ into an orator for his own abolitionism. The creation of the body enabled the corporeal subject to overcome the normative and exclusive conventions of racial politics and slavery. Moreover, if the ideological restrictions founded upon slavery prevented the corporeal subject including African Americans and women from entering the abolition's public sphere, their invention of bodily presentation was essential to demolishing the boundary of racial and gender normality surrounding that sphere.

The Black Body

My conceptualization of the black body aims at illustrating the complex process of establishing and deconstructing blackness rather than typifying African Americans' holistic experiences resulting from the materiality of their bodies in the U.S. history. The black body demonstrates African Americans' struggle to prove their humanity by

¹² Daphne A. Brooks argues that the couple worked together "to repossess their own bodies through methods of passing, performing, and cross-dressing" their escape to the North ("Introduction" liv). In doing so, they not only disrupted the "legal" institution of slavery but also undermined the normative categories of race and gender that undergirded that institution as well ("Introduction" lv).

¹³ A prominent abolitionist, journalism, and social reformer in the nineteenth century U.S. Although this dissertation does not directly discuss Garrison, his presence is prevalent throughout it. In Chapter 1, Amistad Africans were often introduced in the *Liberator* that Garrison edited. In discussing the tension between a white abolitionist, Mr. Listwell, and an ex-slave revolutionary hero, Madison Washington, Chapter 2 shortly mentions Garrison in relation to Frederick Douglass. And, in Chapter 5, Garrison appears as a writer of the preface in the *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* and life-long supporter of Truth's abolitionism, African American civil rights movements, and women's rights movements.

symbolically retrieving their exploited, exhibited, and priced bodies from the mainstream U.S. culture in the antebellum period. Texts written or narrated by African Americans have thematized this struggle. For this reason, Robert Reid-Pharr has written of the importance of exploring “the ideological calculus by which our understanding of the black body is wedded to our understanding of black literature and literacy,” noting that “it is taken almost without question that Black American literature is that which demonstrates the impress of the black hand, the black body” (4). By examining the black body in antebellum literature, I argue that African Americans perceived the spectacular power of the black body in the political tension between slavery and abolitionism, and that, by presenting that power in a form of performance, they embodied the meanings of blackness in modifying and actualizing the ideal of American democracy.

Several critics have offered different characterizations of how bodies are figured within African American history and culture. Sterling Stuckey understands the intellectualism of enslaved blacks as an essentially physical and kinetic matter. According to him, the black body has passed on African Americans’ experiences with expressive movement and vocality as both labors and artistic forms. Therefore, an access to the black body means an access to the blackness that Stuckey believes determines the critical attribute of African descendants. As Reid-Pharr criticizes, Stuckey figures “the black body as the necessary antecedent to any intelligible Black American public presence” (5). In his formulation of the black body, unfortunately, Stuckey neglects multiple meanings of the black body. He asserts, “What we know of slave culture in the South, and of that of blacks in the North during and following slavery, indicates that

black culture was national in scope, the principal forms of cultural expression being essentially the same” (82). These “essentially” homogeneous forms pertain to the “African,” which he attempts to define throughout his book, *Slave Culture*. He continues, “Still, the preservation of those values [of African culture] in various forms was not an automatic process. On the contrary, slave ingenuity was indispensable to the survival of African culture in America” (83). Even though Stuckey apparently does not deny a possibility of continuous creation of values originated from Africa, he undervalues the black body’s productivity while regarding it as a reservoir of African culture.

Hortense Spillers’s description of the black body is close to what Stuckey asserts. Spillers states that the black body under the racial hegemony “becomes a defenseless target for rape and veneration, and [. . .], in its material and abstract phase, a resource for metaphor,” since the body itself functions as a private and particular space where “biological, sexual, social, cultural, linguistic, ritualistic, and psychological fortunes join” (“Mama” 66-67).¹⁴ By disembodimenting the black body, she argues that it is “neither *given* as an uncomplicated empirical rupture on the landscape of the human, nor do we ever actually ‘see’ it. In a very real sense, the ‘body,’ insofar as it is an analytical construct, does not exist in person at all” (“Peter” 21). Although she properly insists that the black

¹⁴ In her essay “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” Spillers notes that the flesh, differently from the body, resides in the “zero degree of social conceptualization” (“Mama” 69). By sparing the undiscursive part of an individual subject’s corporeality, this critic sidesteps completely abstracting the materiality of the body and presents the flesh “as a primary narrative,” that is, a living reservoir of a subject’s bodily experiences (“Mama” 67). Nevertheless, Spillers’s “flesh” resembles the body because of its helpless passivity. The flesh not only displays the “sign of an interiorized violation of body and mind” but also “demarcate[s] a total objectification” as a community of the enslaved who become “a living laboratory” (“Mama” 68). The flesh in Spillers’s terms at best evinces a slave’s violated body and mind, and mostly is designed to wait for further intextuation regardless of its current “objectification.”

body be “specified as a discursive and particular instance that belongs, always to a *context*” (“Peter” 21), the body does not merely exist as a theoretical construct. Instead, an individual’s personal experience with that body leads to dismantle and to revise that construct. Consequently, Spillers’s abstraction of the black body paradoxically undermines the significance of antebellum African Americans’ corporeal experiences.

In *Scenes of Subjection* Saidiya Hartman points out that the black body delineates an individual black subject’s notion of agency. By analyzing the relationship between African Americans as performers and white Americans as observers in nineteenth-century America, Hartman asserts that African Americans discovered their subjectivity when they found that they were not free from the system of slavery and racism. Even sympathetic observers’ efforts to redeem the black body that was tortured and exhibited in public unintentionally contributed to maintaining that system: “[B]enevolent correctives and declarations of slave humanity intensified the brutal exercise of power upon the captive body rather than ameliorating the chattel condition” (5). Therefore, any endeavor to redress the pained body turned out to be an “(counter)investment in the body as a site of need, desire, and pleasure and the constancy of unmet needs, repressed desires, and the shortcoming of pleasure” (Hartman 75). Depending on the Foucauldian notion of disciplinary power over an individual’s body, Hartman pessimistically concludes that the black body functions not only as a vehicle for African Americans’ recognition of their being human, but also as a site of bondage that kept them in inhumane conditions. Hartman’s understanding of the black body compromises any effort to challenge that power, as she insists, “The dominated catalyze reversals of power, not

by challenges presented to the system but by succumbing to the system's logic" (88). It is not surprising that she underrates blackness, whereas Stuckey positively considers it what the black body has achieved, as a result of "specific means of making use of the [black] body" (58).

Reid-Pharr's concept of the black body helps us move beyond Hartman's deep pessimism about African Americans' struggle to break down the system of power. While admitting the black body's spectacular display in reality and fiction, he argues that this display indicates "an incredible uncertainty as to the status of that body's being" (5). As many antebellum writers were obsessed with "that body's normalization" in their writing, "the [black] body's inconclusivity, its awkwardness, allowed for the production of a discourse that challenged American racism," and also turned "that challenge in upon itself, producing, as a consequence, a wealth of paradox within early Black American writing, particularly within the novels of the antebellum era" (Reid-Pharr 8-9). In other words, the impossibility of "normalizing" the black body resulted in incongruous notions of blackness, which were thematized in many antebellum texts. I regard this aspect of the black body as a source of productivity for African American resistance to the hierarchies between black and white, between body and mind, between performance and written text, and between performer and observer. At the same time, this resistance challenged any attempt to fixate what blackness would stand for in the systems of power and domination. By analyzing historical events, fictions, and narratives, this dissertation examines these cultural and political dynamics caused by the black body.

Performing Blackness on the Abolitionist Stage

I approach the black body in the theoretical frame of performance because performance serves as “the most fecund metaphor for the social dimensions of cultural production” and “embraces a much wider range of human behaviors” (Roach 46). More specifically, the black body’s performance follows two modes. First, it was used for African Americans to manipulate others and negotiate their own survival in the harsh realities of racism in the North and slavery in the South. By apparently succumbing to the regime of white spectatorship, black performers demonstrated the “believable” of blackness on abolitionist stages and in front of suspicious white observers. These performers’ theatrical masks contributed to their successful survival.¹⁵ Furthermore, in turn, performance also allowed black performers to rebel against these forms of spectatorship. Peggy Phelan argues that performance shows more than it intends, and, therefore, it is never completely controlled by observers’ demands for one type of performance (2). This second attribute of performance made black performers able to create multiple and resistant demonstrations of the body, as the following chapters explicate.

On literal and situational stages, the two modes of the black body’s performance were often indistinguishable. According to bell hooks’ observation of the history of African-American engagement with performance-as-art, its theatricality and political demonstration merge in one category of the black body’s performance because “the performative arts in black expressive culture have responded to circumstances of

¹⁵ Joseph Roach differentiates performance from theater. While theater is limitedly used for a certain kind of spectatorial participation in an event, performance broadly reflects what Michel de Certeau calls “the practice of everyday life” where “the role of spectator expands into that of participant” (46). When this dissertation mentions the term “performance,” Roach’s definition of performance is presumed.

oppression and exploitation” (210). In the same sense, when African Americans were exhibited on various stages in public, in fictions, and in the domestic sphere, their expressions not only amused observers, but also made observers aware of their own bodies as tangible and sensorial as those of the black performers they watched. In the antebellum era, African Americans fashioned the black body as a political tool to participate in producing discourses on slavery, black subjectivity and citizenry, and post-slavery republicanism. Moreover, they barely let mainly white observers enjoy the distance between the stage and audiences, even if this physical distance implied that white observers could maintain a kind of invisible, bodiless, and therefore invincible spectatorship over the black body.

The abolitionist stage here refers to both literal stages at antislavery fairs and situational or metaphoric stages in abolitionist fictions and narratives. These stages function for the black body’s performance in three ways. First, the stage served as a metaphor of antebellum Americans’ collective consciousness of being racialized. Staging the black body revealed racial dynamics, as it demarcated the line between black performers and white observers. Observers gazed at the racial other by confirming their spectatorial authority over those performers, when the black body on the stage became an “empty vessel vulnerable to the projection of others’ feelings, ideas, ideas, desires, and values,” (Hartman 21). However, the performers also looked their “racialized” body by recognizing these observers’ gaze. W.E.B. Du Bois’s “double-consciousness” illuminates the racial dynamics between corporealized black performers and disembodied observers. Double-consciousness provides a clue to understanding the relationships between the

seeing self and the *seen* other, or between the *seeing* other and the *seen* self. Through the abolitionist stage, both blacks and whites confirm their respective self-consciousnesses by seeing themselves through their other's eyes. For this reason, this bodily exhibition enabled black performers to realize their subjective notion of the black body. At the same time, observers' desire for the black body alluded that they depended on the presence of African Americans to confirm their "white" identity as it implied an access to power over the black other.

Second, the stage paradoxically blurred racial distinction, even though that distinction was apparently fixed by the physical nature of blacks as performers and whites as observers in a theater. Black performers did not merely represent what observers expected about the black body. Instead, they continuously reworked the various meanings of their bodily expression either because curious white observers wanted to see unexpected "spectacular" on stage or because performers do not always follow same performances.¹⁶ On the one hand, to demand a "black" performance, white observers occasionally showed its example in front of black performers, which Eric Lott would call "cross-racial desire."¹⁷ For example, in Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*, the heartless mistress,

¹⁶ Despite the abolitionists' political agenda for enslaved blacks' humanity, the abolitionist stage attracted observers by offering "spectacles" of fugitive slaves just like a freak show invited its audiences in the nineteenth century. Given that a freak show often exhibited blacks' grotesque materiality, which differentiated the black other from white observers, the abolitionist stage similarly presented exceptional blacks such as Amistad Africans and runaway slaves. For studies on freak shows in nineteenth-century America, see Michael Chemer's *Staging Stigma: A Critical Examination of the American Freak Show* and Benjamin Reiss's "P.T. Barnum, Joice Heth and Antebellum Spectacles of Race."

¹⁷ By considering blackface minstrelsy white Americans' racial fantasy, Eric Lott argues that the cross racial desire residing in blackface minstrelsy coupled "a nearly insupportable fascination and a self protective derision with respect to black people and their cultural practices, and that

Mrs. Belmont, teaches Frado by demonstrating what a black body is supposed to be in her household, in order to keep Frado inferior to white family members. On the other hand, while observing whites imitating the black body, black performers came to realize not only that the black body could not be appropriated but also that it was impossible to represent that body in one recognizable form. Whereas the division between stage and audience at an abolitionist fair often marked racial separation as well, it was also often lowered when observers actively requested a certain type of racialized performance, and reciprocally performers should satisfy their observers. In short, the stage presenting the black body became a site where whites and blacks intervened in one another's roles.

Antebellum stages, most significantly, reflected the struggle of African Americans to redeem the black body. As E. Patrick Johnson suggests, the stage mirrors "the tension between stabilizing cultural forces (tradition), and the shifting, ever-evolving aspects of culture that provide sites for social reflection, transformation, and critique" (7). Hartman expands the meaning of this tension to the conflict between observers with (spectatorial) power and performers who were subject to that power: "One performance aimed to reproduce and secure the relations of domination and the other to manipulate appearances in order to challenge these relations and create a space for action not generally available" (8).¹⁸ When recognizing black subjectivity by discovering the estranged bodies on stage through observers' gaze, black performers strategically

made blackface minstrelsy less a sign of absolute white power and control than of panic, anxiety, terror, and pleasure" (6).

¹⁸ As her pessimism detailed earlier, Hartman also claims that that space for challenge a previous domination is rarely possible because "acts of resistance exist within the context of relations of domination and are not external to them" (8).

displayed the black body to redeem themselves from the observers' control over them. This redemption was barely successful because the stage was designed by white abolitionists and provided for predominantly white observers.¹⁹ The case of Frederick Douglass is exceptional; he refused to follow white abolitionists' request to play the role of a full-bodied ex-slave on the abolitionist stage as if this role epitomized black people's lack of intelligence and dependency upon whites. I explore black performers' heroic efforts to reinvent spectacles of the black body by transforming places into stages where observers were confronted with the humanity that these bodies carried.

I use stages in a broad sense that are situated in both the public and private sphere. On these various stages bodies were placed under the scrutiny of white observers' curious, suspicious, and voyeuristic eyes. In the North, the Africans of the Amistad revolt and Sojourner Truth were staged as the evidence of the cruelties of slavery. In the South, Douglass's hero, Madison Washington, was once displayed on the auction block. In addition to these public spaces in the U.S., antebellum literature also shows that African Americans were imagined and made into spectacles in the private and domestic space. Topsy in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is asked to sing and dance in her master's house where white observers-masters demand that she display her "native-soil." Likewise, Frado in Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* is forced to demonstrate blackness through the constant exploitation of her body in the Bellmont household, as the Bellmonts use her performance of blackness to mark the terms of their own whiteness. These household performances indicate that private and domestic spheres do not exist separately from the

¹⁹ See Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection* Chapter 3 "Seduction and the Ruses of Power."

public sphere, but become sites where the practice of Northern racism and Southern slavery is actualized. But, at the same time, while these performances seem to conform to certain racial types, these particular performers also belie their observers' expectations, changing the nature of their own staging and multiplying the meanings of blackness.

Fleshy Writing

This dissertation investigates antebellum literature, the popular press, and visual images in order to shed light on how antebellum African Americans came to *flesh out* their being human in the context of slavery and abolitionism. The flesh abides *within* social discourse because of its material facticity. However, at the same time, it resides *outside* the functions of that discourse because the flesh allows an individual to perceive the world independently and to represent this perception through which agency is possible. This “fleshed” individual is called a feeling subject here. The flesh is not “original to” or “existing before” both the body and the mind, as Stuckey and Spillers would believe, but partly coupled with them and mostly transcending them. For example, if slavery located black slaves within the evaluating system of human stocks, their flesh leads them to discover bodily sentiments as the undeniable sign of being human and to preserve their agency outside the system as well. Likewise, antebellum literature shows that the flesh serves as the site of both disembodiment and embodiment in a way that a feeling subject signifies one's own flesh as the evidence of humanity. My coinage of *fleshy writing* attempts to elucidate the theme of a feeling subject's flesh whereby the subject decodes his or her discursive body and encodes body resistant to oppressive

discourses in print. Fleshy writing helps us understand conflicted textual dynamics in antebellum literature, especially recorded by African American writers and storytellers.

Fleshy writing suggests how antebellum counterpublics entered the abolition's public sphere by producing a written text at the time period when literate whites controlled print culture. Most former slaves and black women, who I consider counterpublics, were excluded in the nineteenth-century print culture. However, they dismantled the hegemonic domains of literacy and publication, proving that their corporeality empowered them to produce their stories in print. Antebellum Americans tended to consider writing the token of mind, whereas lack of literacy was assumed equal to that of mind. The split of body and mind has remained a fundamental assumption of Enlightenment Western thought, which influenced the black and white racial dichotomy during U.S. slavery. Proslavery supporters and slaveowners justified their privilege of exploiting black slaves because the former had "mind" evinced by "civilization" but the latter did not. To some African Americans such as Frederick Douglass in this period, literacy proves their minds' victory over the constricted limits and conditions of the black body under slavery and racism. The famous line in Douglass's first narrative—"Knowledge is the pathway from slavery to freedom"—indicates how antebellum African Americans identified their mastery of language with a quality rendering them more equal to whites. Douglass's contempt for Sojourner Truth's lack of culture can be explained in this context. During his visit to the Northampton Association in 1844,²⁰ Douglass

²⁰ Douglass visited the Northampton Association in 1844 to deliver a lecture along with the Hutchinson singers' performance, which drew a large crowd. See Margaret Washington's *Sojourner Truth's America* Chapter 10 "Holy City: Sojourner Truth and the Northampton

observed Truth: She “seemed to feel it her duty to trip me up in my speeches and to ridicule my efforts to speak and act like a person of *cultivation* and *refinement*. [. . .] She seemed to please herself and others best when she put her ideas in the oddest forms. She was much respected at Florence, for she was honest, industrious, and amiable” (qtd. in Sheffield 131-32).

Regarding the matter of African Americans’ effort to prove their minds through written text, Lindon Barrett contends, “[A]s much as literacy represents a privileged state of mind, it also connotes the material body and, ultimately, the allegedly overwhelming corporeality of blackness” (415). In Douglass’s mind, Truth’s diligent laboring and coarse wit only singled out the gap between himself with “cultivation and refinement” and her with “ideas in the oddest forms.” Since Douglass himself demonstrated his mind through the mastery of written language, he seems to highlight Truth’s lack of that “mind” when he witnesses her excessive corporeality represented by her hard toils and “uncivilized” language. Despite Douglass’s apparent success in proving his “mind,” many former slaves had the dilemma of illustrating their inevitably “bodily” experiences under slavery, recognizing that traditional Western thought never presented itself in terms of corporeality and bodily performance beyond writeable language.²¹ In enslaved blacks’

Community,” and Nell Irvin Painter’s *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* Chapter 11 “Douglass, Ruggles, and Family.”

²¹ Many African American scholars discuss the relation between language and body, as their opinions widely differ. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. somewhat dismisses the body and bodily experiences when he celebrates figurations of language as if race could be a metaphor rather than a material reality. In contrast, some African American women writers still cling to the language of the body, and it takes “the form of embracing (both thematically and rhetorically) a relatively literal language” (Homans 79). According to Margaret Homans, Black feminist writers refuse to allow racist as well as sexist biologism. Rather, they value “the body regardless of the degraded

mind, the language of slaveholders could hardly mediate the cruelties of slavery and hardships of their materialized bodies because that abstract medium was “necessarily antithetical to that project” (Barrett 423). Therefore, African American writers invented a new form of writing that was born out of the black body’s experiences because of its fleshy facticity. In this vein, I focus on how African American performers/characters/writers’ recognition of their sensorial body affects their language of agency and enables them to produce a written text. The theme of fleshy writing is implicitly or explicitly explicated throughout all of the five chapters. In particular, Sojourner Truth’s *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* exemplifies that writing, as the dissertation discusses in the last chapter.

Chapter summary

The chapters in this dissertation speak to and across one another in nuanced ways under the themes of bodily culture and fleshy writing. Some of these connections are obvious, as the first two chapters and following two chapters are juxtaposed in thematic and historic dialogues. Furthermore, the chapters are not meant to account for the innumerable ways in which the black body appears in the form of performance in American history and literature. Rather, they offer possible interpretations through which the reader discovers how antebellum writers and their black performer-characters demonstrate the triumphant struggle through the black body’s expressiveness to prove the humanity of African Americans.

position to which androcentric culture had assigned it” (79). For example, Joyce A. Joyce criticizes Gates’s equation of race with metaphor by calling it his “denial of blackness or race as an important element of literary analysis of black literature” (337).

The first two chapters argue that a black performer and a white observer reciprocally constructed each other in the era of antislavery movements, paralleling Amistad African captives and Madison Washington from Frederick Douglass's *The Heroic Slave* (1852) as black performers. Chapter 1, "Staging Blackness: Amistad Africans on the Abolitionist Stage," discusses the racial tensions between white observers' spectatorship over black performers and these performers' resistance to being made into spectacles. Between the Amistad revolt in 1839 and their departure to the African home in 1841, the Amistad Africans became well known to their contemporary Northern Americans in the vortex of the American antislavery movements. The Africans on the abolitionist stage were introduced as the living evidence of the black race's humanity that justified their right to freedom. In this theatrical setting, while (white) observers tried to regulate the Africans' bodies by imposing white-Protestant values and racist images on them, the Africans disproved this regulation by performatively demonstrating their unruly black bodies. This reciprocity among abolitionists, observers, and the Amistad Africans over the stage illustrates how they dynamically attended the social construction of blackness in antebellum America. Regardless of the abolitionists' project on the Africans, observers did often not conceal their fear of slave insurrection and wanted to affirm their control over black people by demanding racial stereotypes in the Africans' performance. Slipping away from both the abolitionists' instructions and the observers' demands for particular performances, the Amistad Africans displayed their performative bodies in ways that the bodies discouraged these Americans' attempts to inscribe them as ideological symbols.

Furthering this performer-observer relationship, Chapter 2, "Performing Bodies: Frederick Douglass's *The Heroic Slave*," suggests that in *The Heroic Slave* Douglass more radically liberates the black performer's body from the white observers' spectatorship by introducing the model observers of the black performer to his reader and by creating his alter-ego as a heroic black man through Madison Washington. The black performer invites a white observer/reader to his situational stage and teaches him how to participate without ogling and thus fetishizing the black body in pain. Washington was born an American slave in Virginia, who led a slave uprising with the help of other nineteen slaves aboard the brig *Creole* in early November 1841. Douglass calls the historical hero back onto the stage of his imaginary theater as the site where white observers and the black performer build a revolutionary relationship by switching their roles. Washington's performing black body inspires white observers to bear witness to his achievements and spread their testimonies, presumably, to the readers of the novella. Douglass empathizes the observer's careful listening more than visual observation in the theatrical setting because listening instead of looking helps white observers overcome the racial boundary restricted by the visual perception of the black body's difference. Witnessing the former slave Washington's heroism, a white sympathizer, Mr. Listwell, matures into an active abolitionist who performs for Washington's rebellion on the board of the *Creole*. The black bodies on the stage are replaced with the white observers. Then, as Douglass thematizes, the observers will witness black heroism, speak about great black people, and take an action on behalf of the black enslaved. His readers are invited to the abolitionist stage to perform what they see and feel.

If abolitionists tried to appeal to observers' sentiments by exhibiting ex-slaves' bodies in public, sentimentalist women writers turned a private home into a place where public discourses on slavery would be tested. Since the domestic sphere becomes a metaphor for social dimensions of slavery and racism in their novels, that sphere functions as a situational stage on which a white mother figure disciplines her black daughter into normative forms of blackness that keeps her inferior in terms of physical appearance, race, gender, and class. In the following two chapters, I use Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859) to explore how the antebellum white mother figure confirms her identity by restricting her black daughter's body, and how a black daughter outgrows her white mother figure through rebellious performance.

Chapter 3, "Topsy-Turveydom: Topsy's Mother-Making Performance in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," illuminates the subversive power of Topsy's versatile performance that not only offers a spectacle for white observers but also reveals Ophelia's dependency on Topsy's proper performance to legitimize her motherhood. In spite of the continuous criticism on Stowe's racist characterization of Topsy, I maintain that Topsy reveals possibilities for the empowerment of African Americans when they become embodied as unfixable and liberating figures in the reader's imagination and on stage. The writer's distinction between sympathetically melodramatic and enjoyably minstrel black stereotypes becomes blurred when it comes to the most problematic character, Topsy. The reader's emotional distance to Topsy fluctuates because she does not settle in either category through her performing body. Rather, as if she teases her

reader with her theatrical skills, Topsy playfully jumps around the two seemingly incompatible genres. Topsy moves in and out of the gap in which the two genres collapse, betraying the reader/observer's expectation of instantly recognizable performance of a black figure in nineteenth-century theater. In doing so, she debunks the notion that the white-mother guardianship for the black daughter merely covers white anxiety about a black woman's transgressive performance. However, I do not overlook how Stowe ultimately uses Topsy as a vehicle for Ophelia to become a feeling subject rather than making Topsy into an alternative heroine who can overcome Ophelia's racism.

Chapter 4, "Staging Whiteness: Frado's Performance of Pain in Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*," extends my critique of Stowe and argues that Wilson creates a construct of white femininity and respectability that belies conventional maternal stereotypes of the time. As Frado plays a counterpart to Topsy, Wilson uncovers the limitation of the maternal politic that Stowe espouses at the cost of Topsy's adulthood, by highlighting unmotherly mothers and the myth of domesticity. Frado's mistress, Mrs. Belmont, justifies her whiteness by exploiting Frado's body as a mere material for the household, and other white female characters sympathize with Frado to affirm both their morality and inability to help her. Frado invalidates the authority of these white mother figures by theatrically replacing them with her performance of pain. Through the visual demonstration of her constant physical pain, Frado breaks the presumed emotional alliance between white sympathizers and black sufferers because this alliance does not allow the sufferer to emerge as a feeling subject. At the same time, she displays a

hypersensitive body that disqualifies white observers' authority over her performance. In attacking white motherhood for its performative nature, Frado-Wilson authenticates her pain as the evidence of both her true motherhood and authorship. How Frado or Harriet Wilson defines her racial identity eventually suggests that breaking the emotional bonds with these idle sympathizers means her assertion of an independent subject who herself can achieve motherhood in the end.

In addition to these characters' performances in antebellum literature, some African Americans made their observers write down about their expressive but kaleidoscopic bodies, in order to maintain their performing bodies independent of white spectatorship. The last chapter, "Performative Texts: Sojourner Truth's (R)evolving Stage and Immortal Body," argues that, by recognizing his or her corporeality, a performer can create a written text as a conceptual stage. For this, I examine Sojourner Truth's *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1850, 1875, 1884) as an example of fleshy writing. While some former slave writers defend the mind at the cost of the body,²² Sojourner Truth refuses to do away with her body. Rather, Truth integrates the mind/body split by utilizing her bodily performance to demonstrate that the body reproduces written texts, as those texts prove the power of her mind as well. Truth, in spite of her illiteracy, inspired her observers to write about her, and at the same time, liberated herself from the lettered boundary, which each observer differently set up for his or her own writing on Truth. In

²² Some former slaves symbolically removed their corporeality to make their "mind" recognizable in their narratives. For example, Henry "Box" Brown and Harriet Jacobs similarly hid away; Brown packed himself in a box and Jacobs stayed at the garret of her grandmother's cabin for seven years. The theatrical removal of their corporeality in both their reality and narratives makes their mind noticeable, although that mind was not apparent when their bodies remained a distinctive marker of exploitation, amusement, sympathy, and identification.

doing so, she led her audiences to record her experiences in terms of multifaceted and even contradictory aspects of blackness instead of appearing one-dimensional in her readers' minds. This storyteller's subjective perception of her enslaved, gendered, and racialized body leads her to produce writing beyond the strict distinctions between body and mind, between literacy and illiteracy, and between performance and written text. Overcoming these distinctions is not only key to fleshy writing but also crucial to relocating an antebellum writer not as a bodiless storyteller who is tied to written language in print, but as an active performer whose primary text—Truth's bodily expressions, experiences, and presence—generates written (para)texts such as Olive Gilbert's and Frances Titus's published narratives. By examining three different versions of the *Narrative*, this chapter discusses how to read Truth's enduring identity in the midst of various scribal voices and through a dynamic of different observers' retrospective remembering of Truth's performances.

Chapter 1. Staging Blackness: Amistad Africans on the Abolitionist Stage

The Amistad revolt of 1839 has become widely known to contemporary Americans since Steven Spielberg's film *Amistad* was released in December 1997. As indicated by the film trailer's last title, "A True Story," the director aimed at representing the historic slave revolt on screen as realistically as possible.²³ In fact, many reviewers have considered the film's achievement as limited to a history lesson.²⁴ Cinematic representation of a historical event unavoidably raises one question: from whose perspective does the film show the past? Film critics often claim that films about slavery are somewhat racist because black slaves cannot help but serve as visual objects for antislavery sentiments rather than subjective agents independent of white spectators.²⁵ *Amistad* is not unsusceptible to this attack. The director was overly ambitious in his attempt to achieve historical accuracy, since few historical records detailing the Amistad revolt have been preserved and those that have been focus narrowly on white abolitionists rather than Amistad African captives. Despite many efforts—using the Mende language,

²³ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., listed as a consultant for the film, praises the film for its realistic representations such as the director's decision to use Mende language for the African captive characters. Howard Jones, the author of *Mutiny on the Amistad*, often visited the set during filming to contribute to the film's historical accuracy. See Bruce Newman.

²⁴ As Bill DeLapp has noted, "Amistad attempts to right a historical wrong with this large-scale production of a little-known incidents, but the Africans end up being just footnotes in Spielberg's earnest history lesson" (DeLapp). Janet Maslin claims that the film's accomplishment would be to secure "its place in history classrooms" (Maslin). Stephen Brown also suggests that the film is "like a stodgy history lesson instead of an explanation of transcendent themes" (qtd. in Jeffrey 78).

²⁵ The film's writer David Franzoni claims, "Most movies that deal with slavery are unintentionally racist" because white characters weigh "the good fight to liberate the black man." He emphasizes that Spielberg's *Amistad*, by contrast, shows how the African captives "would free the Americans" (qtd. in Jeffrey 81).

conducting extensive research on the Amistad case, and casting real Africans²⁶—to visualize the past on screen, the completed film remains organized primarily around the principle of commercial entertainment. It entertains by presenting the Amistad Africans as “exotic other[s], as pure and incomprehensible as his [the director’s] beloved dinosaurs and aliens” (Murray). Not surprisingly, the *London Times* claims that Spielberg’s obsession with Cinque’s naked body turns “history into a black porno flick” (qtd. in 78). This attack on *Amistad* reveals one aspect of the complicated racial relationship between blacks as performers and whites as observers.

The perspective on the Amistad case in this film seemingly comes from the African captives, as the film shows their back stories in Africa and the Middle Passage. Yet the dominant gaze for the Africans’ narrative remains skewed to those (including the director) watching the movie. The camera highlights the African captives’ shackled, tortured, scarred, bloody, and starving bodies, the raw corporeality of which is intensified for non-Mende speakers by their use of the Mende language.²⁷ The powerful image of their corporeality makes a sharp contrast to white American characters’ undistinguished bodies, such as the dark-suited Quakers and uniformed law officers. The casting of the film had already portended the racial division among the black and white characters. Spielberg describes his first impression of Djimon Hounsou, who plays the role of Cinque, the leader of the Amistad revolt, with remarks on his well-built body, calling it

²⁶ For example, Djimon Hounsou as Cinque was born in Bénin, and Derrick Ashong as Buakei is from Ghana.

²⁷ The film does not offer captions on the African captives’ speaking until Lewis Tappan and Theodore Joadson find an interpreter. This cinematic technique stresses the difficulty of communication with the Africans during the actual event.

“a wake-up call” and “overwhelming” (Rothman). Because Spielberg assumed the actor’s compelling physique would make Cinque’s heroism more believable, the director encouraged Hounsou to exhibit his black body at the expense of the character’s complex inner conflicts. Additionally, other African actors tried to intensify their bodily images by wearing real chains that made them “really [. . .] get into the moment” (“Making of *Amistad*”). By contrast, Anthony Hopkins, who plays John Quincy Adams, says that he had freedom to create the character on his own because the director did not tell him how to be (Jeffrey 90). In this cinematic representation of the historical event, the Africans are revived as full-bodied performers, whereas the white characters appear to be so abstract and bodiless that the white actors can use their imagination to invent these characters.

A few film reviewers felt embarrassed at the excessive exposure of the black actors’ bodies in *Amistad* because such exposure invites audiences to a theatrical presentation of the black body. At the time of the *Amistad* revolt, (white) observers’ spectatorship of the black body in public places was sanctioned: for estimation in slave auctions, for entertainment in minstrel shows, or to arouse antislavery sentiment in abolitionist circuits. Similarly, the black actors’ bodies in *Amistad* primarily become an object of a disembodied audience’s spectatorship. Audiences see the objectified black bodies both as expressions of the African captives’ humanity (as the director intends), but ultimately also as entertainment. This grammar of racial sentiments—black performer with excessive corporeality and bodiless (white) observer—contradicts the director’s intention to illuminate the heroic Africans’ victory in antebellum America. The controversy over the film’s representation of the *Amistad* Africans repeats the dilemma

of exhibiting a former slave on the abolitionist stage in the vortex of antislavery movements in the U.S.

Until the Civil War, abolitionists centered presentations of former slaves' bodies and their testimonial storytelling on antislavery public meeting programs, which Houston A. Baker, Jr. calls "the Negro exhibit" (Baker 90). Because most Northerners did not experience the realities of the South, they considered the true-to-life stories of black slaves accurate accounts of slavery. The socio-political inscriptions upon a fugitive or former slave's body could identify the inhumane nature of Southern slavery. Even if a former slave failed on stage to detail personal experiences in the plantation, tree-like²⁸ scars on the slave's back proved the unjustifiable cruelties of the Southern institution more effectively than verbal articulation. Accordingly, observers at each antislavery meeting were required, as Carol E. Henderson contends, to interpret the slave's body within "a framework for formulating a recognizable African American voice situated around the body and its scars" (40). More importantly, these meetings offered a site for reciprocal engagement with the cultural and political invention of performative blackness for both the Africans and the Northern observers. The term "performative blackness" explains a particular aspect of black performance in the sense that a black performer

²⁸ The image of the slave Gordon's scarred back was well known among Northern Americans. He ran away from Mississippi and enlisted in the Union Army in 1863. During his medical examination prior to acting in the army, military doctors discovered the graphically severe scars on his back. Itinerant photographers—William D. McPherson and Mr. Oliver—asked Gordon to pose for a picture, hoping that would reveal the harsh treatment he had recently received. They produced and sold the carte-de-visite of Gordon's portrait. This image sparked an immediate and extensive reaction to slavery during the Civil War. See <http://usslave.blogspot.com/2011/10/whipping-scars-on-back-of-fugitive.html>.

theatrically represented the experience of being black while challenging Euro-American notions of racial hierarchy.

The fund-raising meetings for the Amistad Africans after the last trial at the Supreme Court in March 1841 were similar to antislavery meetings in their use of black performance. A writer for the *Liberator* comments on one of the fundraising meetings for the Africans' trip to Africa, "All their performances were free from affectation or display of any kind"²⁹ Despite the writer's apparent compliment to the Africans' ingenuity, this comment remains somewhat questionable. The observers at the meeting were willing to pay money for the spectacle of these "unusual" black people, and, in response, the Africans would provide the observers with satisfying performances for the Africans' own benefit. If the writer had an impression of the performance "free from affectation," the Africans may have skillfully demonstrated what the writer considered natural to Africans and African descendants rather than any real, "authentic" blackness. While the Amistad Africans repetitively performed the conventional presentation at antislavery meetings led by white abolitionists, the observers were asked to perceive their performance as a "shared experience" with black slaves in the South.

In *Love and Theft*, Eric Lott argues that black performance cannot but be "performative." Black Americans "not only exercised a certain amount of control over such [performing] practices but perforce sometimes developed them in tandem with white spectators." Lott encapsulates this performativity with the term "self-commodification," which he describes as "a way of getting along in a constricted world" (39). The Amistad Africans' performance was essential to their survival in the U.S.,

²⁹ *Liberator*, Nov. 19, 1841, 4.

promoting their “self-commodification” on the abolitionist stage. In the same sense, Judith Butler defines performativity “not as a singular or deliberate ‘act’ but rather as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (2). Rather than “acting” on the abolitionist stage, the Amistad Africans as well as black Americans demonstrated their bodies as abolitionists prescribed. As a result, the Africans’ theatrical performances shaped their racial identity.

This performative aspect of racial construction does not necessarily indicate that the Africans passively internalized the abolitionists’ demand for a mode of racial identification while repeating a particular performance. In fact, African Americans such as Frederick Douglass understood the discursive potential of the black body on the abolitionist stage. As Baker argues, “[I]t was only through engagement with the public, symbolic order that he [Douglass] would be able to venture statements that would come legitimately to be defined as in/on the slaves’ liberational behalf” (Baker 14). For this reason, Peggy Phelan argues in *Unmarked*, a theatrical representation “always conveys more than it intends; and it is never totalizing” because it “produces ruptures and gaps; it fails to reproduce the real exactly” (2). This chapter neither attempts to recover the voice of the Africans on the abolitionist stage nor asserts their agency against racial inscriptions onto them. Rather, it searches for a clue that, in these “ruptures and gaps,” the Amistad Africans show a subtle yet certain resistance both to abolitionists’ directorship and to observers’ spectatorship of their performance.

White observers and the Amistad African captives were segregated between the outside and inside of a jail cell, between the public gallery and bar table in the courtroom,

and between audience and stage at antislavery meetings. For the various observers, who consisted of lay-people, legal professionals, newspaper writers, and abolitionists, regardless of the different degrees and purposes of their spectatorships, the Africans had to performatively display their bodies; these observers wanted to witness blackness or what they believed were the authentic characteristics of blacks in the Africans' performing bodies. In a theatrical setting of being seen by and seeing each other, while the white observers regulated the black performers' bodies through spectatorship of the body, the black performers disrupted such regulation by demonstrating their rebellious bodies. The remainder of this essay explores this racial dynamic discovered in the Amistad Africans' performance on the abolitionist stage as an actual and historical site during their residence in the U.S.

Antislavery Movements and the African Captives

American abolitionists fought to eradicate the illegal slave trade in the Atlantic Ocean by defending the fifty-three Amistad Africans against the Spanish slave traders' claims of ownership. With the help of the interpreter James Covey, Lewis Tappan and abolitionists close to him endeavored to provide the "missing" narrative background of the Amistad revolt and the Africans' histories, which had been previously produced to support the cause of the traders. According to the facts disclosed by the abolitionists, the Africans were kidnapped in Mende villages, part of present-day Sierra Leone, then transported on slave ships, where they were disguised as West-Indian native "ladinos" in Havana and then illegally purchased by Jose Ruiz and Pedro Montes.³⁰ On the way to

³⁰ The U.S. government banned the importation of slaves from Africa in 1808 and permitted only intra-national trades. But, even by 1839, smuggling Africans into the U.S. continued, as the

Puerto Principe, the Africans, led by Cinque, revolted and ordered the two Spaniards to steer their schooner *La Amistad* back to the shore of Sierra Leone where the Africans had been handed to European slave traders by African kidnappers. However, seeking a chance to be aided by the U.S. navy, the Spaniards tricked the rebels by roaming through the Bahamas and up the North American coastline without heading to West Africa.

The Africans' capture in the U.S. intensified controversies over American slavery and the legality of the slave trade, kindling the public's curiosity about the original Africans, and igniting abolitionists' desire to help the *Amistad* captives in order to pave the way to a slave-free America. In the courts, young ambitious lawyer Rodger Baldwin and ex-President John Quincy Adams—who joined as a result of Tappan's tenacious persuasion—disputed the legal issues on behalf of the captives. Outside the courtroom, the abolitionists organized by Tappan quickly moved to gather the committee of the *Amistad* case,³¹ and Rev. Joshua Leavitt published his report on the African captives in the New York *Commercial Advertiser*. After three trials and some two years in jail, the Mende Africans were successfully released.³² Despite their victory at the final trial in

Amistad case proves. Through the illegal slave trade over Africa and Americas, about 50,000 slaves allegedly regarded as “captured runaways” or “ladinos” were transported into the U.S. between 1807 and 1860 (Hugh Thomas 615).

³¹ A committee was appointed, consisting of Simeon S. Joselyn, Joshua Leavitt, and Lewis Tappan. New York newspapers published an “Appeal to the Friends of Liberty” written by the newly formed *Amistad* Committee. See Maggie Montesinos Sale's *The Slumbering Volcano*, 84-96.

³² This essay does not discuss the specific procedure of the legal cases against the *Amistad* captives. However, given that the court scene in which the lawyers and attorneys fiercely argued is quite theatrical, this is not unrelated to the topic of performance because the scene exemplifies a symbolic stage setting and its participants displayed their affected gestures. For instance, when Baldwin attacked the forged files on the Africans' enslavement with rational and legal language, Ruiz and Montes attempted to retrieve their rebellious “properties” by appealing to the American

1841, this legal achievement was not a dramatic turning point for American abolitionism. The court decision did not affect the trade in slave states, but was limited to reaffirming the illegitimacy of transatlantic slave trades. American abolitionists nonetheless took the trials as a chance to direct the broader public's attention to antislavery movements.

When still jailed, the Amistad Africans were already very popular in the North, even to those who may not have supported abolitionism. As soon as the African captives' arrived at Hartford for the trials, more than three thousand people came to see them for the first three days, paying twelve and half a cents apiece to jail keepers.³³ Theater producers and abolitionists in Northern cities did not overlook the public's desire to see the Africans, and quickly utilized this for their commercial or abolitionist purposes. For example, the Amistad mutiny was dramatized first at the Bowery Theater of New York in a play titled *The Black Schooner, or, The Pirate Slaver Amistad*. The play was commercially successful, earning over \$1,650³⁴ for two weeks, whereas most of staged plays at that time ran only one or two days (Martin 177). Just two weeks after the play's opening, the New York *Mirror* predicted that the drama would be a success in the 1839

prosecutors with pretentious tears and laments. It disgusted Adams as he asked the audiences: "Who, then, are the tyrants and oppressors against whom our laws are invoked? Who are the innocent sufferers, for whom we are called upon to protect this ship against enemies and robbers?" (Adams 21). For the historical and political context of the Amistad case, see Christopher Martin, *The Amistad Affair*, Iyunolu Folayan Osagie, *The Amistad Revolt*, Thomas, *The Slavery Trade*, and Sale, *The Slumbering Volcano*.

³³ Regarding this popularity of the Amistad captives, Lewis Tappan argued that many Americans were anxious to "acquaint themselves with the African character, as developed before the natives have been corrupted by intercourse with the white man." *Emancipator*, Oct. 10, 1839, 6.

³⁴ The value of a \$1,650.00 commodity in 1839 may be relatively equal to \$42,000.00 for "real price," to \$360,000.00(using the unskilled wage) or \$772,000.00(using production worker compensation) for "labor value," and to \$834,000.00 for "income value." <<http://www.measuringworth.com/m/calculators/uscompare/relativevalue.php>>.

season (Nathan 187). Various local theaters also attracted curious audiences by presenting their own theatrical versions of the Amistad revolt. The cost for the legal defense of the African captives, approximately \$5,000, was made up through these theater productions (Finkenbine 239). In addition, wax duplicates of the African captives were exhibited at the Peale's Museum in New York City for several weeks.³⁵ The popularity of the Amistad Africans encouraged abolitionists to visually publicize the Africans as the victims of slavery and the evidence of the black race's humanity.

The Africans presumably also noticed the black body's theatrical productivity. The popularity of the African captives indicated antebellum Americans' voyeuristic desire to see the Africans, while the visible corporeality of the Africans' bodies was emphasized by their unintelligible language and physical imprisonment. The observers' curious gaze at the Africans initiated the Africans' mutual recognition of the observers' presence and even of their own bodies through the observers' gaze. Because the profits from the observers' visits to jail were spent on these Africans' comforts, the former's curiosity turned into something beneficial to the latter. Therefore, the Africans understood the exchange value of their physical presence in the foreign country. The self-control over their bodies might be essential to good relationships with jail keepers and visitors, resulting in more comforts for the Africans. The theatrical and exhibit setting of the jail already required the Africans to present their bodies in particular ways for their

³⁵ One writer's observation of the wax duplicates illustrates that black Americans also had an intense interest in the Amistad Africans: "We last week visited the Amistad captives; not the great originals, reader, but their counterfeits, done in wax. They are exhibited at Peale's Museum, and well worthy [*sic*] a visit. The figures are 29 in number, of life size, and they possess a fidelity to nature which is truly astonishing." *Colored American*, June 27, 1840, 9.

own survival, even before they stood as free men on the abolitionist stage. Later the Amistad Africans were publicly staged at antislavery meetings, through which Tappan's abolitionists raised funds for the Africans' education to be missionaries as well as for the trip back to Africa.

The racial reciprocity between the Africans and the observers epitomizes the racial dynamics of American antislavery movements. On the one hand, most likely white Northerners of the antebellum period had conflicted feelings toward the Amistad Africans. The Africans appeared to be heroic but dangerous, noble but uncivilized, and familiar but unassimilable.³⁶ These Americans as observers wanted to see qualities such as republican heroism along side stereotypical notions of the black race consistent with maintaining white Americans' control over blacks. On the other hand, the Amistad Africans reacted to the curious yet controlling observers' gaze at them by apparently performing what the observers wanted to see on the abolitionist stage, and by covertly expressing their resistance to the observers' spectatorial authority through their bodily movements. Regarding this mutual formation of race in the U.S., Dana Nelson notes, "'race' has never been a fixed concept," but "the idea of 'race' had to be invented, described, promulgated, and legislated by those who would benefit as a group from the concept" (viii-ix). While recognizing each other, the African performers and the Northern-white observers together restlessly shaped and reshaped meanings of blackness in antebellum America.

³⁶ George Fredrickson argues that white intellectuals in the 1840s and 1850s began to convey contradictory stereotypes of (enslaved) blacks. Despite the unchanged belief in racial differences maintaining white-black hierarchy, a few Northern whites "discovered redeeming virtues and even evidences of black superiority" on religion and docility. Frederickson calls this tendency the "romantic racialism" (Fredrickson 101-102).

The white-black dynamics led both black and white Americans to historicize slavery and to imagine the multiracial future, as the Amistad Africans' performance on the abolitionist stage continued on. In *Traumatic Possessions*, Jennifer Griffiths argues that slave testimony offers a "public enactment of memory": "When looking at the reception of testimony within specific contexts, one must also consider cultural inscriptions of identity onto the [black] body. How we mark different [enslaved] bodies is linked to the transmission and reception of memory and testimony" (5). The Amistad Africans were brought onto the abolitionist stage to perform their sufferings from the history of African people's enslavement and the Middle Passage. While emotionally responding to their performance, the observers could expand the spectrum of American history. Geographically, the U.S. appeared to be a part of the transatlantic history of the colonization and enslavement of Africa. In addition, demographically, the observers saw their black others together participating in this history, although Africans and their enslaved descendants had been silent and invisible in mainstream American history. Therefore, the black (ex)slave's body-as-text³⁷ on display was designed to function as a site where the observers could historicize the former slave's memory and identify themselves as political subjects against slavery. This chapter calls this commemoration of slavery through the black body's "performative historiography." Because it was impossible for various observers to see the performing/performative black body free from

³⁷ Henderson argues that "the body has functioned as a walking text, a fleshy reminder of the paradoxical nature of an American citizenry built around the ideology of difference" throughout American history. The body has been used by "various ethnic groups as a tool to challenge the stifling conditions of economic and social oppression or, at the very least, to challenge our understanding of those historical moments that revolve around the issue of social and political control of subjugated groups" (3).

their own desires, the body inevitably became the blueprint of what observers expected from their black contemporaries. Here is the reason that (ex)slaves' performance went further than the collective memorization of American slavery. Performative historiography accompanied such visions of the post-slavery era. Black (ex)slaves' performance and the theatrical setting at antislavery meetings made both the performers and the observers envision the historic ideals of citizenry necessary for a racially equal society in the future.

The pattern of the fundraising program for the Amistad Africans illustrates how the antislavery performance generated performative historiography and anticipated the future. The program consisted of two parts: looking back to the Africans' past and looking forward to their future. Typically, the performance started with a pastor's opening prayer, and, then, Lewis Tappan or the Africans' white teachers gave introductory greetings to audiences. The Africans, accordingly, began to be called one by one to stand on stage, when a white moderator summarized each African's personal history from birth to enslavement. Cinque, as a highlight of the performance, always showed up last on the center of stage. The Africans' re-presentation of the Amistad revolt on stage ritualized re(-)membering the historical event, and the observers participated in this ritual. After performing their recollection of the dramatically successful rebellion on the schooner *La Amistad*, these Africans read loudly in the Bible wherever the observer asked them to, spelled English words, answered questions on Christianity, and sang their native songs as well as hymns in English for the finale. What the observers discovered might be the Africans' capability of internalizing republican values of revolution and

Christianity as universal civic virtue³⁸ for the upcoming time after their emancipation.

Enthusiastic cheers and generous donations from the observers followed, as if their spontaneous reactions to the Africans' performances were parts of the program.³⁹

Abolitionist Projects on the Stage

The particular three groups—the (white) abolitionists led by Tappan, the (white) observers, and the African performers—actively engaged in the Amistad fundraising meetings. The abolitionists designed the Africans' performance to incorporate their revolt into the narrative of the American Revolution and to glorify the heroic Africans as if they were descendants of the Founding Fathers, while “taming” the Africans by associating them with the Protestant ethic. Yet the observers stereotyped the Africans through preexisting images of black slaves, for instance as insurgents with threatening physical images or a happy Sambo with his entertaining bodily performance. Resisting these two groups' spectatorship, the Amistad Africans performed their unfixable bodies in ways that we can trace only through the white writers' observations of the fund-raising meetings for these Africans.

The abolitionists attempted to create images agreeable to abolitionist visions by framing the Amistad Africans in terms of Western heroism. According to the abolitionist invention on behalf of the Africans, the Amistad case was intended to reframe black insurgency as a praiseworthy revolution. Maggie Montesinos Sale argues that these abolitionists' use of the trope of revolutionary struggle “disrupted both the original

³⁸ Ronald Takaki explains that during the Revolution period, Christian moral asceticism and republicanism were blended (4).

³⁹ The program is specifically introduced in the *Colored American*, May 8, 1841, 1.

alliance of ‘all [free] men’ and the alliance of ‘all [white] men’ solidified in the 1830s, and claimed the discourse for an alliance of ‘all men’” (63). However, this new discourse for the alliance of “all men” was possible in the extended alliance of “all free and white men.”⁴⁰ For example, Joshua Leavitt extols Cinque as “the daring leader of this band of captives, [who] is a hero, worthy to stand by the side of the noblest Roman, whose name ever graced the pages of history.”⁴¹ Similarly, a writer with the acronym J. C. G. idolizes Cinque: “Unquestionably the Congolese⁴² chieftain has, from his heart of hearts, recognized this sentiment of Lord Byron, and his practical application of it has been an exact copy of our own conduct, to resist unto death, aggression, insult, and an infamous tyranny.”⁴³ The black revolutionary leader had the boldness of “the noblest Roman” and the sentiment of “Lord Byron,” mirroring the white men’s “own conduct.” Undoubtedly, most antebellum Americans did not know Africa and its people aside from the fact that Africa was colonized as a source of human labor and natural materials. The abolitionists believed that these Americans could easily understand the Africans’ heroic achievement within the historical and cultural frame of Euro-America. In the abolitionists’ minds, the Amistad Africans’ virtue could be conceivable only when covered with whiteness.

⁴⁰ In the U.S. territory any black violence was characterized by pro-slavery Americans an insurgency of “the unfit, the unruly, the untamed, against the better government of a civilized people.” See Sale, *Volcano*, 8-9.

⁴¹ *Liberator*, Sept. 13, 1839, 1.

⁴² Cinque came from the British Colony of Sierra Leone. The Kingdom of Congo (now part of Angola, Republic of the Congo, and Democratic Republic of the Congo), which the writer believed was Cinque’s native land, was located far south of Sierra Leone. The writer’s confusion about Cinque’s origin hints at contemporary Americans’ general ignorance of Africa.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 2.

In addition to using the rhetoric of Western heroism to publicize the Amistad revolt, the abolitionists employed Protestant ideals to describe the Africans' future. The Amistad Africans on stage were not "heathenish" foreigners any more but "civilized" Christians. They were taught by white pastors and abolitionists to demonstrate religious faith, literacy, and the potential to proceed with missionary work in the near future. Whatever observers asked them to read in the Bible, the Africans, usually Kinna who learned English more quickly than any other Amistad African, recited it in English and assured auditors of their holy mission in the African homeland. The *Cleveland Daily Herald* describes one of the Amistad meetings held between November 5 and 17, 1841.⁴⁴ Nine men and one girl among the Africans performed at this tour, accompanied by Lewis Tappan and William Raymond, their teacher. The newspaper comments that the observers were "surprised and delighted to witness their [the Africans'] extraordinary improvement," and willingly donated money for their trip back to Africa.⁴⁵ Although the article does not mention clearly the reason for the observers' generosity, the tone of this description insinuates that the writer himself had not expected the Africans' intellectual improvement. As Ronald Takaki maintains, many white Northerners did not see blacks as able to develop beyond childhood. Stereotypes of black childhood were associated with the notions of black intellectual inferiority that white-male leaders like Thomas Jefferson had asserted (Takaki 113). The Africans' "extraordinary improvement" as a case-study

⁴⁴ During the thirteen days, the Africans performed at sixteen meetings in several Northern cities including Boston, Haverhill, Lowell, Nashua, Andover, Springfield, Northampton, Hartford, and Farmington. But the article does not clarify in what city the writer saw the Amistad Africans.

⁴⁵ *Daily Herald*, Dec. 30, 1841, 2.

suggested that even pure Africans could be “elevated” near to the “advanced” white race through “enlightenment” education.

To learn Christianity meant not only to become civilized but also to internalize normative civic virtue. Specific types of citizens’ interiority, as Christopher Castiglia argues, represent Americans’ understanding of “race” and social identities (101). White abolitionists regarded black Americans “first as pupils needing lessons in, and then as stable embodiments of, civic ‘character,’” sympathetic affect of which “entitled white abolitionists to teach, challenge, and change” (Castiglia 103). Tappan designed the Africans’ performance to prove this civic interiority before the white observers who might be reluctant to accept black people as citizens equal to themselves in the U.S. By emphasizing the Africans’ gentleness and generosity through Christian education, Tappan and other abolitionists supposed that the Amistad Africans’ civic interiority would suggest black people’s potential acceptability as part of the U.S. citizenry. At the same meeting above, one minister asked Kinna what he would do for “his enemies.”⁴⁶ Even though the article does not indicate who these enemies were, they might be African kidnapers, the Spanish slave traders, legal participants on behalf of the Spaniards, or white Americans in general. Kinna answered, “O, we pray for *them* too. I think, if you look into the Bible same time, you’ll find it say, bless your enemies and do them good, and if he be hungry give him to eat.”⁴⁷ The performance suggested that black Americans like these Africans must be grateful and generous enough not to cause any social unrest.

⁴⁶ Cleveland *Daily Herald*, Dec. 30, 1841, 2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 2. Italics original.

The abolitionists believed that, in witnessing Kinna's response, the observers' anxiety about black insurgency might be lessened.

The Amistad Africans' performance certainly generated "positive" images of the black race in the observers' minds. Following the abolitionists' elaborate design, the Amistad Africans' performance helped observers imagine a new, racially diverse America. The New York *Herald* sketches one black family among many white ones at the Tabernacle meeting for the Amistad Africans on May 12, 1841:

There were blacks and whites, and every intermediate hue and color, beautifully interspersed all over the house. On one seat was a negro fellow, as black as the ace of spades, with a mulatto wife, and a couple of children, a shade whiter than the mother, and next to them, well dressed white ladies and gentlemen, all mingling together, regardless of the odor exhaled by their neighbors, and happy to receive their colored brethren and sisters on terms of perfect equality.⁴⁸

The writer sees "every intermediate hue and color" in the image of blacks and whites "beautifully" "mingling" together at the hall. The white writer's glorification of this interracial placement at the antislavery meeting sounds too positive to incorporate any reminder of slavery in the South or racism in the North that the multiracial observers might be experiencing. The "mulatto" mother's "white" blood transformed her children so that they were "whiter" and could be "received" by "white" Americans. The white people were tolerant of the black family's "odor" and willingly accepted the family "on terms of perfect equality." While the writer makes the multiracial observers more

⁴⁸ New York *Herald*, May 13, 1841, 1.

palatable to white readers through such language, the tragic history of miscegenation under slavery is erased in the mother's "mulatto" body and her "whiter" children. Given that white slaveholders' sexual exploitation of black (female) slaves was commonly introduced as an immoral effect of slavery at other antislavery meetings, the romantic depiction of the beauty of racial diversity is anachronistic. Because of the writer's obvious ignorance or neglect of racial reality, the phrase "perfect equality" does not seem to be persuasive. Nevertheless, the writer's blind optimism illustrates that the Amistad Africans' performance led some observers to imagine a multiracial America in the future. The black and white observers physically sat together and watched the African revolutionary heroes' testimony and performance on the history of the Middle Passage and the mutiny at sea. In the writer's mind, this visual image would ideally suggest the possibility of racial equality represented by all races "beautifully interspersed all over" the nation.

Northern White Observers

These abolitionists' invention of the "model" black man for their stage did not entirely govern both the observers' perception of the Africans and the Africans' performance for the observers. Rather, because the Africans were paradoxically powerful, persistent, and troubling to antebellum Americans, their presence on stage led the observers to confront their own fears of the Africans' overwhelming power, as embodied in the Africans' corporeality. The white observers attempted to affirm their controlling power over the Amistad Africans by often intervening in the Africans' performance. These observers' responses to the performance reveal the limitation of the

white, Protestant values on the basis of which the abolitionists struggled to historicize the heroic revolt and to invent a future vision of multiracial America.

Even before the abolitionists started the image-making project on the Amistad Africans, the Africans in the jail had already appeared to be threatening black bodies to many observers' eyes. The New London *Gazette* reports a contributor's observation of them on August 28, 1839: "[W]e also saw Cinque, the master spirit of this bloody tragedy, [. . .]. His countenance, for a native African, is unusually intelligent, evincing uncommon decision and coolness."⁴⁹ However, this comment is more complex than its apparent awe of Cinque's physique. Cinque's bodily image disturbed the white contributor, causing his anxiety about "savage" slaves' insurrection: "[T]he most horrible creature we ever saw in human shape, an object of terror to the very blacks, who said that he is a cannibal. His teeth projected at almost right angles from his mouth, while his eyes had a most savage and demonic expression."⁵⁰ If this horrified reaction was prevalent, the crowds at the theaters presenting the Amistad revolt and in the museum exhibiting the life-sized wax duplicates of the Africans might not be entirely sympathetic to the abolitionist propaganda on behalf of the Africans.

Northern and mainly white Americans' fascination with the native Africans' fleshy bodies also entailed these Americans' fear of failure to regulate (enslaved) blacks. The worst scenario of this failure, which antebellum Americans imagined, would be the extinction of the white race. For instance, regarding the Denmark Vesey slave conspiracy of 1822, one South Carolina man exclaimed that blacks were "barbarians who would, *if*

⁴⁹ New London *Gazette*, 28 Aug., 1839, 1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

they could, become the *destroyers* of our race” (qtd. in Takaki 121). As Takaki argues, to prevent potential Nat Turners, white Americans of that time needed a symbol or image that could assure that blacks were controlled (121). In this sense, the Amistad Africans were used as such a racial symbol. The wax duplicates—realistic but lifeless—of the Amistad Africans were symptomatic of racial tensions within antislavery movements in the North. The images of the Africans were produced to be displayable commodities: “We have never seen the originals, but have understood that they [the wax duplicates] are *perfect likenesses*: every muscle, every lineament of countenance is portrayed with all the appearance of life. They are to be *removed* next week [. . .].”⁵¹ At the wax museums, the observers symbolically placed the unruly Africans’ bodies under their surveillance and control. Then the observers attempted to overcome their own anxiety about a slave insurrection, the emancipation of black slaves, and how consequent racial interfusion might threaten white racial “wholeness.”

The need for this racial symbol became evident when the Amistad Africans performed at the meetings. Regardless of the abolitionists’ investment of republican heroism into the Africans, some observers expected to see the stereotype of the “happy slave” from the black others. To these observers, the Africans were at best entertaining bodies that recalled the “pickaninnies” or Sambos of minstrel shows and slave auctions. These two fixed images, which are imagined versions of the black other, served whites’ control over blacks. The New York *Herald* speculates on the Amistad Africans’ presentation: “The exhibition was very satisfactory, but if the performances had been

⁵¹ *Colored American*, June 27, 1840, 1. Emphasis added.

diversified with a few summersets⁵² [*sic*], in which the negroes are very skillful, the entertainments would have been more complete, and more agreeable to the audience.”⁵³

The article refers to the Africans’ presentation using three different terms that are not exactly synonymous. According to the description, what the Africans actually presented was mere “exhibition,” whereby the writer implies that they only displayed themselves rather than developing it as a “performance” created via skillful tactics. The quote stresses that the “performance” even could have “entertained” the (white) audiences who had expected to see the kind of essential blackness that featured in so many white discourses on black difference and inferiority. In the writer’s mind, the fundraising meeting should be the “entertainments” intended to please the audience. He postulates that Africans and their descendants were good at physical (as opposed to verbal, or an otherwise more intellectually generated) performance and tricks. Although the performance could have been “more complete, and more agreeable to the audience,” the writer patronizingly regarded “the exhibition” as still “satisfactory.” Disappointing these audiences, the actual performance lacked the instant recognizability provided by black stereotypes. The article reveals the observer’s desire to label the Africans as nothing more than entertainers for whites’ amusement. This desire derived from the way that abolitionists advertised the universal human right to freedom by staging the Amistad Africans as the victims of the dehumanizing effects of slavery.

⁵² This is a typo of “somerset” or “somersault” that is a whole body’s overturn performed by an acrobat or tumbler.

⁵³ New York *Herald*, May 13, 1841, 3.

It remains unclear what the Amistad Africans actually felt about the abolitionists and the observers when the Africans faced antebellum Americans' self-contradictory attitudes towards them—revolutionary heroes to be praised, childish savages to be educated, duplicable commodities to be consumed, dangerous cannibals to be subdued, and happy Sambos to be enjoyed. Since they did not leave enough written text to express their personal views on these Americans,⁵⁴ we can only speculate as to their reactions from the observers' records of the performance. The Africans had to perform according to the abolitionists' plan to lure more observers, so their performance was more theatrical for the pleasure of the observers than authentic to the Africans' sense of their own identities. The same article in the Cleveland *Daily Herald* depicts the beginning of Cinque's speech: "Cinque rose and addressed the assembly in his native tongue, with power and effect." Despite the observers' lack of knowledge of his native language, they felt his power "to sway the minds of man and to touch [. . .] the finer chords of the human heart." At last, when he expressed "his deep sense of obligation to the 'Merica people for their kindness," some of the observers were moved "to tears."⁵⁵ Given that the observers could not understand Cinque's words, their overflowing emotions and corporeal reactions suggest that they must have already known what kind of message to

⁵⁴ The letter from Ka-le (or Ka-li) to John Quincy Adams is the only one document written by the Africans. The letter was sent to Adams on the eve of the Supreme Court hearings on January 4, 1841. Here is a part of the letter: "Some [American] men say Mendi people very happy because they laugh and have plenty to eat. Mr. Pendleton [the jail keeper] come, and Mendi people all look sorry because they think about Mendi land friends we no see now. Mr. Pendleton say Mendi people angry; white men afraid of Mendi people. [. . .] Dear friend, we want you to know how we feel. Mendi people *think, think, think*. Nobody know what he think; [. . .] Mendi people have got souls." Quoted in the *Colored American*, March 27, 1841, 5.

⁵⁵ Cleveland *Daily Herald*, Dec. 30, 1841, 1.

receive from the meeting.⁵⁶ As much as the tears blurred their vision to the real Cinque, only the created identity for the heroic and grateful Cinque remained on stage.

The Black Performers

One keen observer did not miss such theatricality at the meeting. Lydia Maria Child⁵⁷ attended one of the Africans' farewell meetings, making a remark: "I thought these honest creatures would be vexatious materials, should any theological drill-sargent [*sic*] try to substitute a routine of catechisms and creeds for the [individual's?] life."⁵⁸ Child was amazed at Kinna's answers to theological questions not to mention his literacy. However, what surprised her was not his skills but the bifurcation of his psyche into his native culture and Christian education. According to her observation of the Africans, they "would be vexatious materials" because their "drill-sergeant" teachers forcibly made them deny routines and creeds in their native life by implanting theological ideas in their minds.

⁵⁶ In contrast to his expressive bodily gestures, Cinque's speech was often misinterpreted and colored by other abolitionists' mediatory interruptions. For instance, the New London *Gazette* reports on Cinque's speech right after the Amistad African captives were sent to jail: "My brothers, I am once more among you, having deceived the enemy of our race by saying I had doubloons. I came to tell you that you have only one chance for death, and more for liberty." Quoted in the *Liberator*, Sept. 6, 1839, 2. The cabin slave boy of *La Amistad*, Antonio, translated Cinque's "Congolese" into Spanish, and the editor of the newspaper, John Joy Hyde translated this into English. However, later it turned out that Antonio could not speak any African languages. *Emancipator*, Nov. 7, 1839, 2-3. See also Sale, *Volcano*, 78.

⁵⁷ Lydia Maria Child is one of the most important abolitionists not only because she expansively viewed the maladies of slavery in the Northern context of the labor market system and racism, but also because she offered a feminist critique of male-dominant antislavery movements. In 1841 Child became the first female editor of an antislavery newspaper, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. Regarding the Amistad Africans' performance, she discovers what white-male writers have overlooked, which suggests her particular perspective on slavery and abolitionism. See Sánchez-Eppler's *Touching Liberty*, the first chapter titled "Bodily Bonds: The Intersecting Rhetorics of Feminism and Abolition," 14-49.

⁵⁸ *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Dec. 2, 1841, 2.

Child's observation of the Amistad Africans hints at their subtle but significant resistance to the observers' controlling gaze. As mentioned above, the repetitiousness of the Africans' performance was crucial to the commemoration of the event; however, performance on stage is a temporal form of artistic representation, different from a written text perpetuated on paper. In spite of the similarly repetitious contents of the performance, the Africans could not present the exact same performance for each meeting: its routine repetition occasionally allowed the performers to display improvisations. The New England *Weekly Review* complains that their performance was not thoroughly prepared: the reporter witnessed the meeting leader and the Africans mistakenly reciting the "Lord's Prayer." They said that the will of God "to be done in *Heaven* as the *earth*" instead of "to be done on earth as it is in heaven." In doing so, they were "reversing the order of the Divine instructions and economy."⁵⁹ The writer detects the Africans' subversive profanity as something that could reverse the divine order of Christianity. Although the misplacement of the two words seems like a simple mistake, the writer's emphasis on the reversal implies that the Africans' verbal aberration is cataclysmic to social hierarchies represented by the heaven-earth dualism, for instance, white-black, Christian-heathen, civilization-barbarism, master-slave, and literacy-illiteracy. The *Weekly Review* writer reacts sensitively to the Africans' mistake, revealing his own identity construction based on the black other, which Peter Stallybrass and Allon White explain as "psychological dependence upon precisely those Others which are being rigorously opposed and excluded at the social level" (5). To the apprehensive observer,

⁵⁹ New England *Weekly Review*, Nov. 20, 1841, 4. Italics original.

the Amistad Africans' performance even with a trivial mistake appears to be disruptive to these hierarchies in which the construction of white subjectivity is possible.

The façade of their performance slightly marred by the aberrant mistake attests that the Africans did not successfully fulfill their role for the abolitionists' project of manufacturing a model of the black race. Instead of playing for the various demands from those consisting of both the abolitionists and audiences, the Africans exhibited their performative bodies that theatrically slipped out of the two groups' spectatorial control over the bodies. To highlight this slippage as a token of the Amistad Africans' resistance to these officious American sympathizers, we need to go back to Kinna's answer to the minister's question of what he would do to his enemy. Although Kinna seemed to satisfy the observers, in a circumlocutory manner he evaded the minister's aim to ascertain Kinna's understanding of Christian forgiveness and generosity. As a matter of fact, he did not say that he and his people would bless their enemies, but replaced the questioned himself with an abstract and disembodied subject "you" by suggesting a condition: "if you look into the Bible."⁶⁰ In Kinna's answer, he was not a subject for forgiveness but a witness to how his observers—the white other—practiced religious faith according to the Bible. Moreover, the *Pennsylvania Inquirer and Daily Courier* does not depict Kinna as a religious boy with a compliant nature at all. As his teacher, Mr. Booth, describes, Kinna often challenged his authority as teacher: "Mr. Booth, you say when we all learns to read the Bible we shall go home; [. . .] and there is such and such an one, naming another, he no learn in two winters, his head be white; if we wait till he learn to read the Bible, we

⁶⁰ Cleveland *Daily Herald*, Dec. 30, 1841, 2.

never go home.”⁶¹ Instead of helping his people learn English and Christianity better, Kinna pushed his teacher to give up teaching those who could not follow it till their “head be white.” By proclaiming a few Africans’ incapability of learning, Kinna discouraged both the abolitionists who advertised them as an exemplar of black Americans, and the observers who came to see how far the “exemplars” could acquaint themselves with the white and Protestant variety.

As well as Kinna, Fuli, one of the Africans, refused to straightforwardly answer Mr. Booth’s question by making the observers self-reflexively consider the Africans’ feelings toward his contemporary Americans. When the teacher asked, “Fuli, supposed the American people do not help you to get home—how will you get home?,” Fuli replied: “I know; I no tell you, [. . .] American people not all good; good and bad every where; so in Mendi, so here. I no tell you about New Haven; you know all about that.”⁶² Fuli seemingly failed to answer the teacher’s question because he did not mention what he knew or how he would return to Africa. However, his reluctance to directly answer kept the observers wondering about what and why he did not want to tell. His assertion, “you know all about that,” urged the observers to self-referentially examine themselves to figure out the elusive reference of “all about that.” To understand the Amistad Africans, the observers should be their own observers first (“so in America, so there”), just as Fuli realized that “good and bad every where” by looking back on his native country (“so in Mendi, so here”).

⁶¹ *Pennsylvania Inquirer and Daily Courier*, May 29, 1841, 4.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 4.

In addition to the two Africans' slippery performance on stage, Cinque can serve as a good example of the black body that exhibits resistance to white spectatorship. Without losing the observers' intense attention to his performance, Cinque nonetheless estranged them by delivering a speech in his native language. Though the writer for the *Cleveland Daily Herald* (quoted above) admired the expressiveness of Cinque's body as something that transcended the linguistic barrier, other observers might admit that Cinque remained incomprehensible. The *New England Weekly Review* phonologically transcribes Cinque's speech, for instance, "cam lo dur tumhad eakoni yarn fumrigostan houn [. . .]."⁶³ The article even does not attempt to interpret Cinque's narrative by turning to the explanations of those who instructed Cinque. As if eluding any imposition of the various images—murderer, savage, hero, and converted sinner—to the African leader, Cinque looked too alien to embody any image that the (white) observers had projected onto him. For instance, Cinque's masculine black body was hardly associated with the common stereotype of the black man as "rapist" in this article. Instead of being "a little disturbed by the presence of such a host of beautiful ladies," the African leader was sitting calm on the stage until his turn to speak. In fact, the description of Cinque's equilibrium reveals the writer's own sexual gaze at the "beautiful [white] ladies," while he fails to detect the stereotypical black men's sexual desire for white women in Cinque. More radically,

⁶³ It is impossible to prove how exactly the writer transcribes Cinque's native language. However, in the period when Africa was considered to have had no civilization, the writer's attention to Cinque's language is notable. His article exemplifies this language as the evidence of Cinque's dignity and intelligence, which, as the writer explains in the same article, could "revolutionize and civilize a large portion of benighted Africa." *New England Weekly Review*, Nov. 20, 1841, 4.

Cinque himself looked like “an attentive observer of ‘men and things.’”⁶⁴ Cinque turned the observers’ gaze back upon themselves, just as the writer unconsciously exposed his lustful gaze at the women through Cinque’s observant gaze at him.⁶⁵

The frustration of the observers’ spectatorship became obvious, when they saw Cinque and the Africans apparently enjoying their own performance while making the observers uncomfortable with their inscrutable Africanness. The Pennsylvania *Inquirer and Daily Courier* depicts one farewell meeting for the Amistad Africans. The newspaper portrays Cinque’s performance in an attentive manner:

Cinque is so energetic in action, that at the meeting on Monday evening, it was thought prudent to remove the pitchers and tumblers that were on a table before him, lest he should sweep them off. At Mr. Reed’s Church, he had full space; he commenced his speech with a restrained action of the right arm, which moved from his elbow downwards, and increased in frequency and rapidity as he progressed, till at length his whole frame was excited; he moved quickly from side to side—now addressing the audience, and now appealing to his countrymen, who would answer his

⁶⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁵ Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks explains this gaze at the racial other through Lacanian psychoanalysis. According to her, “[r]acial visibility is related to an unconscious anxiety about the historicity of Whiteness” that “produces a logic of differential relations” (20-21). This anxiety entails a desire for active looking at the other to protect the system of racial difference. The evidence of an observer’s visual perception is mainly “caused by an unrecognized and underlying need to encounter that which Lacan terms ‘the gaze, [. . .] which always escapes the grasp of that form of vision that is satisfied with imagining itself as consciousness” (Seshadri-Crooks 59). By gazing at Cinque, the writer attempts to promote the fantasy of disembodied white-male spectatorship. However, his spectatorship necessitates Cinque’s distinctive presence, which causes the observer’s anxiety about fragile “Whiteness.” When Cinque returns his gaze back, the writer sustains his status of *seeing* by moving his gaze from at the racial other to at the sexual other, “the beautiful ladies.”

appeals with a low guttural exclamation. He showed the manner in which he knocked off the chains; and when he described the onset on board the *Amistad*, he was almost terrific.⁶⁶

In this passage, Cinque is neither a grateful African hero nor a touching orator. Rather, he appears to be overwhelmingly corporeal, as the writer seems to be obsessed with the African's body. Cinque here visualized himself not "in speech" but "in action." In describing the concern felt by the organizers of the event ("it was thought prudent [by the organizers] to remove"), the writer has already imagined that the performer would "sweep off" pitchers and tumblers placed on stage. This insinuates that Cinque's corporeality powerfully aroused the writer's vivid imagination, which preceded Cinque's actual performance. Approving of the organizers' removal of the props, the writer does not hide his desire to see how Cinque had "full space" with his exuberant bodily energy. Even during Cinque's speech, the writer continued to focus not on the speech but on Cinque's motions, noticing Cinque "with a restrained action of the right arm." The African performer stopped restraining his bodily expression but intensified aggressive gestures, as his speech "increased in frequency and rapidity" and he "moved quickly from side to side." The observer-writer then witnessed how "[Cinque's] whole [physical] frame was excited." This excitement is to some degree shared by the writer because his observant and breathless-sounding descriptions of Cinque's performance expose the writer's own enthusiasm as well.

However, according to this passage, Cinque did not respond enough to the writer's attentive gaze at his body and intense feeling for his performance. Although

⁶⁶ *Pennsylvania Inquirer and Daily Courier*, May 29, 1841, 5.

Cinque was “addressing the audience,” he ultimately “appealed” only to his Africans, who joined him “with a low guttural exclamation.” The Africans, estranging their observers, affirmed their solidarity with this unintelligible sound. Not only does the repetitive use of the word “now” emphasize the suddenness of Cinque’s movement, but it also hints at the writer’s futile effort to perpetuate the performing black body in the temporality of his spectatorship. The final remark encapsulates the writer’s feeling toward Cinque. In showing “the manner in which he knocked off the chains” and describing the revolt, presumably with his foreign tongue and gesture, Cinque looked “almost terrific.”⁶⁷ Cinque’s performance with his immeasurable bodily energy and expressions “almost terrified” the observers because they understood that Cinque could “knock off the chains” physically or conceptually restricting the black body again. Figuratively, through his expressive body, Cinque exceeded the abolitionist stage and performed beyond the observers’ spectatorial authority.

Cinque’s performative body escaped the net of the observers’ conflicting desires for the black body. To some observers, he and other Amistad Africans were the tangible evidence of African exoticism as if they were performers of a “freak show,” a genre which was popular in this period.⁶⁸ To different observers and abolitionists, they stood

⁶⁷ According to *OED*, the word “terrific” referred to “causing terror, terrifying and excessive” until the end of the 19th century—unlike its modern definition, “superlatively good.” Def. A. *Oxford English Dictionary*. <http://www.oed.com.floyd.lib.umn.edu/view/Entry/199580?redirectedFrom=terrific#>.

⁶⁸ According to Michael Chemers, exhibitions of physical abnormality and exotics have been “spectacles” on stage since the Enlightenment. Terms such as “normality,” “abnormality,” and “average” did not appear in European languages prior to the Enlightenment. It influenced the age of Jacksonian populism in the early nineteenth century U.S. Dime museums and freak shows emerged in this context. Both middle-class and under-class Americans enjoyed a variety of

for the victory of the revolutionary spirit for freedom over the bloody history of slave insurgencies. Above all, their contemporary Americans wanted to see them demonstrating black people's civic qualities in order to preserve social stability in white-black hierarchy. Most observers could hardly interpret the Amistad Africans' performance without investing the socially constructed images and meanings of the black race onto the Africans' bodies. Therefore, what the observers saw on the abolitionist stage is a reflection of their various desires for the black body as if the body was an open sign of racial signification. Their performance blatantly indicates that the Africans refused to display their bodies according to the representational taxonomies of the white and Protestant variety or as racist symbols. Instead, they transcended the ideological boundaries set by antebellum Americans, while performatively demonstrating their uncontrollable bodies. The abolitionist stage became a site where blackness was formed both by an (white) observer's desires for the black body and by the black performer's resistance to (white) spectatorship.

On Thursday, November 25 1841, the Amistad Africans with the chief missionary Rev. William Raymond and his family boarded the *Gentleman*, which was docked near New York City. In the middle of January the ship arrived at Freetown in Sierra Leone.⁶⁹

exhibitions and stagings such as magicians and human oddities (freakish or simply foreign). Staging the black body on both the abolitionist and minstrel stage was not unrelated to this fashion. See Chemers, *Staging Stigma* 57-83.

⁶⁹ The Amistad Africans sailed back to Sierra Leone with five missionaries—William and Elizabeth Raymond, Henry and Tamar Wilson, and James Steel—dispatched by the American Missionary Association. Osagie explores the history after their return to their home country by studying correspondences between these missionaries and Lewis Tappan. One letter tells that Cinque (Osagie calls him “Sengbe” or “Sengbe Pieh”) emigrated from Sierra Leone to Jamaica later. See Osagie's chapter 3 “The Amistad Returnees and the Mende Mission,” *Amistad*, 53-70.

Despite the lack of indisputable evidence, there was a rumor that Cinque, who was once a victim of the slave trade, became a trader himself after returning to his country (Martin 213; Osagie 63). Having faced the Africans' betrayals and conflicts, Rev. Raymond in one letter confessed that he "scarcely knows what to write" about Cinque whom he had "a higher opinion" of than others when Cinque was under his instructions in the U.S.⁷⁰ The irony in the Amistad hero's dramatic change illustrates performative blackness during the American antislavery movements. Cinque and other Africans did "perform" the themes of heroic achievement for humanity, "theatrically present" religious faith, and became "spectacles" in front of the observers. After all, behind the various images of the black body on the abolitionist stage, the Amistad Africans remain *unseen*.

⁷⁰ *Liberator*, Aug. 5, 1842, 1.

Chapter 2. Performing Bodies: Frederick Douglass's *The Heroic Slave*

The Amistad case was no less sensational to black Americans than it was to whites in the North. Black abolitionists such as Philip A. Bell and Robert Purvis actively participated in domestic abolitionism by drawing antebellum African Americans' attention to the case. Black antislavery advocates in free states worked with those white colleagues who tried to promulgate the Amistad Africans' revolt as part of the extended history of the American Revolution. Northern blacks attentively read and discussed articles on the Amistad case, and celebrated the Africans' final victory at the court. One of the leading black activists, Purvis of Philadelphia, commissioned cheaply produced replicas of a portrait of Cinque. A facsimile of Cinque's handwriting was also a popular item produced and purchased by Northern blacks.⁷¹ Two prominent black abolitionists, William Wells Brown and John Mercer Langston, even named their children after the African hero, Cinque (Finkenbine 240). Frederick Douglass was not an exception to those black Americans fascinated and inspired by the Amistad Africans.

There is no written document on Douglass's first-hand experience with the Amistad Africans other than a few phrases on Cinque in his autobiographies and speeches, but these do attest that he was to some extent engaged in the Amistad case. Douglass had been an avid reader of the *Liberator* since his settlement in New Bedford after the successful escape in September 1838, as he declares, "[The *Liberator*] took a

⁷¹ In the *Colored American*, the following advertisement was posted: "PORTRAIT OF CINQUE—[. . .] We shall be proud to have our apartments graced with the portrait of the noble Cinque, and shall regard it as a favor to our descendants, to transmit to them his likeness. And who that has any humanity in his heart, or any veneration for a HERO, [. . .] would not like to have this likeness is *fac simile* of Cinque's hand writing, although he came here a heathen, and unlearned" (2/27/41:192,8).

place in my heart second only to the Bible. [. . .] Every week the *Liberator* came, and every week I made myself master of its contents” (*Life and Times* 658-59). Given that the *Liberator* elaborately reported the Amistad case from the African captives’ arrival to their departure and even to their missionary works in Sierra Leone, Douglass must have been well acquainted with the Amistad Africans’ incidents and appearances at antislavery meetings. Furthermore, during the first three years of his free life—from his settlement in New Bedford to the emergence as an ex-slave speaker in 1841—he clarifies that he “promptly attended” “[a]ll the anti-slavery meetings held in New Bedford” (659). This three-year period when Douglass ardently explored abolitionism through the *Liberator* and antislavery meetings exactly coincides that of the Amistad Africans’ residency in the U.S. Presumably, Douglass could have had a chance to witness the spectacles of the Africans’ performance or at least heard it from his friends who went to the Amistad meeting.

While being excited by the Amistad Africans’ legal success and popularity, Douglass saw that his contemporary Americans in the North, by contrast to their harsh critique of the transatlantic slave trade, seemed insensitive to the domestic slave trade. Rather, he found a discrepancy between their disgust with the enslavement of Africans and silence on the Southern slavery despite the clear connection between the two. For instance, Northern Americans of that time overlooked the Creole revolt led by the son of Virginia, Madison Washington, and his dramatic achievement against slavery in their country in 1841.⁷² In considering that the two mutinies occurred consecutively and the

⁷² Robert Ensor, the captain of the Creole, was severely wounded during the uprising. Washington ordered him to be taken care of by his wife aboard as well. Similar to Cinque, Washington and

press meticulously reported every move of the Amistad Africans, it is surprising that antebellum Americans were relatively quiet about the revolt on the slave ship named *Creole* and its leader Washington. This lack of the interest in this domestic slave's rebellion reveals their double standard between international and domestic issues on slavery, which mattered to Douglass. For this reason, the narrator of *The Heroic Slave* begins the last part by pointing out these contradictory attitudes toward the inland and outland slave trade: "The inconsistency is so flagrant and glaring, that it would seem to cast a doubt on the doctrine of the innate moral sense of mankind" (225-26).

In Douglass's mind, what people missed in their vociferous praise to the Amistad Africans' victory was that many Americans still did not assume that enslaved blacks in their country should have the same right to liberty as the Amistad Africans claimed at the court. Consequently, as an effort to solve this contradiction, Douglass maintains that the insurrection of black slaves is legitimate in both the U.S. and abroad. His speech on the Emancipation of the British West Indies echoes this idea: "I am aware that the insurrectionary movements of the slaves were held by many to be prejudicial to their cause. This is said now of such movements at the South. The answer is that abolition followed close on the heels of insurrection in the West Indies, and Virginia was never nearer emancipation than when General Turner kindled the fires of insurrection at

other insurrectionists threatened the first and second mates, Zephaniah Gifford and Lucius Stevens who remained almost intact, to steer the ship to Nassau. The revolutionaries knew that Nassau was a slave-free territory under the authority of British government. On arriving at Nassau, all of the slaves on the *Creole* were liberated. Douglass must have asked many black and white abolitionists for details about Washington and his notable victory. However, while we do not have how much information Douglass gained, the personal history of Washington remains unknown. See George Hendrick and Willene Hendrick's *The Creole Mutiny*.

Southampton” (“West India” 368). Douglass claims that, just as the emancipation of the British West Indies resulted from slave insurrections, the South should not ignore further slave insurrections after Nat Turner who led a massive slave rebellion in Southampton County, Virginia in 1831.

Madison Washington, the leader of the Creole revolt, appeared to be relevant for Douglass’s project to connect international slave insurrections to the revolts of domestic slaves. Washington was born an American slave in Virginia, escaped to Canada, returned to rescue his wife, but failed and was recaptured. On the way to New Orleans as a captive slave, he led a slave uprising with the help of other nineteen slaves aboard the brig *Creole* in early November 1841. Strategically, both Washington and Cinque achieved their freedom through violent insurgence on the slave ships. As the account in his *Narrative of his physical fight with Mr. Covey* illustrates, Douglass felt that violence is inevitable for black slaves to strive for liberty. At the same time, the geographical trajectory on which Washington pursued his freedom includes the sites where Cinque and Douglass were enslaved and escape slavery. Cinque was brought across the Atlantic Ocean to Americas and the West Indies, and Douglass was born in the South but escaped it by crossing the Ocean to flee from slave captors. Washington can be paralleled both with Cinque, the African revolutionary hero on the slave ship, and with young Douglass, the brave slave of the South.

Douglass’s writings and speeches compare Madison Washington explicitly with Cinque and implicitly with himself. In another part of the speech above he says, “Joseph Cinque on the deck of the *Amistad*, did that which should make his name dear to us. He

bore nature's burning protest against slavery. Madison Washington who struck down his oppressor on the deck of the *Creole*, is more worthy to be remembered than the colored man who shot Pitcairn at Bunker Hill" ("West India" 367). Additionally, Douglass describes Washington as one of the Southern slaves who did or would attempt to rebel against his slaveholder. Douglass delivered his speech titled "The Slaves' Right to Revolt" in Boston on May 30, 1848, emphasizing Washington's commonality with other Southern slaves: "There are many Madison Washingtons [. . .] in the South, who would assert their right to liberty" (qtd. in Blassingame 130-31). By locating Washington in the South, Douglass hints at the duplicability between himself and the black hero. As P. Gabrielle Foreman points out, the biographical facts about Washington introduced in *The Heroic Slave* partly overlap with the writer's life. Both escaped slavery in 1835, and appeared to the public through abolitionists in 1841 (152). Borrowing the triumphant figure for his novella, Douglass reconstitutes his alternative ego of a black revolutionary in the South. This explains why the novella focuses more on the slave Washington in the South than the hero Washington on the *Creole*. Through his recreation of Madison Washington in *The Heroic Slave*, the writer turns the reader's attention from the Amistad Africans' revolt at sea to a domestic black slaves' (potential) rebellion and its justification in the U.S.

Staging the Hero

Regardless of the commonalities of Washington shared with the African hero Cinque and the ex-slave Douglass in history, *The Heroic Slave* is a literary product of the writer's imagination. Therese Rizzo suggests that Douglass did not choose the *Creole*

revolt as a factual account but took the historical persona of Madison Washington for his fictional narrative (137). The scanty facts of both the Creole mutiny and Washington's biography allow Douglass to establish his authorship instead of remaining as an ex-slave witness-storyteller. Because Washington was less known to the public, Douglass found that he could (re)create a heroic revolutionary representative of domestic black slaves by borrowing the historical event of the Creole mutiny and the figure of Washington.⁷³

William Andrews claims that Douglass utilizes "a special marginal position [of the case] between authenticatable history on the one hand and unverifiable fiction on the other" (26). According to Andrews, *The Heroic Slave* is significant because the novella suggests "the evolution of African American narrative from 'natural' to 'fictive' discourse."

Douglass gains authority that does not depend "on the authentication of what is asserted in that discourse" but is established in "sabotaging of the presumed authoritative plentitude of history as a 'natural' discourse" (Andrews 30). Douglass used the historical event for his literary creation that could subvert this "natural" discourse in which an African American writer like himself was marginal. By reinventing the scarcely documented history as a fiction, he sets up his self-evident authorship rather than being

⁷³ One article titled "Madison Washington: Another Chapter in His History" in the *Liberator* cites testimony from several abolitionists who helped Washington's escape to Canada and return to Virginia (06/10/42:23,5). The article highlights Washington's romantic drama rather than his bloody fight for freedom: "Madison had been some time in Canada—long enough to love and rejoice in British liberty. But he loved his wife, who was left a slave in Virginia, still more." Yet, it ends with a lament the lack of specific stories about Washington: "Will not some British abolitionists obtain for us the story from Madison's own lips?" William Andrews views that the article "infer[ing] a romantic plot underlying the *Creole* incidents testifies to the strong desire of American abolitionism for a story, if not *the* story, about Washington that would realize him as a powerful symbol of black antislavery heroism" (28 italics original).

an authentic (because of his black body) but seemingly dubious (because of his intelligent speech) witness to slavery.

Douglass proclaims his authorship for two reasons: to overcome the limitations that he found in antislavery meetings when working as an agent and a follower of Garrison; and to introduce an ideal relationship between a black slave in pursuing freedom and a white observer in witnessing the slave's pursuit. First of all, the writer needs a fictive persona who is free from white abolitionists' attempt to regulate an ex-slave's performance within the racist frame of white spectatorship of the black body. Douglass realized that his authenticity as an ex-slave had not always appeared authentic to Northern whites in the early year of his career as an ex-slave agent. During one of the antislavery meetings where he introduced his slavery past, Douglass was advised to "[better] have a *little* of the plantation manner of speech than not; 'tis not best that you seem too learned" by George Foster, the Garrisonian white abolitionist who wanted "to pin [him] down to simple narrative" (*Bondage and Freedom* 367). To prove his authentic identity and experience with slavery, Douglass should play the role of a black slave onto whom white Northerners imbued their stereotypes and racial fantasies of the black body. While mastering a stage presence, Douglass faced the dilemma of being too articulate to be authentic. His real past—having been born into slavery of Maryland and suffered under it for twenty-eight years—did not establish his authenticity, unless Douglass exaggerated and presented enslavement in a particular way.

Douglass not only betrayed the Garrisonians' confidence in their stereotyping of black men but also confounded their rationale for a patriarchal guardianship over the

black race. Douglass criticizes this culture of Northern racism among the Garrisonians by charging that they became deflected from the original purpose of the antislavery movement. “It started to free the slave,” he contends, “[but] [i]t ends by leaving the slave to free himself” (Foner 350). Similarly, Douglass relentlessly attacks the white abolitionists in another speech: “This class of Abolitionists don’t like colored celebrations, they don’t like colored conventions, they don’t like colored Anti-Slavery fairs for the support of colored newspapers. They don’t like any demonstrations whatever in which colored men take a leading part. [. . .] Your humble speaker has been branded as an ingrate, because he has ventured to stand up on his own right, and to plead our common cause as a colored man, rather than as a Garrisonian” (“West India” 366). However, because the black-white alliance is crucial to achieving their common goal, Douglass understands to some extent that he needs to compromise with the white abolitionists’ self-contradictory double standard for black performance.

Douglass has to establish his leadership by divorcing the Garrisonian abolitionists, which is another reason that Douglass needed to claim on his authorship. This clarifies why Douglass wrote this novella about ten years after the Creole mutiny of 1841. Around the time of the publication of *The Heroic Slave*, Douglass broke completely with Garrison, and renamed his newspaper *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, independent of the guardianship of the white-leading American Anti-Slavery Society.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Many critics including Maggie Sale have pointed out the possible motivations of Douglass’s political diversion from Garrisonian moral suasion to legitimacy of violence for immediate liberation of the enslaved. For instance, the attack by a mob in Pendleton, Indiana, in 1843 would have an impact on Douglass’s rejection of nonviolent resistance. Additionally, his meeting with John Brown in 1847 could confirm Douglass’s pessimism on the nonviolence doctrine. Douglass’s acquaintance with Gerrit Smith is also considered one motivation of his diversion

Therefore, Douglass creates the heroic black man on behalf of black abolitionists who could replace the “authentic” ex-slave designed for white abolitionists’ agenda. He revives Madison Washington because he was less familiar to these abolitionists, and thus had more potential to be a new black hero rather than the famous, even stereotypical figure of Cinque in the Amistad revolt.

Douglass’s dejection in the North was caused by the fact that the white abolitionists, not unlike Southern slave-traders who measured a slave body’s corporeal values on a slave auction market, regarded him as an object for a display of slavery’s black corporeality on the abolitionist stage. Douglass recalls his performance at antislavery meetings where one of the Garrisonian abolitionists, Mr. Collins, introduced him as a “graduate from the peculiar institution [. . .] *with my diploma written on my back!*” (*Bondage and Freedom* 365). This remark implies that Douglass was invited primarily to exhibit his body’s indelible wounds in front of the observers. In all probability, Douglass had to often reveal his back on stage along with his testimonial speech. What disturbed him was not the white abolitionist’s request for his bodily display but his introduction of Douglass as a dehumanized “thing”: “Many came, no doubt, from curiosity to hear what a negro could say in his own cause. I was generally introduced as a ‘*chattel*’—a ‘*thing*’—a piece of southern ‘*property*’—the chairman assuring the audience that *it could speak*” (366 italics original). During his staged testimony, Douglass’s body became an object of “consumption according to the dictates of white abolitionist imperatives” (Bernier 75). His humanity denied under slavery was neglected once more

(Sale 174-75). Differently from these assumptions, Margaret Kohn insists that Douglass already acknowledged the necessity of violence for the enslaved to achieve freedom, as his physical fight against Mr. Covey illustrates. See Kohn’s “Frederick Douglass’s Master-Slave Dialectic.”

when the observers only found the physical evidence of the cruelties of slavery from his material body and did not see the black race's humanity underneath the visible evidence. For this reason, Harvey Young claims that the black body has been "*made to be given to be seen*" (12 italics original). Douglass's verbal fluency failed to make him believable to suspicious white observers because the "thing" must be not *heard* but *seen*. He keenly recognizes that his body attends the discursive practice to conceptualize the black body, as it possesses a visual materiality for the (white) American abolitionism.

In addition to these white abolitionists' treatment of him as a spectacular object, Douglass on the abolitionist stage was dispirited by his own failure to appropriately represent black Americans' humanity. Although he was introduced as a sub-human specimen from slavery, Douglass struggled to appear as a human being with dignity and authority by undermining the abolitionists' effort to nail his narrative down. His narratives at the meetings became too overflowing to be fixed on the white abolitionists' grammar. However, in the midst of endeavoring to overcome the confines of black corporeality as a "thing" through his speech skills, Douglass gradually found himself denying his blackness as well because he could not make his verbal articulation compatible with his visual representation of the black body. He confesses: "For a time I was made to forget that my skin was dark and my hair crisped. I regretted that I could not have shared the hardships and dangers endured by the earlier workers for the slave's release. I soon, however, found that my enthusiasm had been extravagant [. . .] the life now before me, had shadows as well as sunbeams" (*Bondage and Freedom* 366). As soon as he realizes he forgets his black body with "dark skin and crispy hair," the regret comes

to his mind. Douglass believes his path toward antislavery movement would be easier than that of early abolitionists, in particular, black ex-slave abolitionists. To this inexperienced black agent, the “hardships and dangers” that the earlier abolitionists had gone through did not seem to exist anymore. On the flip side of his “sunbeam”-like freedom in the North, Douglass could see the reality of the American antislavery movements “shadowed” by internal racism, which did not allow him to transcend his black body despite his verbal fluency and articulateness.

Notably, Douglass does not consider his fluent speech a viable way of expressing black people’s experiences with slavery. His transition from a slave to a free man implies not only his volition to verify slaves’ bodies with language instead of remaining an objectified and sentimentalized body, but also to achieve his autonomy beyond the corporeal boundary. In this vein, Robert B. Stepto maintains that, by acquiring linguistic articulation, Douglass can “conjoin past and present with images that not only stand for different periods in his personal history—the testimonial experience—but also speak of his evolution from slavery to freedom” (*Veil* 20). Similarly, Lindon Barrett argues that, by empowering linguistic articulation, Douglass obscures his overwhelming corporeality and authorizes his inviolable humanity (434). Linguistic articulation could hardly describe the extreme pains that black slaves should endure under slavery. The writer of the *Pennsylvania Inquirer and Daily Courier* describes, as quoted in the previous chapter, Cinque expressed the fear and pains resulting from his enslavement, with the exaggerated motion in the “full space” and “guttural exclamation” (5/29/41:126,5). There is no doubt that the white writer could not imagine the miseries that Cinque had gone through. To

this ignorant white writer's eyes, Cinque estranges the observers by failing to depict the pains with an "intelligible language." The "guttural exclamation" only spotlights Cinque's black corporeality that takes "full space." By contrast, to Douglass's eyes, Cinque must have gesticulated to express his human feelings toward the unspeakable terrors of the Middle Passage.

Cinque's unintelligible sound and suffering body's motions can be associated with Aunt Hester's screaming⁷⁵ through which Douglass witnesses the cruelties of slavery for the first time. Young Douglass as "a witness" should see the "most horrible spectacle," and, at the same time, he becomes "a participant" in the spectacle because he expects "it would be [his] turn next" (*Narrative* 15). When he as a participant imaginatively overlaps himself with Hester tortured by her master, Douglass as a witness fails to preserve the visual image of the gory scene and, consequently, his testimony is somewhat unreliable. Just like Cinque, Douglass cannot verbally depict the scene: "[L]anguage has no power to convey a just sense of its awful criminality" (*Bondage and Freedom* 177).⁷⁶ Instead, his body immediately reacts to this memory of the extreme terror, worsening his inability to verbalize the memory once again. Regarding his first speech, Douglass says, "It was with the utmost difficulty that I could stand erect, or that I

⁷⁵ Douglass uses her name differently in his autobiographies. The aunt is called "Hester" in his *Narrative*, but "Esther" in both *My Bondage and My Freedom* and *Life and Times*. I use "Hester" in my dissertation.

⁷⁶ In *The Body in Pain* Elaine Scarry argues that pain cannot be expressed not because we do not have proper language describing it but because pain "resists objectification in language" (5). Resonating with Scarry, Jeannine DeLombard reads the scene of Aunt Hester's torture: "We should note that Aunt Hester's vocalizations are incoherent 'shrieks' and 'screams'; her more articulate 'words' and 'prayers' are negated by their ineffectuality and, in the text, by the anaphoric 'no' that precedes these terms" (114).

could command and articulate two words without hesitating or stammering. I trembled in every limb” (364). His trembling limbs, stammering mouth, and any indelible memory of pains hinders him from clearly speaking out. Only by forgetting his black corporeality afflicted with the cruelties of slavery is Douglass able to explain what he witnessed. He criticizes this self-delusional moment when he mistakenly feels he could prove universal humanity beyond both his black body and the white abolitionists’ impositions on that body, as his second autobiography suggests. If he cannot verbally portray the cruelties of slavery so long as he recognizes his vulnerable and sensitive body, and if he still needs to recover black humanity residing in his body by resisting the white abolitionists’ inhumane treatment of him as a “thing,” how can Douglass effectively demonstrate his black body as the indisputable evidence of black humanity?

The Heroic Slave can provide us with an answer to this question. The theatrical setting in the novella suggests Douglass’s ideal of the relationship between a performer/black (ex)slave and an observer/white abolitionist or sympathizer. Madison Washington’s heroic aspect emerges quite distinctively in this sense. He is heroic not only because of his leadership of the *Creole* revolt but also because of his remarkable performance that makes white observers change their attitudes toward black people. As Daphne Brooks explains, African Americans have used “performance tactics to signify on the social, cultural, and ideological machinery” that circumscribes them. While exhibiting their bodies performatively, they “intervene in the spectacular and systemic representational abjection of black peoples” (Brooks 5). Douglass calls the historical hero Madison Washington back onto the stage of his imaginary theater where Washington

performs. His performing black body is so inspiring for white observers that they can bear witness to Washington's achievements and spread their testimonies (to the readers of the novella). By developing the conventional relationship between an ex-slave performer and a white observer in the North, Douglass locates the white characters to witness the enslaved Washington in the South, and borrows their voices to testify to the cruelties of slavery and the slave revolt on behalf of the black slave. The white witnesses emerge from Douglass's testimonial narrative, while Washington's black body functions as a focal force to control their actions for abolitionism.

Creating the Stage for a Black Subject's Performance

The fact that *The Heroic Slave* consists of the two white observers' respective encounters with Washington is particularly significant in reading the novella as a narrative of performance. Douglass creates an imaginative antislavery fair at a church where the Amistad Africans would perform: the writer places the performer on stage, the observers off stage, and the reader outside of the church. Therefore, his readers cannot but become avid of what the observers see inside there, just like Northern Americans of that time and Douglass himself attentively read articles on the Amistad Africans. Douglass avoids the risk of directly depicting Washington in his authorial voice, by setting the white observers—Mr. Listwell and Tom Grant—as witnesses to the revolutionary hero. The reader of the novella hears Washington's voice only through the mediation of the observers whose white bodies do not conflict with their linguistic articulation. In addition, through the very mediation, Washington's black corporeality does not appear a tangible "thing" to the reader's imagination. The black hero resides

within the white observers' stories, while their acts of storytelling are still arranged by Douglass, who does not appear on the surface of *The Heroic Slave*. Through this frame-within-a-frame narrative structure of the novella, Douglass preserves Washington's humanity and authenticity from the reader's imposition of a speechless "thing" onto the black body.

The rhetorical strategy of employing this theatrical setting defends Douglass from the attack on his apparent imitation of the white abolitionists' hero-making project in the tradition of the American Revolution. Prior to introducing Madison Washington, the writer begins by comparing the "great character" to the revolutionary heroes: "a man who loved liberty as well as did Patrick Henry,--who deserved it as much as Thomas Jefferson,--and who fought for it with a valor as high, [. . .], led all the armies of the American colonies through the great war for freedom and independence," (175). Arousing the reader's curiosity of the character as great as the revolutionaries, *The Heroic Slave* moves to Mr. Listwell's witness to Washington's monologue. This beginning resembles the pattern of the praise to the Amistad Africans. Abolitionists and contributors for abolitionist newspapers often connected the African captives to the Founding Fathers. For example, the *Liberator* says, "it is a case which calls for the sympathy of all true hearted lovers of liberty, that the brave Cinques and his associates have [. . .] imitated the example of Washington and the heroes of the revolution" (09/06/39:143,6). As this article exemplifies, Madison Washington's name is readily associated with these white male prototypes.

Given the irony in these white abolitionists' project to advertise Cinque with the familiar names of the Fathers, it seems absurd that Douglass also uses their names to illuminate Washington's heroic aspects. The logic of the heroic Founding Fathers regards the American Revolution as the projection of a sort of manifest destiny rooted in Eurocentric historical and cultural perspectives. For this reason, Douglass once denied his connection to the national figures by calling them, "your fathers" in his famous speech, "What To the Slave Is the Fourth of July?"

Washington seems to be the result of Douglass's compromise to attract white readers by relying on the conventional rhetoric to construct his black hero. To solve the dichotomy between the white Fathers and him, Douglass even removes Washington's racial characteristics so that Washington can be broadly doubled with the white Fathers. Because Washington is "black, but comely"⁷⁷ with "Herculean strength [. . .] nothing savage," "he was one to be sought as a friend, but to be dreaded as an enemy" (179). This offers some critics a clue to assert that Douglass carelessly adopts the revolutionary paradigm of the Founding Fathers that ultimately underpins the ideology of American slavery and white-male centrality. Richard Yarborough argues that Douglass tries to appeal to white readers by creating the extraordinary black man. Washington's unusual ability fails to represent most blacks, so that the "white bourgeois paradigm of manhood" remains unchallenged. Consequently, Douglass's "celebration of black heroism was

⁷⁷ The phrase, "black, but comely," is originated from the book, "Song of Solomon," about Sheba. Ivy Wilson positively interprets this phrase by arguing that it can be considered "not as a preoccupation with the accurate or the authentic but with the inventive, the imaginative, and the fantastic. In this respect, Douglass uses hyperbole in stylizing Washington's speeches to symbolically counteract the myriad ways that blacks had been scripted as the negative sign of U.S. democratic fulfillment" (30).

subverted from the outset by the racist, sexist, and elitist assumptions” upon which “the Anglo-American male ideal” was established (Yarborough 182).⁷⁸ In agreement with him, Krista Walter insists *The Heroic Slave* “affirm[s] the Northern white audience’s tenuous faith in the ‘collective solidarity’ of the American project,” while “downplay[ing] the importance of racial or ethnic chauvinism as a key component of nationalism by rendering his black hero virtually raceless” (237).⁷⁹ Douglass apparently straddles a line between Washington as an American hero and as a black rebel.

It may be a hasty conclusion that Douglass in *The Heroic Slave* follows the white abolitionists who introduced the Amistad Africans as a “black version” of the white American heroism, although his partial employment of that heroism is undeniable. The heroic aspects of Washington are transferred to the reader only through the white observers—Mr. Listwell and Tom Grant. Washington is framed within their narrow scopes before the reader of the novella figures out how heroic he is. It is impossible for the two observers to explain Washington’s heroism without associating him with their prototype of the American revolutionary heroes. Through the setting in which Mr. Listwell and Grant come to witness Washington, Douglass’s text encourages the readers

⁷⁸ Even though I do not examine the theme of black violence in this chapter, Yarborough’s arguments on Douglass’s downplaying of black violence deserve our attention. As one of his gestures to appeal to white readers, Douglass deleted any physically violent scene, which could single out to the readers’ minds. Therefore, Washington’s manly heroism was “domesticated,” when “Douglass cuts us off not just from Washington’s heroic violence but from his emotional responses to the dramatic events in which he plays such a crucial part” (Yarborough 182). Eric Sundquist also calls Douglass’s suave gesture for the white readers into question. To gain white recognition of black heroism and revolutionary rights, Douglass blurs Washington’s African features and neglects his role in the violence of the Creole revolt (Sundquist 118).

⁷⁹ Many scholars of *The Heroic Slave* have discussed Douglass’s association of the black hero with the Founding Fathers. See Sale (239 n4).

to recognize the gap between Washington's actual performance in front of the white men and their observations of the performance. Just as the throng of observers at the Amistad meetings longed to see the "real" black people from Africa and understood the Africans' performance according to their preconceptions of blackness, the spectatorial desires of Mr. Listwell and Grant to see a black hero or to confirm their belief in the revolutionary heroism simplify the character of Madison Washington. Therefore, Washington as a raceless and nonviolent revolutionary may be rather the white observers' ideals than that of the writer Douglass. As Foreman maintains, Douglass is less idealistic in creating the black hero Madison Washington because "the reader/listener/Listwell [and Grant] does not transcend race, and that power is not shared" (157). Even though Douglass does not assert his authorship or empower his heroic ego Washington to tell the story, the white observers have the power to authorize what they witness without receiving (white) audiences' suspicion of their testimonies.

Douglass's undeniable dependency on the white observers in his novella raises another question. By taking up the white characters' voyeuristic observations of Washington as a key to leading the reader to Washington's heroic achievement, Douglass apparently exposes the hero to the danger of the white surveillance over the hero's body. For this reason, Therese M. Rizzo argues that the black subject or Douglass himself cannot but realize the limitations of his personal agency because of his need for the white public's constant gaze at the black body (Rizzo 138). In spite of his humiliating experience with the white abolitionists who treated him as a "thing," Douglass's rhetorical strategy to secure white readership of *The Heroic Slave* entails the

commodification of Washington's body. Corresponding to Mr. Listwell's (somewhat homo-erotic) gaze at Washington, Douglass's readers may "appreciate" the black hero's corporeality: "Madison was of manly form. Tall, symmetrical, round, and strong [. . .] with the strength of the lion, a lion's elasticity" (179). The observer's obsession with Washington's corporeality reminds us of the intrinsic problem of exhibiting black slaves' tortured bodies at the antislavery meeting. In this sense, Rizzo insists that "[t]he dehumanization process inherent in positioning bodies as a commodity" on the stage. This commodified body, which "can be broken down, catalogued, and contained for value" by the white observers, "leaves the [black] individual as a series of bodily fragments" (Rizzo 145). Just as Cinque and even his printed image became a popular commodity among antebellum Northerners, Madison Washington may represent a consumable image of the heroic black man as a result of white spectatorship.

Nevertheless, Douglass does not regard the racial difference between the observers and the slave as the main reason why the white observers cannot feel the black slave's pain at the same level that the slave does. Moreover, their inability to feel his pain does not necessarily indicate that they fetishize the black slave's body as a spectacle for mere amusement. From his witness to Aunt Hester's flogging, Douglass realizes that he can feel her pain only when he replaces her with his imagined self. Her pain is limited within his emotive and imaginative capacity ("it would be my turn next"). For example, on the way to the North, the runaway slave Washington hides on the top of a tree and watches an old slave praying wholeheartedly under the tree. The protagonist recognizes the limitation in feeling another's pains because he cannot fully understand the meanings

and depth of the old man's heart-felt words. Washington confesses to Mr. Listwell that he "cannot repeat [the old man's] prayer, nor can [he] give [Mr. Listwell] an idea of its deep pathos." However, Washington feels "almost like coming down and kneeling by his side, and mingle my broken complaint with his," as much as he has suffered and longed to be free (198). Only Washington's own emotional depth "assured [him] of [the old man's] sympathy" for him as a runaway slave in the danger of being caught by slave hunters (198). Saidiya Hartman expresses her skepticism about white sympathy for a black sufferer on stage. While witnessing the black sufferer, a white observer imaginatively positions his white body in the place of the black body "in order to make this suffering visible and intelligible" (Hartman 19). However, in *The Heroic Slave* this observer's urge to replace a sufferer and feel his imagined pain as real is a prerequisite for sympathy for the sufferer. When a sympathizer embodies the pain rather than deleting it in his self-promoting imagination, he can sincerely feel for the sufferer. In this scene, Washington shares the old slave's truthfulness as much as his own, and wishes to kneel by the old slave without imagining himself as the slave. Likewise, Douglass's text expects the white observers to feel for a suffering slave as deeply as they can imagine.

Washington's body is subject to alienation that occurs not only when the white observers commodify it as a "thing" but also when he notices his "thing-ness" through the observers' eyes.⁸⁰ Under slavery, Washington is clearly aware that his body has

⁸⁰ Douglass's observation of the "thing-ness" anticipates W.E.B. Du Bois's term "double-consciousness." Racism fortified by institutionalized authorities does not allow blacks to have "true self-consciousness" because they can see themselves only by recognizing others' gaze at them. It is notable that he uses the word "true" to refer to being merely self-generative rather than to being authentic. In other words, Du Bois insinuates that the presence of whites as the other to blacks is latent but prevalent behind his observation of the complex construction of African

already been exploited by a slaveholder, brutalized by an overseer, and priced by a slave trader, as he laments, “How mean a thing am I?” (177). He, then, does not directly proclaim his body as the evidence of humanity. Rather, his dogged effort to keep humanity intact from physical violence under slavery leads him to objectify his vulnerable body as if the body were separable from himself: “These trusty legs, or these sinewy arms shall place me among the free” (178).⁸¹ Accordingly, he discovers that his body becomes a vehicle of empathy that can entitle him to maintain his humanity. During Washington’s hiding in the treetops, the old slave tries to help him get foods. When white men discover the old slave’s attempt, the slave is severely punished by them. Witnessing the old slave’s suffering, Washington says, “They tied him to a tree, and began to whip him. My own flesh crept at every blow, and I seem to hear the old man’s piteous cries even now” (200). By contrast to Washington’s sensitivity to the suffering of others, the people who fail to find their bodies to be “feeling flesh” are white slave traders. At the slave pen in Richmond, the slave traders “in human flesh have *no* respect for such [a

American identity. If black Americans cannot but be doubly conscious of being black and American, white Americans as the counterpart of the formers cannot hold “true self-consciousness.” This double consciousness occurs with the mediation of visual representations that are perceived through social implications that construct the relationships between the *seeing* self and the *seen* other, or between the *seeing* other and the *seen* self.

⁸¹ This part of Washington’s soliloquy sharply contradicts young Douglass’s confessions when his body was violated by Mr. Covey: “[Mr. Covey] came to the spot, and, after looking at me awhile, asked me what was the matter. I told him as well as I could, for I scarcely had strength to speak. He then gave me a savage kick in the side, and told me to get up. I tried to do so, but fell back in the attempt. He gave me another kick, and again told me to rise. I again tried, and succeeded in gaining my feet; but, stopping to get the tub with which I was feeding the fan, I again staggered and fell” (*Narrative* 47). By contrast, Washington, even after suffering a cruel lashing, could eloquently express his agony as well as determination for freedom. Moreover, his body remains intact enough to convince him that he can escape with the help of that body. Douglass must have needed a hero greater than himself to overcome his broken body and inability to articulate. For this reason, Eric Sundquist considers Washington “an idealized figuring of Douglass the orator” (120).

young slave girl's] sorrow" (218 italics original). Because the slave traders do not feel black people's pain, Douglass insinuates that their bodies are unfeeling "things." Their insensible bodies cannot function as a vehicle of empathy and ultimately fails to prove their humanity. Therefore, Washington's sentient body makes him more humane than these unfeeling whites.

The writer privileges Washington's sentiments more importantly than the "thingness" of his body. The protagonist discovers the black body as this discursive practice within the specific context of Southern slavery. Even in the North and in the abolitionist society Douglass should be a "thing." Slavery and the culture of American abolitionism construct the black body as a dehumanized object for white observers' spectatorship, estimation, and appreciation. This construction of the black body was so powerful that Douglass "came to understand that [the display of the black body] was only through engagement with the public, symbolic order that he would be able to venture statement that would come legitimately to be defined as in/on the slaves' liberational behalf" (Baker, *Spirit*, 14). The material nature of the black body is its primary determinant, which the fictive Washington and the real Douglass experience and deplore. However, this nature does not erase or discount their unique experiences with the body's sensorium. Washington recovers his sentient body by discovering the operating system of the discursive body. The institution of slavery commodifies his body as if it were a senseless "thing," while he feels his human agony with the very "thing." Washington, the feeling subject who sees his sensorial body evincing his humanity, inverts the logic of dehumanizing the black body under slavery. Additionally, Douglass suggests how the

black body produces a counter-discourse as well, by juxtaposing Washington's sentiments for the old slave and the white slave traders' senselessness. Feeling is the most subjective and independent quality of human beings because of its immediate perceptibility and independent effect on an individual. Regardless of the discursive body's "thing-ness," Washington's bodily feeling ("My own flesh crept at every blow") resists the compulsory materiality of the black body in the discourses on slavery.

Teaching How to be a Good Observer

While heavily depending on the white observers' testimony to Madison Washington, Douglass suggests how his white reader can correctly bear witness to black slaves' lived experience. Above all, the reader has to make a ceaseless effort to find their heroic achievements with all of his or her senses. *The Heroic Slave* begins with the narrator's praise to the man, "one of the truest, manliest, and bravest of [Virginia's] children" (175). "Glimpses of this greater character" are now presented when "a few transient incidents" happen. These glimpses of the hero give the reader only "partial satisfaction" because the hero sporadically appears: "Like a guiding star on a stormy night, he is seen through the parted clouds and the howling tempests; or, like the gray peak of a menacing rock on a perilous coast, he is seen by the quivering flash of angry lightning, and he again disappears covered with mystery" (175). The observers of the hero cannot but "[c]uriously, earnestly, anxiously" "peer into the dark, and wish even for the blinding flash [. . .] to reveal him," and often become "weighed down with disappointment and sorrow" (175). In this passage, Douglass underscores that the reader is not a reader of a written text but an observer with a visionary imagination. Douglass

portrays Mr. Listwell as the desirable model of a sympathetic observer who actively seeks a hero instead of helplessly waiting for the time when a hero shows up. In his first observation of Madison Washington in the woods, Mr. Listwell is not the one who *is caught by* Washington but does *catch* the hero's voice engaging in "earnest conversation" (176). Once more, when Washington finishes his soliloquy, "the traveler raised his head cautiously and noiselessly, and *caught*, from his hiding-place, a full view of the unsuspecting speaker" (178 emphasis added). Mr. Listwell pursues Washington with his attentive ears, observant eyes, and his hunch that keeps him listening to the slave. Then, he finds the black man so heroic that Washington can inspire the white man to practice his philanthropic desire for the enslaved.

Douglass puts an emphasis on the observer's careful listening more than visual observation. His name "List(en)-well" implies his virtue in attentively listening to Washington. As Thomas Jefferson exemplifies in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, racial difference is visually perceived. Although race cannot be reduced to its visible look, race is "fundamentally a regime of looking" (Seshadri-Crooks 2). Listening instead of looking can help white observers overcome the racial boundary restricted by the visual perception of the black body's difference. Mr. Listwell sees Washington's body, but what drives this observer to him is not the visual image of the slave's overwhelming corporeality but the strong sentience that Washington produces. In short, the observer does not voyeuristically enjoy Washington's performance by removing his humanity from the body. By contrast to the white abolitionists who ordered Douglass how to speak and the white observers who asked the *Amistad* Africans what to answer, Mr. Listwell does not interrupt

Washington's soliloquy: "[Mr. Listwell] became intensely curious to know what thoughts and feelings [Washington had]. [. . .] [H]e stealthily drew near the solitary speaker" (176). Even in danger of being discovered, Mr. Listwell "still could not quit the place. He had long desired to sound the mysterious depths of the thoughts and feelings of a slave. [. . .] He resolved to hear more" and at last did hear "another gush from the same full fountain" (179). At the end of Washington's soliloquy, Mr. Listwell's eyes follow till Washington disappears into the woods (181). Mr. Listwell's gaze indicates that his desire to hear the heroic slave's own story has not been satisfied because he knows that Washington's attractiveness results from his verbal power rather than his physical comeliness: "But his voice, that unfailing index of the soul, though full and melodious, had that in it which could terrify as well as charm" (179).

Throughout the novella Mr. Listwell's attentive listenership characterizes him as a virtuous white sympathizer. When Washington appears as a fugitive in his backyard, Mr. Listwell asks him to tell the events of the past five years, by saying "we [the Listwells] could hear you talk all night" (194). The Listwells' prompt action to help Washington escape to Canada results from their effort to understand the slave not through the visible signs of his hardships inscribed in the black body but through his storytelling. Furthermore, Mr. Listwell's listening is ultimately conducive to Madison Washington's successful revolt on the *Creole*. For his second visit to Virginia, Mr. Listwell chooses the room located in a tavern's top-floor to stay invisible to other boorish people in the tavern but also to overhear their conversations. While remaining "private to the eyes, but not to the ear" in the room (211), he learns about a slave auction in downtown where he

encounters Washington again. Mr. Listwell's disembodiment as a good listener is particularly important because his Northern white appearance and a refined manner prevent the local people from talking about slavery outspokenly. Rather, they want to listen to Mr. Listwell, as Wilkes says: "I never see'd a nigger-buyer yet that hadn't a plenty of money, and he wasn't as free with it as water. [. . .]; and, generally speaking, they's men of education, and knows all about the government. The fact is, sir, I alloys like to hear 'em talk, bekase I alloys can learn something from them" (210). Until Mr. Listwell withdraws himself to the room, people at the tavern do not reveal the amoral life-style that Douglass implicitly regards as the demoralizing effect of slavery. Regardless of Mr. Listwell's qualm about concealing his antislavery sentiment from the people, it at least affords him the opportunity to help Washington at a slave market in Richmond.

If Mr. Listwell represents the sympathetic observer with attentive ears to enslaved blacks, the other white observer Tom Grant, the shipmate on the *Creole*, typifies the majority of white observers who are somewhat detached from (ex)slaves on the abolitionist stage despite their fascination with them. He does "grant" Washington's freedom, although he is reluctant to support the rebellious slaves on the ship. Grant at least honors their heroic achievement and feels an inclination to the abolitionist cause after the mutiny. Only when he does not cling to the visible sign of bodily differences between himself and Madison Washington, can Grant notice Washington's heroic character: "The fellow loomed up before me. I forgot his blackness in the dignity of his manner, and the eloquence of his speech. It seemed as if the souls of both the great dead

(whose names he bore) had entered him” (233). In Washington’s manner, Grant finds him identifiable with the Founding Fathers, two of whose names are included in the name “Madison Washington.” Similarly, in the violent storm at sea, Grant’s vision is limited in the darkness and impaired by occasional lightning: “[T]he ocean was white with foam, which, on account of the darkness, [the shipmates] could see only by the quick flashes of lightning” (236-37). At this moment, Grant tells the greatness of Washington’s inviolable body: “During all the storm, Madison stood firmly at the helm” (237).

However, despite his recognition of Washington’s superiority, Grant cannot transcend the visible differences of Washington’s black body as a marker of the hierarchal relationship between himself and the black slave. Grant reaffirms that Washington is branded by the compulsory visibility of the black body. He confesses: “I felt myself in the presence of a superior man; one who, had he been a white man, I would have followed willingly and gladly in any honorable enterprise. Our difference of color was the only ground for difference of action” (237-38). Although his sentient body feels for Washington, this instant feeling becomes weakened by the most powerful sense, vision. Emotion *is* the feeling of bodily change rather than a result of thinking process such as evaluation. Sara Ahmed argues that emotion implies the immediacy of physical reaction but does “not involve process of thought, [. . .] we feel fear, for example, *because* our heart is racing, our skin is sweating” (5). As the word “see” means both to “perceive something [visible] by sight” and, unlike emotion, figuratively to “perceive something [abstract] by thought” (*OED*), visual experience does not necessarily make a viewer’s body immediately react he is seen by the quivering flash of angry lightning,

and he again disappears covered with mystery. Instead, this is often mediated by the viewer's thoughts. Because Grant's visual sense corresponds to the established knowledge system that maintains the white-black hierarchy, he easily abandons his genuine feelings toward the black hero. Grant's adherence to his sight prevents him from becoming a friend of the hero, and from acting out for abolitionism.

Teaching How to be a Good Performer

Not only does *The Heroic Slave* teach the white reader how to observe a black (ex)slave's testimonial performance, it also provides a black (ex)slave with a guide to performance on the abolitionist stage. First of all, a black performer must be able to articulate his or her distinctive experiences in order not to be a silent and voiceless "thing." Even though Douglass admits that he was not a good speaker for his first speech, Madison Washington skillfully maneuvers language to express his firm belief in humanity and disgust with the dehumanizing effect of slavery. Mr. Listwell hears:

Scathing denunciations of the cruelty and injustice of slavery; heart-touching narrations of [Washington's] own personal suffering, intermingled with prayers to the God of the oppressed for help and deliverance, were followed by presentations of the dangers and difficulties of escape, and formed the burden of his eloquent utterances; but his high resolution clung to [Mr. Listwell]—for [Washington] ended each speech by an emphatic declaration of his purpose to be free. (180)

According to Mr. Listwell, Washington justifies the liberation of the enslaved through his rhetorical strategy. He attacks slavery by expanding his spatial vision from the private

sphere of his vulnerable body (“personal suffering”) to the universe created by God (“prayers”). He also broadens his vision of time from the present to the near future, insinuating that “the dangers of difficulties of escape” at this moment will be delivered with “his eloquent utterance,” presumably, in front of Northern audiences after successfully escaping to there. In addition, Douglass specifically highlights that Washington makes his speech impressive by declaring the slave’s firm determination with a repetitive form of speech. This rhythmical repetition emphasizes the performer’s body that makes Washington’s desire for freedom appear to be physical and actual rather than abstract. In his deeply moving narration, Washington converts Mr. Listwell from attentive listener to active abolitionist. His powerful speech also affects Grant who observes, “[Washington’s] words were well chosen, and his pronunciation equal to that of any schoolmaster. It was a mystery to us *where* he got his knowledge of language” (233). Washington’s speech obscures his racial and geographical identity, as it breaks the stereotypical pattern of the Southern (black) dialect. In the verbal articulation, Washington is not definable as a Southern slave but identifiable as a master of language and of logos to make the “thing” real through the speech act. Douglass believes that a black man’s oratory power changes a white sympathizer into an antislavery activist, and to some extent influences a proslavery supporter, so that any kinds of white observers can witness black humanity.

Most importantly, *The Heroic Slave* urges a black performer to be wary of a white observer’s innocent amusement and idle sympathy for the enslaved. While Douglass was introduced as a “thing” and ordered to expose his scarred back as “a diploma of a peculiar

institution,” his observers became sympathetic to him, or felt selfish relief from his physical and mental agonies that they would never undergo, or amusement at the unbelievable story of his dramatic escape. The white abolitionists’ request for Douglass’s performing body to be a spectacular “thing” proposes to offer more excitement to the observers who then might be willing to donate more to the abolitionists. To be a performer with human dignity, Douglass was aware of the observers’ penchant for entertaining spectacles on the abolitionist stage. Likewise, Madison Washington recognizes that his attentive observer may find enjoyable thrills from the stories about his hardships, rather than sympathizing with him because of those hardships. While describing the urgent moment of hiding in the treetops, Washington half-jokingly says to Mr. Listwell, “But here I must disappoint you” (196). Mr. Listwell at best imagines Washington’s wretchedness only by substituting his megalomaniac self with the fugitive slave, and this imagination gives a sort of voyeuristic pleasure to this curious listener. If the crowd were whites chasing the runaway slave, Mr. Listwell could have pictured more dramatic scenes with a series of adversaries that Washington would have to overcome. However, Washington refuses to play for Mr. Listwell’s spectatorial expectation, emphasizing the crowd was “all colored” workers (196). By indirectly warning Mr. Listwell not to be an idle sympathizer who merely enjoys what he cannot experience at first-hand, Washington enjoins him to feel the enslaved people’s pains not for selfish amusement but for these sufferers.

Douglass expects that a successful performance can cause an observer participate without remaining off stage. Mr. Listwell’s overcoming of the boundary of the stage

implies that a successful performance of the black body as a liberatory strategy can germinate voluntary engagement among white abolitionists and sympathizers. When Washington shows up at his house in Ohio as a runaway, Mr. Listwell explains how the former affected his decision to become a dedicated abolitionist. Mr. Listwell, representing Washington's vocal performance, invites him to be as an observer of his own performance: "Mr. Listwell at once frankly disclosed the secret; *describing* the place where he first saw him; *rehearsing* the language which [Washington] had used; *referring* to the effect which his manner and speech had made upon him; *declaring* the resolution he there formed to be an abolitionist; *telling* how often he had spoken of the circumstance" (187 emphasis added). Through Mr. Listwell's performance, the original relationship between the black performer and the white observer is reversed. Mr. Listwell embodies Washington's heroic blackness with his white and unscarred body. The pain in the black body theatrically becomes shareable with the painless white body. During the white man's representation of the hero, not only does Washington witness how the white man personifies the suffering black slave, but Douglass's reader also pictures the slave's pains more vividly through Mr. Listwell's mediatory performance.

The heroic slave, Washington, "daguerreotyped on [Mr. Listwell's] memory" turns out to have been a precedent for Mr. Listwell's performance as an active abolitionist (188). Douglass's use of the term "daguerreotype" is crucial to understanding Mr. Listwell's self-reflective realization of Washington's heroism. First, as Ivy Wilson suggests, Douglass uses daguerreotype as "an example of the transubstantiation of the flesh and body" (30). The image of Washington on daguerreotype in Mr. Listwell's mind

becomes not merely a reflection of the character but a full-embodied substance. In addition, because a daguerreotype made of polished silver-plate is highly reflective, its viewer can see “both the figure of the photographed subjects and also [the viewer’s] own reflections” (Young 49). Mr. Listwell sees himself along with Washington in his daguerreotyped memory of the slave.⁸² His self-identification with Washington occurs in this visual coupling of their images. Later, during his second visit to Virginia in 1841, Mr. Listwell stays calmly on the second floor both to avoid the annoying chat with the officious Wilkes and to listen to other people’s conversation at the old tavern. His hiding on the top floor with observant ears strikingly resembles Washington’s hiding in the treetops during his escape. Mr. Listwell as a lonely abolitionist at the tavern imitates Washington’s performance to secure his personal safety from numerous enemies. His prompt action to buy Washington three iron files proves that he now plays the role of a supporting actor in the heroic slave’s performance for freedom.

Douglass demonstrates that Washington’s heroism transcends the racial boundary because of the universal truth in his pursuit of freedom. In this sense, the writer emphasizes Washington as a hero of all human beings rather than black people. Even the less sympathetic observer, Tom Grant, changes enough to speak out about how he feels for the enslaved after his encounter with Washington on the *Creole*: “I dare say *here* what many men *feel*, but *dare not speak*, that this whole slave-trading business is a disgrace

⁸² John Stauffer claims that Douglass preferred to be taken with photography rather than to be portrayed by (white) painters. Douglass thought that the daguerreotype could represent more realistic images as it prevented “the distortions and exaggerations that came from the hands of whites” (51). He praised the inventor of the daguerreotype, Luis Daguerre, calling him “the great discoverer of modern times, to whom coming generations will award special homage” (qtd. in Stauffer 51).

and scandal to Old Virginia” (230 italics original). As a witness to Washington, Grant openly refutes Jack Williams’ biased view on black slaves. When Williams derisively says, “But a nigger’s a nigger, on sea or land,” Grant indignantly speaks about the greatness of Washington that Williams may “*feel, but dare not speak*” because of William’s own racial prejudice (226). When Washington’s visually distinctive black body is out of his sight, Grant recovers the powerful sense felt from the hero. The feeling is too vivid not to express it. Through Grant, Douglass exhorts the observers to voice about their experiences with the black enslaved, exemplifying Tom Grant the model observer because he does not remain silent about black humanity and heroism.

The visualization of the black body on the abolitionist stage stands as the emblem of the cruelties of slavery. Facing the dilemma that theatrical representations of the body were considered the only way of demonstrating authentic blackness, both the Amistad Africans and Frederick Douglass saw their pain-filled bodies designating blackness; that is, their bodies became a displayable, replicable, vulnerable, tameable, and non-verbal commodity for the abolitionist agenda. Indeed the aberrational moments of the Amistad Africans signal a black performance in which they call the observers’ attention to their defiant bodies as agential. In *The Heroic Slave*, Douglass more radically liberates the black performer’s body from the white observers’ spectatorship by introducing the model observers of the black performer to his reader and by creating his alter-ego as a heroic black man through Madison Washington. The black bodies on the stage are replaced with white observers. Then, as Douglass thematizes, the observers will witness black heroism,

speaking about great black people, and take an action on behalf of the black enslaved. His readers are invited to the abolitionist stage to perform what they see and feel.

Chapter 3. Topsy-Turveydom: Topsy's Mother-Making Performance in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

As soon as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published in 1852, the book caused a sensation in the transatlantic world and generated numerous theater productions. Among many characters in the novel, the orphaned black girl Topsy was reborn as mostly antic in printed illustrations and these staged shows.⁸³ These mutations of Topsy seem to contradict the original character in Stowe's novel because Topsy, once an incorrigible "pickaninny" in the novel transforms into a well-educated female missionary, and Stowe emphasizes this dramatic change as a righteous conclusion at the end of the novel. Even though she is a round character, Topsy has often been presented one dimensionally by both theatrical producers and literary critics. The well-known George Howard troupe and other small acting companies (commonly called "Tommers" in North America and Europe) similarly featured the minstrel antics of the mischievous Topsy till the early twentieth century (Lhamon 63).⁸⁴ These mutations of Topsy in the

⁸³ The two most detailed accounts of the stage adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the transatlantic countries are Harry Birdoff 144-65 and Thomas Gossett 164-260. David S. Reynolds's recent study *Mightier Than the Sword* also offers the rich history of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on various stages and films. For other visual illustrations of Topsy in the published copies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, see Marcus Wood 143-214. The immediate popularity of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in Europe is studied well by Thomas F. Gossett 164-260 and Marcus Wood 143-214. For the mutations of Topsy, see Linda Williams 86 and Elizabeth Young 37-47. Regarding this popularity, Jim O'Loughlin claims that the popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* should not be measured only by book sales, but "by the influence of American culture on subsequent representations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," while criticizing Jane Tompkins and Richard Broadhead, both of whom consider the book's importance based on its historic book sales (576).

⁸⁴ From the 1920s, Topsy has been reborn various black children characters including versions of Little Black Sambo and sexless pickaninny figures. See also Jayna Brown 67-68.

theatrical and visual arts reveal the multivalent performative potential of the character as opposed to Stowe's racist representation.

Onstage the minstrel Topsy has been considered an undeniable example of the racism of Stowe and her contemporary society. As many critics have pointed out, the character's racist representation germinates and grows into the spectacular racist stereotype of black female. For example, her contemporary, the African American leader, Martin Delany, denounces Stowe's depictions of black characters for their false representations of the race, saying "[I]n all respect and difference [*sic*] to Mrs. Stowe, I beg leave to say that she knows nothing about us, 'the Free Colored people of the United States,' neither does any other white person—and, consequently, can contrive no successful scheme for our elevation; it must be done for ourselves" (qtd. in Robert Levine 78). The unusual popularity of Topsy as a minstrel figure keeps recent critics uncomfortable because this minstrel aspect evinces Stowe's limited understanding of African Americans. Analyzing George L. Aiken's theatrical production of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Thomas F. Gossett argues, "[Topsy] was the character in the novel who might most easily be transformed into the stereotype of blacks nearly always found in the popular theater, especially in the minstrel shows" (265).⁸⁵ W. T. Lhamon, Jr. locates Topsy in relation to white men in blackface on the mid-nineteenth century stage. "Topsy's steam-whistle imitation is one indication of her indebtedness to the minstrel stage," writes Lhamon, "[And] her body-warping [is what] Stowe might have lifted from any of the grapevine-twisted figures spelling out the titles on minstrel-show posters. [. . .

⁸⁵ The complete version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was first performed in Tory, New York, on November 15, 1852, by the George C. Howard trope with Aiken's script. See Gossett 260-283.

.] Topsy [i]s a wench figure from the minstrel show” (142). In the same sense, Sarah Meer asserts that Topsy would become an “image as ubiquitous as Jim Crow or Zip Coon and possibly even more long-lived” (22). Unquestionably, Topsy is often representative not just of ludicrously amusing blacks but also of a living specimen of exceptional blackness within a racist frame.

In spite of many virtuous African American characters such as Eliza and George Harris and Uncle Tom in the novel, why is the seemingly minor character Topsy placed in the center of this discussion on Stowe’s racist representation? To answer this question requires our further examination of the multilayered aspects of Topsy that invite us to a deeper discussion on racial representation. In fact, limiting Topsy to a racist figure fails to elucidate various interpretations of the most popular nineteenth-century literature, even though Stowe’s racial prejudice is self-evident. Reading and (re)presenting Topsy in the frame of minstrelsy, as if minstrelsy is always a racist performance and as if Topsy is a victim of Stowe’s racism, is diversionary. The idea that minstrelsy is always a racist art form needs to be reconsidered. Despite the “racist” performances of the minstrel tradition, the novel inspired black performers to stage themselves as well. When Stowe wrote her dramatized version of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, titled *The Christian Slave*, for the black performer Mary E. Webb, Webb played all of the characters in the play before audiences in New England and London (Reynolds 179). Another good example is Sam Lucas, one of the most outstanding black performers. When touring with several minstrel companies in the early 1870s, he often sang minstrel-like songs that actually celebrated emancipation (Reynolds 180-81). In this context, W. T. Lhamon, Jr. analyzes the multiple

aspects in blackface performance to reveal that blackface performance can work against racial stereotyping. Its anti-racist dimensions appear obvious when it comes to the biblical meaning of Cain, the cursed fugitive. Raising Cain in the Bible is a way “to license minstrel practice and to establish minstrelsy’s cardinal theme as the constant struggle between resistance and its discipline” (117).

It is easy to overlook Topsy’s multidimensional performance on stage and its significance. White authorial intentionality of racist depictions should be give no more weight than these authors who use their contemporary understandings of race. For this reason, Lhamon maintains that we need to separate Stowe’s racism from the novel, whereby the writer intended to break slavery down. Additionally, this critic insists, “[t]he racist parts elicit counterparts that ghost around them, cohere with them, and have continued to dawn, and set, as they travel through time together” (141). If Stowe’s racism is pervasive in her black characters, they emerge as uncontrollable counterparts that the writer attempts to suppress through her omniscient-authorial voice but inevitably fails. In this respect, Topsy can be a haunting counterpart that challenges racial stereotyping both of Stowe’s characters and on minstrel stage.

This chapter argues that Topsy reveals possibilities for the empowerment of African Americans especially when they become embodied as unfixable and liberating figures in the reader’s imagination and on stage. Stowe’s contemporary critic George Sand considers child characters in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* “the true heroes of Mrs. Stowe’s works,” as Topsy multifariously appears to be “poor, diabolic, excellent” (498). Whereas Topsy is a hero in Sand’s mind, an anonymous reader calls her “a little black imp [who]

loves lying for the sake of lying, [. . .] more mischievous than a monkey, and in all respects as ignorant” (517). The black body’s cacophony characterizes the possibility of representational mutations that Topsy carries in the readers and theater-goers’ minds. Jim O’Loughlin points out that Stowe leaves Topsy without a personal narrative, as Topsy’s habitual answers, “Dunno” and “I spect I grow’d,” indicate (580). This apparent lack of Topsy’s narrative provokes the readers’ desire to fill in her personal details with their own imaginations, as the early reviewers of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* would agree. The theatrical embodiment of Topsy is more divergent than her in the novel. In addition to all the tricks that incense Ophelia in the novel, Topsy becomes a figure of multi-entertainment with songs, dances, somersaults, and odd performances. While Topsy once demonstrated a surprising eroticism (i.e. “Topsy’s in Town”) in the end of the nineteenth century, she becomes a symbol of interracial and homoerotic love through the famous sisters Vivian and Rosetta Duncan’s performance in the 1920s (Reynolds 192-93, 248-49).

Nevertheless, the racist aspect of Stowe’s characterization of Topsy needs to be understood not simply through the character’s minstrel mutations but through her relation with her white-mother figure Ophelia. Ophelia’s adoption and education of Topsy demonstrate how she attempts to perform and thus confirm her status as an ideal of white bourgeois womanhood. Stowe glorifies Ophelia’s project on Topsy as a central theme of motherly love for social reform in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Interestingly, the minstrel and other theatrical mutations of Topsy ironically indicate the writer or other mainstream readers’ own anxiety about Topsy’s uncontrollability that breaks the white-middle-class-

female norms. This chapter sheds light on this aspect by evading her white-mother figure Ophelia's restrictive instruction for Topsy's behavior, Topsy emerges as a subject of self-realizing performance. For this, she ultimately calls into question Stowe's feeling subject that excludes black women. Furthermore, against Ophelia's attempt to shape her blackness as surrogate to white-Christian motherhood, Topsy invents her theatrical expressiveness beyond the boundaries of minstrelsy and melodrama.

Some critics have highlighted the positive function of Topsy's manifestation of black female unruliness as a form of black women's resistance to white and male dominance. Meer argues, "the minstrel elements of Stowe's book may have facilitated its rereading and rewriting by drawing on the inherent instabilities and ambivalences in the racial politics of blackface" (9). As Topsy says, "I spect I grow'd" (355, 344), she outgrows the world ordered by her creator and white mother Stowe. Stowe loses her authorial control over the characters when little Topsy appears to be the most problematic figure. Jayna Brown encapsulates Topsy's indomitability as a rebellious subject: "Topsy is impervious to the whip, her wailing a hyperbolic satire of its intended effect. Her callousness, meant to signal her dehumanized condition and her pre-civilized nature, also signals her escape from violent forms of discipline and coercive regulation" (84). Here is the reason that Topsy deserves our special attention. Topsy's apparent incorrigibility, insensitivity, and corporeality, as if they indicate the lack of her mature interiority, indeed correspond to her surreptitious challenge to expose the white-mother figure Ophelia's own self-righteousness and insensitivity to enslaved blacks' pain.

The objective of this chapter is to delve into Topsy as a black performer who promises agency for the feeling subject. This chapter illuminates how a particular performance of maternity—comprised of the orphaned *black* slave girl Topsy and her *white* mother figure Ophelia—begins as a particular sentimental construction of “the poor and lowly.” Yet, even though Stowe emphasizes the importance of motherly feeling as an impetus for social change, such maternal depictions depend on the figure of the black daughter as the catalyst for such feeling. Furthermore, to maintain this characterization of the mother as reformer, the daughter must be engaged in a specific form of performance: the “saved savage” and “converted heathen.” However, Topsy’s appearances both in Stowe’s novel and in the popular theatrical stages of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* demonstrate the possibility of a bodily performance that can exceed these limits. Topsy ultimately performs in ways that reveal the white-mother figure’s dependency on her black-daughter figure.

To explore her liberating performance, this chapter, first of all, examines Stowe’s maternalist politics, and then employs the two theatrical modes—minstrelsy and melodrama—to point out the subversive potential within racial stereotyping and its corresponding loopholes in these genres. Simply put, Topsy is not only an anti-racist minstrel character but also a subversive melodramatic heroine who outgrows her white mother. The writer’s distinction between sympathetically melodramatic and enjoyably minstrel black stereotypes becomes blurred when it comes to Topsy. The reader’s emotional distance from Topsy fluctuates because she does not settle in either category. Rather, as if she teases her reader with her theatrical skills, Topsy playfully jumps around

the two seemingly incompatible genres. Topsy moves in and out of the gap where the two genres collapse, betraying the reader/observer's expectation of an instantly recognizable performance of a black figure in nineteenth-century theater. In doing so, she debunks the notion that the white-mother guardianship for the black daughter merely covers white anxiety about a black woman's transgressive performance.

Stowe's Maternalistic Politics

If *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is Stowe's call to readers to participate in the antislavery movement, then this call is based on summoning the strong connections between feeling and the body's representation of that feeling. Stowe wrote a letter to one of her children, which was collected by her son Charles Stowe for her biography: "I well remember the winter you were a baby and I was writing 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' [. . .] My heart was bursting with the anguish excited by the cruelty and injustice our nation was showing to the slave[s], and praying God to let me do a little and to cause my cry for them to be heard" (Charles Stowe 149). In this letter, Stowe asserts her moral agency with her overflowing emotions for slaves. It is her "bursting heart" and "cry" for enslaved blacks that drives her to be an outspoken opponent of slavery. The famous line in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "There is one thing that every individual can do,—they can see to it that *they feel right*" (632), indicates that "right feeling" can be felt in embodying experiences of feelings just like Stowe herself did "cry" for the slave mothers. This undeniable bodily evidence of sentiments makes readers feeling subjects.

In the same vein, bodily reactions to the injustice are intensified by a feeling subject's motherliness. Stowe believes that the shared experience of mothering with black

women slaves can lead white women readers to “*feel right*” about the necessity of abolitionism.⁸⁶ The letter continues: “I remember many a night weeping over you as you lay sleeping besides, me, and I thought of the slave mothers whose babes were torn from them” (Charles Stowe 149). Jane Tompkins argues that Stowe wrote “the story of salvation through motherly love” that “gave women the central position of power and authority in the culture” (125). A mother’s sympathy for slaves results from her emotive identification with the slave mothers who lost their children. Therefore, Stowe’s ideal of motherly sensitiveness to these sufferers empowers women for social reform instead of making them helplessly “emotional” in opposition to manly rationality.

That motherly sentiment, in Stowe’s mind, is possible in a mother’s corporeal interaction with a child. Motherhood needs to be tested with a mother’s effort to regulate her child’s corporeality and bodily expressiveness. This mother has to do so by feeling for the child not only emotionally but also physically. In *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* Stowe suggests the examples of how to “*feel right*” as a main method to tame a child. Eva gesticulates her motherly love for Topsy by grabbing her scarred hands and hugging her pained body; consequently, Topsy begins to curb her unrestrained bodily movements. Ophelia, Eva’s aunt from the North, follows Eva’s example of divine maternal care for Topsy when she overcomes her own reluctance to embrace Topsy’s “wick’d” black body. By contrast to Eva and Ophelia, Eva’s mother, Marie St. Clare, is criticized as a

⁸⁶ Jane Tompkins, while arguing in favor of reading sentimental novels for the “cultural work” they accomplished, reads them as instructive texts that encourage (women) readers to conduct their culturally defined roles in order to exercise the power available to bourgeois white women in terms of the “true womanhood.” Similarly, Eva Cherniavsky insists that “the centrality of sympathetic or affective motherhood” is limited to “the structure of bourgeois identity” of the Victorian period (13). Stowe is a good example of this.

“perverted version of American motherhood” because Marie neglects her maternal duty for her only daughter as well as her domestic slaves (Robbins 138). She fails to notice Eva’s sickened body while pitying herself, and ruthlessly punishes her female slaves by ignoring their visible pains. When Marie sells the slaves to markets after the deaths of Eva and Augustine St. Clare, Stowe accuses Marie of her “unfeeling, tyrannical character” (455).

Notably, Stowe does not display the same degree of criticism toward the black mother of three children, Chloe. None of her children seem to have been disciplined, and their incorrigibility is expressed by the elaborate descriptions of their free bodily movement: “[Chloe] took her baby on her lap, and began alternately filling its mouth and her own, and distributing to Mose and Pete [her boys], who seemed rather to prefer eating theirs as they rolled about on the floor under the table, tickling each other, and occasionally pulling the baby’s toes” (37). Similarly, while helplessly adoring her master’s white boy, George Shelby, Chloe lets her unruly young boys look after her little baby in the middle of their “roaring,” “tumbling,” and “dancing” (39). Chloe’s lack of mothering is obscured by her piety and generosity for the Shelby family whom she serves, but Stowe leaves Chloe’s motherhood unquestioned. Although the “mulatto” mother Eliza emerges as a symbol of motherhood at the beginning of the novel, her motherhood is possible as her visual and conceptual blackness fades out.⁸⁷ In addition,

⁸⁷ Jennifer DeVere Brody discusses Eliza’s motherhood as representing the perfect vision of whiteness, which was impossible to other black women characters. The critic, in particular, pays attention to the scene of her escape over floes of ice in the river. In this scene, Eliza is “suspended between hybridity and purity, slavery and freedom” (63). But, according to Brody’s observation, the theatrical productions including the one adapted by George Aiken strikingly whitens Eliza on stage: “Although Eliza is already pure in the reader’s eyes, the scene plays upon viewers’ desire

Eliza never thinks of escaping to freedom until her master decides to sell her only son Harry because she believes her mistress, Mrs. Shelby as Eliza's surrogate mother, protects her boy. This racial division of Stowe's view on motherhood insinuates that Stowe considers the subject of motherhood limited to white mothers.

Furthermore, Stowe's whitening of motherhood appears obvious when she regards actual or symbolic black daughters as objects of her maternal politics. The sympathetic white mother's moral sentiments become obvious only when her black child-figures who can enable the mother to affirm her motherhood.⁸⁸ In Stowe's original story Ophelia is asked to make Topsy perform as a religious subject, as St. Clare insists that Ophelia "go and catechize Topsy" (357). Topsy, as the evidence of Ophelia's motherhood, ultimately entitles the mistress to claim her motherliness. Topsy acquires a particular form of her body's display as a survival strategy in St. Clare's household and under the white mother Ophelia's care. After the tension between Ophelia's strict discipline and Topsy's rebellious resistance to that discipline, Topsy learns to demonstrate the performance of a "good daughter" through compliance, submissiveness, modesty, and piety. On a corporeal level, this performance arouses Ophelia's sentiments and helps her authenticate her white motherhood as Stowe's agent for social reform. Although Ophelia's "flesh and blood cannot endure [Topsy]" in the early days with

to see her escape the threat of blackness. Her own purity is highlighted in her successful 'crossing' that keeps the base forces of blackness at bay" (64).

⁸⁸ In *Born in Bondage*, Marie Jenkins Schwartz says that black children under slavery had to learn how to negotiate a domesticity governed by white mothers. They learn the mothers' authority and power through their physical dependence on them. In addition, these children are emotionally vulnerable to the surrogate white mothers, as their biological mothers cannot take care of them (75-79).

Topsy (398), the mistress does “not any longer shrink from her touch, or manifest an ill-repressed disgust” (437) by the end of the “Reunion” chapter. In doing so, Ophelia passes the “test of the flesh” for the “correctly sensitive” white female subject.

The way that the white mother tames Topsy suggests how the writer’s maternalist politics intersects with her racist view on motherhood and gender. The term “maternalist politics” refers to political discourses that “transformed motherhood from women’s primary *private* responsibility into *public* policy” (Koven and Michel 2). This term explains how Stowe’s strategy promulgates a domestic and private relation as a social model for the public discourse—in her case, abolitionism. In this sense, Eva Cherniavsky defines the white middle-class mother in Stowe’s works as “the mediator of democratic social and political forms, the producer of the rational citizen” (42). Given that Stowe idealizes motherhood as a moral propaganda for social reform, the term “maternalist politics” or “maternalism” here is used to question how the writer’s these politics would reproduce or reinforce the preexisting discourse on race and gender. In other words, maternalist politics reveals how to produce “useful” members in the romantically multiracial America established on the racial hierarchy that Stowe leaves unchallenged.

Many critics have discussed the significances of motherhood in Stowe scholarship by focusing on the writer’s heroic mothers and mother figures such as Eva, Eliza, Mrs. Bird, and Mrs. Shelby.⁸⁹ Stowe pictures a domestic sphere as a microcosm of the current

⁸⁹ See Elizabeth Ammons’s “Stowe’s Dream of the Mother-Savior: *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and American Women Writers Before the 1920s,” Elizabeth Barnes’s Chapter 4 “Changing the Subject: Domestic Fictions of Self-Possession” in her *States of Sympathy*, and Jane Tompkins’s Chapter 5 “Sentimental Power: *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and the Politics of Literary History” in her *Sensational Designs*.

society where her characters share their motherly sentiments for black sufferers living in slavery. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* glorifies (except Eliza) white maternal guardianship extended to their house slaves. Stowe's white-mother figures embody their motherhood by giving motherly care to black slaves at home. For instance, Mrs. Shelby raises her slave Eliza as if she were her own daughter. The mistress has practically replaced Eliza's biological mother, as Eliza's husband George says, "[The Shelbys] have brought you up like a child, fed you, clothed you, indulged you, and taught you, so that you have a good education; that is some reason why they should claim you" (25). Young black female characters like Eliza require the support of white-mother figures to overcome the morally and intellectually debilitating effects of slavery.

Gillian Brown's *Domestic Individualism* provides an important perspective on Stowe's domestic economy. According to Brown, the order of the domestic sphere such as the kitchen reflects the symbolic connection between domesticity and politics.⁹⁰ In suggesting a moral domesticity ordered by good housekeeping models, "Stowe replaces the master-slave relation with the benign proprietorship of mother to child, transferring the ownership of slaves to the mothers of America" (Brown 32). As Brown suggests, regardless of their ages, slaves are not different from permanent children in Stowe's

⁹⁰ Because of slavery, the market economy that dehumanized black slaves in antebellum America pervaded a private home, and the home was no longer immune to "the masculine sphere of the marketplace" (Brown 23). The distinction between work and family is blurred in the presence of slaves at home because women "can no longer keep houses that provide refuge from market-place activities" (Brown 23). In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Brown observes, "Mothers and mother figures initiate escapes from slavery and determine family safety" (24). The novel thematically rearranges domesticity orderly under powerful patriarchy through the model kitchens in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; Brown explains that slavery brought the confusion and disorder of the marketplace into the private home, undermining women's housework (16). Stowe therefore attempts to reform antebellum society "not by employing domestic values but by reforming them" (Brown 18).

Northern-white matriarchal society. These slaves in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* “lack title to themselves and need abolitionist guardianship, which is to say, maternal aid” (Brown 32). This replacement of the master-slave relation with the mother-child one offers a clue about Stowe's maternalism that is comparable to Southern paternalism. However, Brown's acute reading of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* still assures us that the writer's maternalism is ultimately not as harmful as Southern paternalism. When arguing that “Stowe's identification of maternal power with God [. . .] rejects any aspiration to ownership beyond the motherly functions of reproduction and preservation” (33), Brown neglects that these motherly functions actualize racial hierarchy within the home.

In fact, whereas Southern paternalism has been criticized as an ideological tool to reinforce white ownership of black slaves, Northern maternalism or maternalist politics has barely been disputed in this respect.⁹¹ Peter Kolchin defines Southern paternalism: “Masters saw their slaves not just as their laborers but also as their ‘people,’ inferior members of their extended households from whom they expected work and obedience but to whom they owed guidance and protection” (112).⁹² Similarly, maternalism to some extent perpetuates the white-black hierarchy by reinforcing the white-as-guardian and black-as-child dyad. Except the fact that moral mothers urged men to abolish the institution of slavery, these mothers' relationship with their “inferior members” such as house servants of color resembled that of Southern fathers with enslaved blacks. Despite

⁹¹ The term “North,” when this chapter uses “Northern maternalism,” refers to both a geographical and political counterpart to the South. Hence, Northern maternalism implies not only political motherhood for abolitionism but also an irony that its abolitionist cause does not come along with racial equality.

⁹² For white slave-owners' paternalistic practices on slaves in the South, see Kolchin 111-132.

their seemingly affectionate tie, the white mother's authority is founded on the racial hierarchy. Mrs. Shelby as Stowe's model mother insists, "I have tried—tried most faithfully, as a Christian woman should—to do my duty to these poor, simple, dependent creatures. I have cared for them, instructed them, watched over them, and known all their little cares and joys, for years" (48). This motherhood does not propose that her black "children" achieve adulthood, as they are "poor, simple, dependent creatures" in Mrs. Shelby's mind. Elizabeth Ammons argues that Stowe adopts the exclusive rhetoric of Victorian patriarchy, calling this "utopian appropriation of patriarchal motherhood" (Ammons, "Mother-Savior" 159). Even though Stowe aims at abolitionism through motherly virtue, she at last follows the discriminatory frame of paternalism by assuming not only difference between the two sexes, as Ammons argues, but also additionally emphasizing that of race as well.⁹³

Stowe's trope of this interracial adoption is more problematic than her apparently racist characterization of black characters because her maternalist politics tends to be considered a quintessential example of motherhood in antebellum America.⁹⁴ Ophelia as

⁹³ Kathryn Kish Sklar explains that, in the antebellum period, white middle-class American women built "vital and autonomous political institutions on the basis of their ability to speak for the needs of women of other races and classes" (51). These institutions were independent of white male authority because of their gender specific goals.

⁹⁴ For example, in arguing for the role of early nineteenth-century women's benevolent femininity that created gender and class identity of American womanhood, Lori Ginzberg in *Women and the Work of Benevolence* does not mention maternalist politics at all during the antislavery period. Some critics like Sarah Robbins discuss the importance of motherhood for the formation of white middle-class identity in nineteenth-century America. Nevertheless, they have overlooked racial politics in mothering black adoptees, while narrowly spotlighting a Northern mistress's motherly affection during the period of antebellum social reform movements. Robbins in her *Managing Literacy, Mothering America* explores the white motherhood illustrated by Ophelia, through whom Stowe "advocates a strategy for public influence—enlightened teaching in the home—that any Northern woman could carry out" (142). As the evidence of Ophelia's education of Topsy,

a practical mother of Topsy personifies the writer's ideal of maternalism in developing her relationship with Topsy. Ophelia achieves "a Christian surrogate motherhood for America" by transforming Topsy with her motherly affection and education (Robbins 145). Stowe suggests a patronizingly racist gesture when Ophelia adopts Topsy as her servant rather than as a daughter in a traditional sense. Adoptions at the period could be considered an indentured servitude, and Ophelia is no exception to this practice; that is, Topsy becomes "a valued emotional commodity in a culture that revered the family" (Porter 31, 37). In this context, Barbara Hochman maintains, "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* encouraged white mothers to try circuiting themselves through black ones in order to imagine states of feeling systematically forbidden to them" (154).

What is more troublesome in Ophelia's adoption of Topsy is that Ophelia establishes her maternal authority by fossilizing Topsy in the stereotype of black children as if they cannot dispense with a white mother's reformatory education and care. When Ophelia is about to give up Topsy, St. Clare reminds her of Ophelia's mission: "Why, if your Gospel is not strong enough to save one heathen child, that you can have at home here, all to yourself, [. . .] I supposed this child is about a fair sample of what thousands of your heathen are" (399). Stowe cannot but complement her abolitionism and Christian ideal in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by identifying white motherhood and domesticity as

Robbins relies on Stowe's personal experience as a teacher at her social activist sister Catharine's school. "Eager to take the young girl back to New England, and far now from viewing her as the mere object of an instructional experiment, Ophelia imagines a day when others will take on the role she was slow to learn but eventually achieved—a Christian surrogate motherhood for America" (145). In these arguments, Stowe has often been cited as a writer who offers a model of Northern-white-Christian motherhood. Under the shadow of the model white mother, her black daughter is left out of sight.

“positions of power for women and locations of significant moral/social reform[. . .] [as if] the self-critical love of white women can rescue the black race” (Rutkowski 86-87).⁹⁵

Lori Merish in *Sentimental Materialism* advances this perspective by exploring eighteenth-century sentimental historical narratives and nineteenth-century domestic fictions in the context of liberal capitalism on the basis of which both slavery and sentimentalism grew. Merish asserts that “sentimental sympathy prescribed forms of paternalism—specifically, of ‘benevolent’ caretaking and ‘willing’ dependency—suited to a liberal-capitalist social order” because that order “privileged individual autonomy and, especially, private property ownership” (3). In the case of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the “benevolent” white mothers ultimately demonstrate how to maintain their ownership of their slaves who are “dependent” on the mothers’ morality and Christianity.⁹⁶ As Merish suggests, Stowe’s strategy to bring her white middle-class readers into African Americans (the “extension of sentimental sympathy”) inscribes the latter’s subjectivity according to white, middle-class norms (153). The African American subjects that Stowe endeavors to make her readers discover are only depicted through conventions intelligible to those readers.

⁹⁵ Susan Porter points out that postbellum women writers repeat and revise Stowe’s tropes of an adoptive white mother and a black girl adoptee (3). It reinforces the white mother’s power over her black daughter, and, at the same time, and perpetuates the black daughter’s dependency on the mother and incomplete adulthood.

⁹⁶ Merish insists that sentimental sympathy is “not a moral value” (4). She points out that the sympathetic relationship between white benefactors and black slaves illustrates “affect reforms” that maintained the requirements of a capitalist market society and secured middle-class political hegemony, which is what Merish calls “sentimental ownership.”

However, the dramatic finale of Ophelia not as a strict mistress but as a benevolent mother for Topsy reveals that Ophelia's "normative" subjectivity after all depends on Topsy's acceptance of that subjectivity. Overturning the relationship (supposed by Stowe) between Ophelia/subject and her/object, Topsy debunks Ophelia's dependency on her to gain her agency as a mother-social reformer. Specifically, Topsy challenges Ophelia's motherly sympathy for her that the writer introduces as the cure-all for the unruly black orphan. Stowe herself supported sympathy as the most important factor in urging her readers to support the antislavery cause. Topsy, in spite of being Stowe's creation, rebels against the sympathetic mother-figure Ophelia, and calls the efficacy of her—or Stowe's—narcissistic sympathy for enslaved blacks into question. Regardless of the ideal ending of their relationship in the novel, Topsy's reluctance to follow Ophelia's instruction ironically indicates the instability of Ophelia's (or Stowe's) subjectivity as a mother. At the same time, Topsy asks us to see the mistress's motherhood beyond the white middle-class norms that Ophelia represents. Theatrical productions in both Stowe's and our time have showed the vivid images of Topsy transcending Ophelia's discipline. Topsy standing on stage does not so much resemble a passive daughter waiting for her mother's instruction but an active performer who changes her *mother* to see Topsy's independent body and feelings.

Although in the novel Topsy completely loses her voice when she reaches adulthood and leaves for her mission trip to Africa,⁹⁷ Topsy on stage appears to be

⁹⁷ Gillian Brown criticizes Stowe's (mis)characterization of Topsy at the end of the novel. Even though the writer intends to suggest Topsy's dramatic transformation through Christianity, Topsy as the most rebellious child character loses her voice completely at last. As Brown points out, Topsy's initial mischievousness remains too memorable to be replaced by her later piety: "When

constantly comic and unruly even under Ophelia's guidance in the North. George L. Aiken's stage adaptation, one of the most important versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a play, keeps Topsy alive through her frolics, as when she continuously insists, "I ain't half so wicked as I used to was." However, Topsy's role in Aiken's play is not limited to presenting herself for the audience's amusement: she transforms Ophelia not only into a mother but also into an attractive woman who actualizes the Victorian femininity. When Ophelia introduces Topsy as her daughter to Deacon Perry, the widower and Ophelia's old acquaintance, he suspects Ophelia's interracial relationship with a black man in the South: "[*Aside*] Her daughter! Then she must have married a colored man off South." His reaction implies that Topsy arouses Deacon's imagination on Ophelia's sexuality, which he never found before, and makes him simultaneously desire Ophelia as his possible mate. In addition, when Topsy beats Cute, another pursuer of Ophelia, Ophelia "faints in Deacon's arms" and redeems a femininity that she does not show in Stowe's novel. In this production, Topsy not only makes Ophelia a loving mother but also feminizes her strict Christian virtues to become a Victorian lady.⁹⁸

Topsy becomes an unquestioning reader of the Bible, her initial misreading of Christian history appears merely a childish utterance, rather than a trenchant albeit unwitting description of the historical connections between Christianity, racism, and slavery. The very characteristics of children that Topsy so vividly exhibits fade with her maturation. Along with her antics, Topsy herself seems to recede as Stowe relocates her in Africa" ("Children" 84).

⁹⁸ Stowe saw this version of the play when the George C. Howard troupe visited Boston. His wife, Mrs. Howard played the role of Topsy. Her companion to the play, Francis H. Underwood, recorded Stowe's reaction to the staged Topsy: "I never saw such delight upon a human face as [Stowe] displayed when she first comprehended the full power of Mrs. Howard's *Topsy*. She scarcely spoke during the evening; but her expression was eloquent—smiles and tears succeeding each other through the whole" (qtd. in Gossett 266).

The various mutations of Topsy represent the more complex relationship with Ophelia. Contemporary playwrights have recreated Stowe's Ophelia and Topsy in a way that Topsy refuses to become a living object of the mistress's motherhood project. For example, in Robert Alexander's modern play adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Ophelia proclaims her adoption of Topsy: "I don't want to own you—I want to adopt you. From now on, I want you to call me...Mother" because "I love you, Topsy" (55). However, Alexander describes Ophelia's motherhood as oppressive to Topsy in her becoming of a black subject, when the adoptive mother insists: "There is nothing you want to read about in Africa. Remember...call me Mother, and I shall call you daughter" (56). This scene illustrates why Janya Brown regards Topsy "not only as an orphaned child but also as a figure of English and European colonial subjecthood" and a symbol of "the racist infantilization of black people" (65). The education that Ophelia offers to Topsy echoes the Western discourse on African colonization.⁹⁹

Alexander's adaptation weighs Topsy's criticism on Ophelia's maternalism over Ophelia's colonial desire in adopting Topsy. By negating the mistress's sentiments and feeling body, Topsy independently establishes her subjectivity through her own sensorial body. At the end of this play, Topsy breaks up her mother-daughter relation with Ophelia by denying the mother's feeling for Topsy:

OPHELIA: But, Topsy...I'm your mother—I love you.

⁹⁹ This indirectly points out Stowe's pro-colonialism. Stowe supported the idea that black Americans should return to Africa, following her father Lyman Beecher. William Lloyd Garrison, the outspoken opponent of the African colonization proposals, comments on the novel: "The work toward its conclusion, contains some objectionable sentiments respecting African colonization, which we regret to see" (qtd. in Gossett 170).

[. . .]

TOPSY: Yeah....you're the ghostliest of [all white people]. Sometimes, I can look right through you. I touch yo' skin and my hand goes right through yo'. I don't see nuffin—I don't feel nuffin...no feelings ever come back from you.

OPHELIA: I have feelings, Topsy, and you are hurting them right now.

TOPSY: Well, dat's just too goddamn bad—aint it? (65)

In the novel Ophelia disciplines Topsy's expressive body by forcing her to internalize white-femininity norms through bodily gestures such as proper clothing and lady-like gait. However, this discipline downplays Topsy's independent notion of herself or subjectivity that is expressed by her corporeality. The conversation between the two reveals that the white mother figure needs her black daughter to confirm her identity as a feeling-subject. When she is a mother, she can insist on her feeling for her "daughter" ("I'm your mother—I love you"). Ophelia becomes a subject that Stowe envisions as a Christian-woman reformer, as far as she has the emotional object, Topsy, in whom she can invest her emotions. Nevertheless, Ophelia's foundation of her motherly authority and subjectivity are unstable, because they rely solely on Topsy's perception of them. Whereas Ophelia insists on her emotional capacity by presenting her adopted daughter, Topsy does "touch," "see," and "feel" another with nobody's mediation. In the passage, Topsy declares that she cannot feel anything from Ophelia. Her emotional investment in the black-daughter figure turns out to be unprofitable; that is, Ophelia fails to become a feeling subject through Topsy's confirmation of Ophelia's feeling body.

It would be an exaggeration to regard Topsy's resistant performance to Ophelia as an absolute sign of her agency. Her recalcitrance in the face of the white-mother figure's authority may equally indicate her lack of agency. As Ophelia says, "Topsy would hold a perfect carnival of confusion" (354), Topsy's indocile attitude reflects her uncritical internalization of the "lowest" characteristics of black slaves. In addition, if the establishment or full recognition of self-subjectivity is prerequisite to agency, Topsy does not seem to have established any confirmed self-subjectivity against slavery yet because she merely suspects "I grow'd" (344). Nevertheless, Topsy does not completely lack agency: she does not passively wait to be molded by others' identifications of her even though Stowe intends to characterize Topsy for the actualization of Eva and Ophelia's motherly love. According to this assumption, the agency-less Topsy becomes mature only through Eva's Christian spirituality and Ophelia's motherly care. Jane Tompkins, for instance, underestimates the importance of Topsy, when stating, "Eva initiates a process of redemption whose power, transmitted from heart to heart, can change the entire world" and that Topsy is one of the characters deeply influenced by Eva's love (131). Topsy's significance is not limited to her supplementary role to embellish Eva's virtue and Ophelia's morality. When Eva practices her religious faith on Topsy by echoing Stowe's Christian ideals, Topsy plays a counter-Eva by disrupting these ideals. Ophelia also reexamines her moralistic view through Topsy's incorrigibility. Therefore, it is more appropriate to understand Topsy as instinctively reacting to any outer forces when these forces do not permit the confirmation of her self-subjectivity. Her performance represents her defiant body against Ophelia/Stowe's attempt to confine her in the

conceptual sphere of white-Christian-sentimental maternalism. Regardless of or prior to her cognitive awareness of agency, Topsy's body per se enables her to exhibit her subjectivity independent of her white-mother figure and even the creator.

Topsy, a Melodramatic Minstrel Performer

The Cain-like Topsy who outgrows Ophelia in the stage adaptations above already exists in Stowe's original text. Even though she appears in only a few chapters of the novel, the intensity of her body's expressiveness gives us a clue that leads us to see how Topsy invents her own performance against Ophelia's discipline of her. Topsy creatively demonstrates her bodily movement by freely displaying herself in various forms from minstrelsy and melodrama. In doing so, Topsy controls Ophelia not to become the white mistress's once-savage-but-reborn-Christian daughter, as Stowe and Ophelia intend, but to gain her subjectivity independent of the white mother.

Minstrelsy and melodrama were very popular theatrical forms in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century in the North. Many minstrel shows and melodramas depicted black Americans, although the latter barely performed in these shows. Minstrelsy, mainly performed by white actors in blackface, ludicrously exaggerated black Americans for observers' amusement. Quite differently, melodrama aroused observers' sympathy through sufferings of black heroines whose physical blackness was unnoticeable. The most distinctive difference between these two genres may be found, as Linda Williams has described, in their intended effect on an observer's feeling toward a performer. The observers of minstrelsy separate themselves from its performer. By contrast, the observers of melodrama identify their feelings with a performer's (Williams

70). The distance between a character/performer and a reader/observer depends on the accessibility to the former's sentiment. Stowe's racial characterization in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is remarkable in that the writer skillfully fits most of the main black characters into either minstrelsy or melodrama. Some of them are loyal, docile, faithful, and pious enough to arouse melodramatic sympathy; the others are so child-like, impish, defiant, incorrigible, and sacrilegious that they can be a minstrel object for the reader's innocent amusement.

On the one hand, the tragic heroes and heroines such as Uncle Tom, Eva, and Eliza arouse the reader's melodramatic sentiments of fear, sorrow, relief, and empathy.¹⁰⁰ They imbue the reader with the feelings that they bodily and emotionally experience, so that the reader to some extent shares those feelings. On the other hand, the minstrel performers including the "happy darky" Sam, Quimbo, Chloe's "woolly-headed boys," and other supporting black characters serve as theatrical spice, contrasting such pathos with pleasurable amusement and laughter at their singing, dancing, and frolics. These minstrel characters express sentiments as well, but distort it with exaggerated expressions so as to discourage pathos. Therefore, the reader can enjoy these black bodies' playfulness without experiencing sympathy for the characters' distress. The opposing stereotypes of the black characters in the novel reflect the writer's own conflicting feelings toward black Americans. While not abandoning the negative attitude toward

¹⁰⁰ Richard Ashby Wilson and Richard D. Brown differentiate empathy from sympathy: "Sympathy refers to the recognition of another's emotional state, [. . .] a state of suffering. Empathy inhabits a site further along on the emotional register and refers to a production of one's own mental state into that of another. Whereas in a state of sympathy one says 'I recognize your pain,' in empathy one says 'I feel your pain'" (2. n.2.).

what she regards as essential blackness through the minstrel black characters, Stowe imposes her romantically racist view¹⁰¹ on the black race by glorifying Uncle Tom's boundless love and (melo)dramatic sacrifice.

Topsy is the only character who uniquely performs both as minstrel pickaninny and melodramatic sufferer. Her versatile performance expands its interpretive possibilities. The term "minstrelsy" here does not narrowly refer to a staged performance in which white actors blacken their faces and make a fun of what a majority of whites would (want to) believe as inborn or derivative blackness. Minstrelsy broadly indicates the way that black characters were conventionally imagined and embodied in antebellum minstrel shows, which Stowe must have utilized for her own creations of the black characters and even Uncle Tom.¹⁰² This expansive definition of minstrelsy pictures Topsy as one of the germinal black characters for the novel's later theatrical productions. In addition to Topsy's minstrel characteristic, it is important to notice her as a distinctively melodramatic character. Williams contends that melodrama "typically offers combinations of pathos *and* action" through a "[v]irtuous sufferer and active hero" (24-25). In this critic's definition of melodrama, Topsy, unlike the tragic mulatto and slave mother Eliza, may not be a melodramatic character because "wick'd" Topsy expresses her pain through too peculiar performance to automatically cause the observer's "pathos *and* action." Yet, without subsuming the character's innate moral superiority, we can

¹⁰¹ For the romantic racialism, see my footnote on George Fredrickson in Chapter one.

¹⁰² Even though Stowe disapproved of the dramatization of the novel, the racial portraits of antic black figures hint at the undeniable influence of minstrelsy on Stowe's black characters. See Sarah Meer 22-25.

more inclusively use the term “melodrama” to indicate those representations of human sentience through which even less virtuous characters can invite the reader to witness their own pains. These eclectic uses of the definitions of minstrelsy and melodrama break down the minstrelsy-melodrama binary frame that limits rich interpretations of Topsy as a performer in Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

As Topsy exemplifies, the apparent distinction between the two genres actually becomes blurred because black characters in both genres function for the observer’s spectatorial pleasure. In this sense, the novel produces a combination of minstrelsy and melodrama more complex than it seems.¹⁰³ According to Saidiya Hartman, Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* evokes “the grammar of sentiment and the rhetoric of minstrelsy [that] set the stage for a performance of slavery that wed cruelty and festivity” (27). In analogizing the two theatrical genres to slave auctions, Hartman argues, “the fashioning of blackness arouses pity and fear, desire and revulsion, and terror and pleasure” in the two popular genres of the nineteenth century (27). The black body on stage offers “an essentially pained expression of the body’s possibilities” for either terror or pleasure of its observer. The comic moment in minstrelsy stems from the violence on the black body (“the terror of pleasure”), and the tearful cliché of the melodramatic plot is propelled by the observer’s violent desire to see the tortured body (“the pleasure of terror”) (Hartman 32). Therefore, the theatrical display of bodily pains in both minstrelsy and melodrama converts the black body’s pains into the observer’s requisites for “pleasure” and

¹⁰³ Meer views that this conjunction of comedy and sentiment was not unusual to Stowe’s contemporary writers. Meer exemplifies the narrator of Herman Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener,” who boasts about his knowledge of “divers histories, at which good-natured gentlemen might smile, and sentimental souls might weep” (21).

“spectacle.” As Hartman suggests, in that the observers of both minstrelsy and melodrama alike dehumanize the black body, distinguishing the two genres based the emotional distance between the black performer and the (white) observer ultimately fails to explain a generic difference of the two genres.

The subtle similarity of minstrelsy and melodrama that Hartman reveals is crucial to our understanding of Topsy’s performance. To the observers of her performance, the black body conveys the dichotomy between the observer’s possible sympathy for the tortured body and emotional detachment from its visible blackness, resulting in Topsy’s complex representation of her body. The black body’s cacophony characterizes Topsy from the beginning of her appearance in the chapter titled “Topsy.” Her abusive owner’s beating of Topsy in the streets motivates St. Clare to purchase her on a sentimental whim. Ironically, on buying her, he asks the little sufferer to sing and dance in order to forget any unpleasant sentiment toward her tortured body. St. Clare, then, sees Topsy demonstrating a peculiar body of both sympathy and amusement. The spectacles of Topsy’s performance prove this link between the audience’s terror and pleasure. Introducing Topsy to Ophelia, St. Clare says:

“Why, the fact is, this concern belonged to a couple of drunken creatures that keep a low restaurant that I have to pass by every day, and I was tired of hearing her screaming, and them beating and swearing at her. She looked bright and funny, too, as if something might be made of her,—so I bought her, and I’ll give her to you.” (341)

St. Clare confesses that he purchased her because he could not ignore the violent scene of Topsy's sufferings anymore. He is sympathetic toward Topsy, for he feels "tired of hearing her screaming" and her owners' "beating and swearing at her." Interestingly, his sympathy is accompanied by his interest in those "something be made of her" "bright and funny" characteristics. In other words, St. Clare's compassion for Topsy's pain occurs with his desire for Topsy as an entertaining performer. The transition from a sympathizer to an insensitive observer happens simultaneously without any mark of remorse or qualm for Topsy. According to Hartman's explication of the black body's performance, St. Clare's association of Topsy's pained and enjoyable body does not sound paradoxical. Topsy is expected to perform both melodrama and minstrelsy to white observers in the novel and to Stowe's white readers. As a result, the emotional distance between the performer and the observer still remains unbridgeable in either form of her performances.

Ophelia also has ambivalent feelings toward Topsy, looking at her outlandish performance and observing the scars on her body. While watching Topsy's debut in St. Clare's house, Ophelia expresses her disgust at the "heathenish" girl (338), complaining that she would see black children including Topsy "mopping and mowing and grinning between all the railings, and tumbling over the kitchen floor" (340). According to Ophelia's observation, Topsy's performance of the "odd Negro" heritage suggests "a most sanctimonious expression of meekness and solemnity," which is "broken by the cunning glances which she shot askance from the corners of her eyes" (339).¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Schwartz explains that slave owners enjoyed "the presence of children as entertainment both for themselves and for their guests, for most adult found little children 'cunning,' by which they meant "cute" (95).

Nevertheless, different from St. Clare, Ophelia shows her emotional capacity of feeling Topsy beyond her black body that prevents Ophelia from overcoming her ignorance of black sentiments. Shortly after her first encounter of Topsy, Ophelia discovers “great welts and calloused spots” on Topsy’s body as “ineffaceable marks of the system,” which makes her pity Topsy (342). Ophelia’s conflicting sentiments toward the black body crash on Topsy’s physical site, whereas St. Clare does not show any dilemma in understanding Topsy as a simply minstrel figure. As a matter of fact, Ophelia desires Topsy’s body as a vehicle for feelings that ultimately actualize her philanthropic Christianity and womanhood. Her “ideas of education, like all her other ideas, were very set and definite” (344). Yet, she knows “of nothing else to do; and, therefore, applied her mind to her heathen [Topsy] with the best diligence she could command” (345). Ophelia’s abstract ideal of education can be specified only through Topsy’s change, as the mistress determines to teach her with “the best diligence.” For Ophelia’s project, Topsy, on the one hand, must remain the black body that requires a white mother’s discipline, and, on the other hand, has to help Ophelia feel Topsy’s sentiments that are less visible in her apathetic body.

Going back to Hartman’s arguments on the black body on stage and considering Topsy within this frame, we may feel uncomfortable with her assertion on the inevitable subjection or subjugation of the black body to white pleasure. Furthermore, we wonder how the black performer could redeem his or her body as a physical site of subjective sentiment rather than remaining an emotional commodity for sensorial observers. Because a sufferer fails to express pain when her or his observer appropriates the pain

and conflates it with “debased forms of power,” argues Elaine Scarry, “the successful expression of [the] pain will always work to expose and make impossible that appropriation and conflation” (14). In other words, a sufferer has to express pain by keeping officious sympathizers from superseding the sufferer’s pain with their own megalomaniac selves’ emotional conflation. Given this, can Topsy redeem her black body away from Ophelia’s emotional investment in Topsy’s body? The rest of this chapter examines how Topsy’s body functions as her corporeal language for the claim on her inalienable authenticity of the pain.

Topsy’s success in displaying her body as an expressive tool of subjectivity depends on how she transfers her sentiments to observers without allowing them to incorporate these sentiments through deploying their imagination from their own painless (white) bodies. Topsy holds the key to bringing the reader outside of the text and the observer within the text into her sentiments under slavery. When it comes to the black body’s pains, there is no proper language to express them. Stowe as a white writer may not be able to verbalize the black body’s pain even though she imagines it, unless a sufferer’s black skin is less visible like Eliza’s or unless the black body is “metaphysical, unearthly” like Uncle Tom’s (Baldwin 14).¹⁰⁵ Stowe’s Topsy cannot speak of her pain at the same level that almost-white-looking Eliza powerfully moves Mrs. Bird’s heart.

Topsy’s “deep Southern” and “African” body makes any expression of her pain

¹⁰⁵ James Baldwin is one of the critics who have harshly judged Stowe’s false characterization of African Americans. For example, Tom is “phenomenally forbearing. He has to be; he is black; only through this forbearance can he survive or triumph. [. . .] His triumph is metaphysical, unearthly; since he is black, born without the light, it is only through humility, the incessant mortification of the flesh, that he can enter into communion with God or man. [. . .] Tom, therefore, [Stowe’s] only black man, has been robbed of his humanity and divested of his sex. It is the price for that darkness with which he has been branded” (Baldwin 14).

undervalued in her observers' mind, as St. Clare exemplifies. Topsy's verbal incapability reflects the writer's limitations because Stowe cannot help but characterize her through the language in which the white-normative power is embedded. Topsy's habitual answer, "Dunno," and grins indicate this verbal inexpressibility of the black body's pain because of the *lack* of Stowe's language rather than Topsy's ignorance of language. Furthermore, as Houston A. Baker, Jr. claims, black slaves cannot be articulate because language itself is part of an institution that oppresses them to deny their humanity.¹⁰⁶ Creating alternative ways of expression is crucial to African American art. Topsy invents one of these ways through her body's performance transcending the writer's verbal descriptions. In doing so, Topsy as a feeling subject overcomes the observers' conflicting desires for amusement with or sympathy for her black body.

Two terms can help us understand the complexity of Topsy's theatrical representation of her black body: *performing blackness* as her performance under the observer's surveillance, and *performative blackness* as that drawing the surveillance away from her body to achieve her representational subjectivity. *Performing blackness* concerns the production of imposed racial attributes and black subjugation, the reassurance of white ascendancy over black bodies, and the perpetuation of blacks'

¹⁰⁶ "If one begins, not with the phenomenal, but with the cognitive, then one is required to ask: How are cognitive 'models' conceived, articulated, and transmitted in human cultures? Certainly one of the obvious answers here is *not* that human beings are *endowed* with a 'system of signs,' but rather that *models of cognition are conceived in, articulated through, and transmitted by language*. And like other systems of culture, language *is* a 'social institution.' Hence, if cognitive 'models' of 'fiction' differ from those of other spheres of human behavior, they do so not because fiction is somehow discontinuous with social institutions. In fact, it is the attempt to understand the coextensiveness of language as a social institution and literature as a system within it that constitutes a defining project of literary-theoretical study in our day" (Baker 100 italics original).

enslavement through the whites' spectatorship of performing blacks. By contrast, *performative blackness* denotes Topsy's manipulative exhibition of the defiant black body that cannot be fixed by the observers' expectations for the black performer. Topsy's mother-figure Ophelia becomes estranged, fails to supervise her performance, and, at last, realizes Topsy's bodily resistance to Ophelia's maternal authority. In this sense, the representational dichotomy between Topsy's minstrel and melodramatic body can be considered the strategic subversion for her subjective control over the mother figure. The significance of Topsy in this novel corresponds to what Stowe eventually insists: "There is one thing that every individual can do,—they can see to it that *they feel right*" (632 italics original). Stowe uses the phrase "feel right" narrowly to urge her readers to support the antislavery movement. However, Topsy broadens its meaning to lead them to witness the black race's subversive resistance to the white observers' self-satisfying sympathy, which Stowe does not view critically in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Performing Blackness and Performative Blackness

Performing blackness refers to the required performance during which the observer expects Topsy to be (1) a minstrel figure of a happy Southern slave who barely expresses any pain and sorrow under slavery and is defined by her frolicking gestures such as singing and dancing, and (2) a melodramatic figure of a compliant and submissive black slave girl who imitates the virtues of white "ladies" but clearly recognizes the immeasurable gap in the white-black hierarchy. As the first case of *performing blackness*, St. Clare introduces the black girl as "a funny specimen in the Jim Crow line" and "a fresh caught specimen" to Ophelia (339). Submitting to his request,

Topsy sings “in a clear shrill voice, an odd Negro melody,” “with her hands and feet, spinning round, clapping her hands, knocking her knees together, in a wild, fantastic sort of time,” and produces “in her throat all those odd guttural sounds which distinguish the native music of her race” (339). Topsy incarnates the black body in a comic and grotesque minstrel figure whose bodily pain becomes obscure. The second case of *performing blackness* is found in Ophelia’s instruction for Topsy to be a “civilized” black girl who would deserve melodramatic sympathy and understanding. In contrast to the performance operated by the observer’s desire for Topsy’s amusing black body, her audience also requests her to perform as “less black” in a controlled body. When Topsy wears “a suit of decent and whole clothing” and has “her hair cropped short to her head,” the surveillant Ophelia can see the “more Christian-like” girl with “some satisfaction” and simultaneously begins to “mature some plans for her instruction” (342). Topsy’s black body, once fresh from the deep South or Africa, is transformed into a “properly” performing body through Ophelia’s discipline.

However, the observers’ demands on Topsy’s performing body do not necessarily result in what they expect. The discrepant requests for Topsy to be both a minstrel and melodramatic performer often make her performance untimely and inappropriate. For instance, Topsy’s recurrent joviality is a byproduct of these requests when she cannot follow them adroitly. Ophelia asks Topsy when she meets her for the first time:

“Have you ever heard anything about God, Topsy?”

The child looked bewildered, but grinned as usual.

“Do you know who made you?”

“Nobody, as I knows on,” said the child, with a short laugh. (343-44)

In this dialogue, Topsy does not seem to understand Ophelia’s authority with which she represents the absolute creator “God.” Topsy is supposed to affirm Christian virtues that Ophelia believes Topsy should pursue. Betraying Ophelia’s expectation, Topsy keeps grinning and laughing as if she is still doing a minstrel performance. Her improper playfulness presumably comes from her previous owners’ demand for her to be a happy slave or St. Clare’s asking for the black performance “in the Jim Crow line,” causing her delayed adaptation of a new performance to another observer, Ophelia. Topsy fails not only to rightly respond to the new mistress’s request for being pious as a melodramatic character but also to perfectly conceal her emotional embarrassment (“looked bewildered”) as an ever happy minstrel performer.

It is important to notice the roles of Topsy’s grin and laughter in this passage. They show how the moment of the collision between her minstrel and melodramatic performance generates a strategic loophole. Her constant joviality stands for Topsy’s passive yet undeniable resistance to the observer’s dominance over Topsy’s performing body. As Topsy already resides in the word “topsyturveydom,” the character could have been named “topsy-turvy” Topsy presumably because Stowe invented her from the term. Lawrence Levine’s quote of “topsyturvydom” from Henri Bergson is particularly relevant to explain Topsy’s untimely grins and improper playfulness: “Picture to yourself certain characters in a certain situation: if you reverse the situation and invert the roles, you obtain a comic scene. [. . .] Thus, we laugh at the prisoner at the bar lecturing the magistrate; at a child presuming to teach its parents; in a word at everything that comes

under the heading of “topsyturvydom” (qtd. in Levine 300). The word “topsyturvydom” refers to any radically antithetical relationship between people with different power.

Topsy’s topsyturvydom specifically functions for Ophelia in two ways, given that Levine emphasizes that black Americans’ laughter symbolizes reversion of a particular situation and inversion of roles (300-301). First, Topsy’s unexpected performance changes Ophelia, the director of her performance, into a faithful observer of Topsy. Because of Topsy’s aberrational response to Ophelia, Ophelia confesses that she could “not help feeling that so many accidents could not possibly happen in succession, yet she could not, without a watchfulness which would leave her no time for anything else, detect her” (352). Instead of practicing her teaching philosophy Ophelia now becomes Topsy’s watchful observer for she has “no time for anything else.”

Second, Topsy’s laughter serves as a symbolic “weapon” to overcome Ophelia’s authority. The word “weapon” is borrowed from Mikhail Bakhtin who studies the subversive power of laughter through the Renaissance writer François Rabelais. He emphasizes, “Laughter, [. . .], overcomes fear, for it knows no inhibitions, no limitations,” and functions as “a free weapon in [oppressed and blinded] people’s hands” (90, 94). Topsy’s laughter is part of her verbal and corporeal weapon to weaken Ophelia’s established authority. Notably, Bakhtin argues that laughter is “developed outside the official sphere of high ideology and literature, but precisely because of its unofficial existence, it was marked by exceptional radicalism, freedom, and ruthlessness” (71). If Topsy makes her audience laugh, the laughter results not from innocent amusements but from her nonsensical absurdity that challenges the audience’s established

position. Through the inappropriate grin, Topsy takes up the opportunity to slip out of Ophelia's intention to regiment her body. Topsy's grin and laughter even seem to hamper Ophelia's further attempt to domesticate her. Ophelia notices Topsy's bewilderment as well as her own surprise at Topsy's lack of religious education. While Topsy cannot impeccably perform her pickaninny-like performance, Ophelia, facing Topsy's laughter, also cannot wield her maternal authority.

Topsy's unexpected and untimely grin and laughter to the observer illustrates *performative blackness*. Regarding Topsy as "virgin soil" of blackness through Ophelia's voice to St. Clare ("You find virgin soil there," 344), Stowe alludes that Topsy's mimicking, stealing, and unpermitted gatherings as well as grinning show her inherent characteristic of uncurbed and unrefined blackness. However, in opposition to Stowe's denunciation of Topsy's failure to perform "properly," these theatrical gestures can be associated with the evidence of Topsy's *performative blackness*. Topsy exhibits her undisciplined and even defiant body by delaying the "right" performance at the moment of the conflicting requests. Her apparent failure to properly perform enables her to diminish the observer's oppressive surveillance on her performance and to occupy a freed time and space for her feeling body. The freed time and space, claims Hartman, putatively imply "a liberatory and utopian structure of feelings" (63). For this "structure of feelings," Topsy can experience desired but unapproved freedom.

The scene of Ophelia's hardship in teaching Topsy epitomizes how Topsy invents the strategic fissure for *performative blackness* in between her demands on Topsy to perform both minstrelsy and melodrama. When Ophelia instructs her how to make a bed,

Topsy apparently obliges her mistress “with a deep sigh, and a face of woeful earnestness” and “with an expression of solemnity well befitting a funeral” as if she were a melodramatic heroine (345). Topsy’s apparent compliance with the instruction temporarily distracts Ophelia’s attention from her: “[W]hat Miss Ophelia did not see, that, during the time when the good lady’s back was turned, in the zeal of her manipulations, the young disciple had contrived to snatch a pair of gloves and a ribbon, which she had adroitly slipped into her sleeves, and stood with her hands dutifully folded, as before” (346). As a result, Ophelia misses Topsy stealing her ribbon and a pair of gloves in a blink. Topsy’s ostensible gravity indicates that she pretends to do the assigned performance while secretly proceeding with her *performative blackness* of mimicking and stealing.

Ophelia later discovers Topsy’s stealth when Topsy mistakenly drops the stolen ribbon. Topsy continues on her play of a melodramatic heroine “with an air of the most surprised and unconscious innocence” (346). When her lies are revealed, Topsy begs Ophelia’s forgiveness “with loud protestations, and tears, and groans”—the gestures belonging to a black figure of minstrelsy (348). Topsy’s clamorous begging overlapped with her frolicking performance seems entertaining enough for other observers like the house servants to overlook Ophelia’s seriousness about Topsy’s misconduct. In doing so, Topsy transforms Ophelia’s bedchamber for white-Christian chastity into Topsy’s own stage for her defiant black body that cannot be settled by any demands from Ophelia. In demonstrating *performative blackness*, Topsy turns Ophelia’s control over her to do the

“right” performance into the performer’s sheer pleasure with her performing body located in the loophole between Ophelia’s surveillance and demands.

How, then, does Topsy gain a subjective sense through *performative blackness*? Topsy performs for her own pleasure, which is opposite to the purpose of *performing blackness*. Her subjectivity emerges explicitly when Topsy becomes the observer of her own performance. And, at the same time, Ophelia is forced to participate in Topsy’s metaphoric stage. At first glance, it seems that Topsy enjoys the liberatory moment by repeating *performing blackness* and consequently by joining the observer’s innocent amusements at her performing black body. In other words, her body may be alienated again from herself, when Topsy appreciates her performing body in a white observer’s stance. Nonetheless, this experimental performance of objectifying her own body is essential in that she perceives the black body’s dynamics to transcend Ophelia’s instruction.

Not much later than her arrival at St. Clare’s mansion, Topsy exhibits and performs the cross-dressed self in front of a mirror during Ophelia’s absence from her bedchamber:

[Topsy] would amuse herself with pulling off the pillow-cases, butting her woolly head among the pillows, till it would sometimes be grotesquely ornamented with feathers sticking out in various directions; she would climb the posts, and hang head downward from the tops; flourish the sheets and spreads all over the apartment; dress the bolster up in Miss Ophelia’s night-clothes, and enact various scenic performances with

that,—singing and whistling, and making grimaces at herself in the
looking-glass. (355)

In accordance with the observer's desire to see her amusing and painless body, Topsy neutralizes her own pain by dividing herself into a performing body and an observing self. The notable difference of this performance here from her usual one for white observers is that Topsy "amuse[s] herself." The mistress's mirror leads her to appropriate the white mother Ophelia's gaze. Without internalizing Ophelia's gaze at her body, Topsy appreciates her performing self by retrieving the consumable black body from the abstractly disembodied observer, Ophelia. Whereas the white-bodiless surveillance is revealed not to be omnipresent, the performing black body actualizes Topsy's legible presence. This mirror scene of *performative blackness* supports her internal possibility of redeeming the pained body that is once negated by the observer who demands *performing blackness*. As if mocking the observer's amusement, Topsy denies Ophelia's exclusive authority to enjoy her performance.

The re-appropriated gaze at herself in this scene enables Topsy to further realize the vulnerability of Ophelia's disembodied authority. Ophelia's body appears neither visible nor tangible in front of Topsy's overly corporalized body. Topsy fleshes out the mother figure's body through her *performative blackness*; Ophelia's body turns out to be exposed to outer violence and sensible the same as Topsy's pained body. This revelation of the shared corporeality with the mother figure provides Topsy with the way in which she demonstrates her body as a tool of challenging Ophelia's unsympathetic gaze at Topsy's performance. Significantly, Topsy performs cross-dressing with Ophelia's

clothes in the passage above.¹⁰⁷ Ophelia symbolically becomes incarnated in Topsy's black body, when Topsy dresses "the bolster up in Ophelia's night-clothes" and theatrically represents Ophelia as a minstrel figure who "enact[s] various scenic performances." Topsy can empower her corporeality over white spectatorship because the white-bodiless observer is helplessly replaced with the performing black body. Moreover, Topsy divulges that Ophelia performs the desirability of white motherhood. By producing a fake-version of Ophelia, she embodies the mistress's authoritative decency as if it is merely calculated performance. Likewise, Topsy's "heathenish" and "minstrel" blackness is not her intrinsic characteristic but acquired performances.

When the replica of Ophelia's body in front of a mirror becomes visible and susceptible to Topsy's surveillance and violence, Topsy now appears as a full-bodied observer of her own show on her stage. Topsy's performance disorders Ophelia's well-arranged place, when she "would climb the posts, and hang head downward from the tops; flourish the sheets and spreads all over the apartment." This spatial disruption of Ophelia's bedchamber even threatens her authority. If the room as her private space stands for Ophelia's conceptually physical entity, that is, her body, Topsy metaphorically amputates Ophelia's body. The "raising Cain" to which Ophelia compares disciplining Topsy insinuates that she is afraid of Topsy's tentatively insurrectionary behavior in her *performative blackness*, or in Stowe's terms "various scenic performances" (355).

¹⁰⁷ Topsy's queering suggests an important aspect of cross-dressing in antislavery literature. For instance, in the same novel, George Harris escapes the South by pretending a Spanish gentleman. Similarly, in the reality, Ellen and William Craft ran away by transforming themselves as a white young gentleman and his servant. In introducing the Crafts narrative, Daphne Brooks argues that "passing is a highly spectacular and performative transaction that involves collaboration and methods of seeing (the other)" (lvii).

Through this exposure of the mother figure's body and the consequent replacement, Topsy alludes to the tenuous difference between her body and Ophelia's in order to turn Ophelia's attention to her feeling body.

Going further than her recognition of the mother figure's corporeality in the liberatory structure of her performance, Topsy ultimately redeems her pained body by inventing theatrical forms of sentimental representation. As a result, Topsy also guides Ophelia to recognize her sentience in this performance. The process of her self-redemptive body—making becomes clear when Topsy goads the mother figure to attend her melodramatic suffering in a minstrel show. Whenever her misconduct is discovered by Ophelia, Topsy demands that her mistress whip her because she is “wick'd” (355). Once Ophelia reluctantly gives her corporeal punishment, “Topsy invariably ma[kes] a terrible commotion, screaming, groaning, and imploring, though half an hour afterwards, when roosted on some projection of the balcony, and surrounded by a flock of admiring ‘young uns’” (355). As soon as Ophelia's discipline of the unruly black girl becomes a part of a minstrel performance in Topsy's scenario, Topsy also becomes a helpless melodramatic heroine confronting her ruthless torturer: “Law, Miss Feely whip! Oughter see how old Mas'r made the flesh fly; old Mas'r know'd how!” (355). Calling Ophelia, Topsy uses the moniker “Feely” with an irony. Ophelia is “feel-ly” to and for Topsy, as if she must but fail to feel Topsy's pain. Consequently, Ophelia once again comes to participate in Topsy's “feely” melodrama.

Topsy insists that the observers “ought to see” her flying flesh and to feel something empathic despite her continuously playful gestures. It is notable that the bodily

pain initiates Topsy's invention of these artifactual gestures. Scarry suggests that physical pain can be overcome through a sufferer's imagination. The sufferer, then, discovers the power of self-estrangement by imagining the self free of pain. In other words, she has to imagine her painless body from the observer's perspective that can directly reveal the pain without the pain's ascendancy over her language. Just as Scarry argues that this self-revision "was apparent in the transformation of weapon into tool and tool into freestanding artifact" (324-25), Topsy constantly revises her performing body. In this scene, Topsy's versatile performance evinces her "continual self-revision" to be visible. This versatility helps Topsy create her stages, invite the detached observers to attend her show, and convert the invisible observers into full-bodied performers just like herself. Through these dynamics, Topsy calls for other observers' testimony to the visual violence that is proved through her corporeal suffering.

If Ophelia now "sees" Topsy's suffering, how does her observer come to "feel" the pain of the black performer? In other words, what leads her white mother to feel affection for her body and to touch it? Ophelia can "feel" Topsy's pain with the medium of Eva's pure white body, unearthly affection, and sensitivity. Topsy seeks a sympathizer who not only attends her performance but also becomes a part of her body by sharing the pain. Even though Ophelia is unwillingly involved in Topsy's performance, she does not associate her decent body with Topsy's "wick'd" one. Topsy implicitly excuses her misconduct with Ophelia's reluctance to touch her: "No; she [Ophelia] can't bar me, 'cause I'm a nigger!—she'd 's soon have a toad touch and feel her! There can't nobody love nigger, and niggers can't do nothin'!" (400-401). In Topsy's mind, physical

touching signals affection, and this affection can lead her to do good. Ophelia's claim that Topsy should behave herself is preposterous because the mistress herself fails to guide Topsy to good deeds by demonstrating motherly affection. Nonetheless, Topsy does not stop merely to blame Ophelia for their unfitting relationship but teaches her how to feel the black pain, just like St. Clare remarks: "[Topsy] is fairly introduced into our *corps de ballet*, and will figure, from time to time, in her turn, with other performers" (358). For this, Topsy succeeds in displaying her pained body through the pain alliance with Eva and this alliance's physical evidence—empathic touches and spontaneous tears.

The scene in which Topsy arouses Eva's sympathy resembles a staged performance. When Topsy and Eva talk together in a little glass-room, St. Clare and Ophelia lift up a curtain to look in the room. Eva seems to be an invited performer to Topsy's show, in which Eva's white body mediates Topsy's sentience that is not felt by the less sympathetic observers than Eva. Eva is distinctive from other white observers not only because of her unrealistic spiritualism but also because of her body's impalpability. Eva's incorporeal body appears too translucent to defend itself from Topsy's performative incorporation with her. Instead, Eva's body intensifies the expressiveness of Topsy's emotional and bodily pains, by letting Topsy easily fill the lack of Eva's corporeality with her demonstrative body: "The round, keen eyes of the black child were overcast with tears;—large, bright drops rolled heavily down, one by one, and fell on [Eva's] little white hand" (401). Topsy's sorrowful tears roll down upon Eva's hand, a hand that functions as a white screen to make Topsy's pained body visible. The detached observers out of the glass-room, St. Clare and Ophelia, see "the beautiful child [Eva],

bending over [Topsy], [. . .] like the picture of some bright angel stooping to reclaim a sinner” (401). The heathenish blackness of Topsy’s body disappears with Eva’s physical embrace of the body. Topsy appears to be “a sinner” with a pained body and heart-breaking sorrows.

Despite the scene’s familiarity with melodrama, we do not have to return to the formula of melodrama framed by Hartman. Hartman insists that melodrama, like minstrelsy, produces the black body’s pain as an enjoyable commodity to the megalomaniac observer. However, Topsy’s performance suggests the possibility of resisting the observer’s desire for the consumable black body. By accompanying Eva rather than showing up as a sole performer, Topsy leads Eva to bear witness to and feel for her indelible body on stage. Eva “with a sudden burst of feeling” lays “her little thin, white hand on Topsy’s shoulder,” saying “O Topsy, poor child, *I love you!*” (401). Without disappearing under the shadow of Eva’s (narcissistic?) sympathy, or without being “skinned, and com[ing] white,” Topsy’s black body remains intact from the observer’s desire to supersede a melodramatic heroine’s pain with his or her imaginary pain (400). Simultaneously, the unmotherly mother Ophelia now comes to acknowledge Topsy’s visible and tangible body as an indisputable sign of her sentience. St. Clare, who once enjoyed innocent amusements with Topsy, declares, “[I]f we want to give sight to the blind, we must be willing to do as Christ did,—call them to us, and *put our hands on them*” (402 italics original). Irony resides in this sentence because the blind person who fails to see Topsy’s real pains beneath her dark skin is Ophelia. By letting these insensitive observers touch her body, Topsy evinces the sentience emerging on her body.

The mother figure is, at last, able to regard Topsy not as an uncontrollable “pickaninny” but as a feeling subject.

Williams explains, “[w]eeping is the agency of the recognition of virtue in Stowe’s novel. It is never a merely passive wallowing in powerless tears” (53). According to this critic, Topsy is the best example of powerful tears. Despite the tragedy of Eva’s death, Topsy reinvents herself as a vicarious agent or a representative of Eva after the death. Topsy’s tears prove her virtuous character handed down from Eva, which then empowers Topsy to justify the sentience of her black body. Her body is no longer senseless as in a minstrel show or replaceable as in melodrama. Topsy’s tears in remembering Eva powerfully make other characters simultaneously cry with her. Stowe comments on this scene, “[Topsy] was a curious mixture of the pathetic and the ludicrous, [. . .] and Topsy’s utter distress. St. Clare smiled; but there were tears in his eyes” (438-39). What the writer calls “a curious mixture of the *pathetic* and the *ludicrous*” parallels Topsy’s *performative blackness* in between minstrelsy and melodrama. Topsy as a performer invites her sympathetic observer to the liberatory stage that she creates out of the observer’s overruling spectatorship. Ophelia, then, not only observes her black body with sentience but also becomes engaged in her pains while smiling, weeping, and even grabbing her hands. The feeling subject Topsy’s pained body is redeemed. Therefore, Ophelia becomes entitled to be a virtuous mother of the black daughter.

Chapter 4. Staging Whiteness: Frado's Performance of Pain in Harriet Wilson's

Our Nig

An editorial in the *Liberator* issued on January 9th, 1846, warns its readers of an imposter fugitive. The article starts with describing a black man who pretended “to be a refugee from South Carolina slavery.” The man asked antislavery sympathizers for financial assistance that would enable him and his sick sister to go to Canada. The black man showed “several sears [scars?],” alleging that they were “from wounds inflicted in various ways by his master.” He also carried recommendation letters from “Mr. Bartholomew Bates, Mr. Ames, a minister and others in Washington, Massachusetts.” However, the falsehood of his past under slavery was revealed by one of his acquaintances. The writer ends the article with strong advice: “Our friend queries whether he may not be an imposter. *We have no doubt of it.* And we hope, therefore, that the friends of the poor refugee slaves will be cautious, and not allow themselves to be imposed upon by this fellow” (italics original). Imposter fugitives emerged in the antebellum Northern culture of disciplinary intimacy between white benefactors and black beneficiaries. These fugitives who manipulated unquestionably blind sentiments for black Americans call into question the white sympathy that Harriet Beecher Stowe espouses in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

With the popularity of slave narratives and growing sympathy for fugitive slaves around the time of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, many newspaper articles alerted and also carried stories about self-fashioned “imposter” (Cohen 101-13). Regarding the increase of imposters, William Lloyd Garrison wrote in the *Liberator*: “Once for all, we

earnestly caution our anti-slavery friends to be less credulous, and more searching, in every case where one presents himself as a fugitive slave. [. . .] Imposters may naturally be expected to abound with the growing sympathy for the enslaved” (12/25/1857/52). Interestingly, Garrison believes that “the growing sympathy for the enslaved” among antislavery supporters inadvertently encourages imposters. This proves a side effect of the affective aspects of anti-slavery politics.

While many critics agree that antebellum America can be considered the age of sentimentalism, Peter Coviello advances this argument by suggesting the concept of intimacy in building a national identity at that time. He defines intimacy as “an affective exchange understood to be reciprocal and recursive” (6). It can be found in various terms characterizing antebellum culture such as sympathy, passion, compassion, desire, sentiment, and a sense of belonging (Coviello 6). Feeling about or for someone means emotional connection or alliance with those whose relatedness is not predetermined. Coviello argues that intimacy creates a connection between oneself and the distant and anonymous citizen in a collective identity of white men in the early nineteenth-century U.S. (7-8). However, Garrison’s observation of how abolitionist intimacy might result in uncritical sympathy and inauthentic performance indicates that this kind of intimacy could also be damaging to the collaborative movement between black and white abolitionists. What sympathetic but credulous abolitionists see in an imposter fugitive is the former’s expectation for the material evidence of slave experiences: the former slave’s visible scars, demonstrated pain, or any other perceptible physical responses, but not the distanced philosophical contemplation of these experiences. At the same time, in

his mutual recognition of abolitionists, an imposter fugitive realizes that he must mimic the expected pattern of performance for his survival in a white-dominated and racist Northern society. In these cases, the theatricality of the abolitionist stage suggests racial estrangement rather than the emotional alliance between the two races as necessary for a democratic ideal.

The writer of *Our Nig*, Harriet Wilson, might agree with Garrison.¹⁰⁸ Wilson portrays an autobiographical heroine, Frado, who accuses both abolitionists and imposter fugitives of their hypocrisy. Frado falls victim to the combination of sympathy and performance on the abolitionist stage when her husband Samuel twice abandons her for his tours with abolitionists. Through Frado's hardships, the writer insists that the cruelty that might affect the public wedding of white sympathy and black performance also can happen more subtly at a private home. Frado initially suffers from this in the most intimate place with biological and emotional ties like the homes of her mother Mag, the Bellmonts,¹⁰⁹ and her own after her marriage. White sympathizers, particularly

¹⁰⁸ The novel's title "Our Nig" has opened various critical responses because of its irony. Frado's moniker "our Nig" is named by Jack when she arrives at the family for the first time (25-26). Lois Leveen interprets the title as a thematic indication of Frado's self-discovery. The writer reveals "the process through which the despised identity of 'nig' is assigned to a free black." In addition, the possessive "our" shows that Frado is a "collectively owned object rather than a self-owned subject" (Leveen 562). For this reason, even though Wilson reinvests Frado's entity with subjectivity under her authorship, Frado's desire for independency dwindles her need for the reader/sympathizer's help for "our nig." Differently from Leveen, P. Gabrielle Foreman argues that the writer strategically allows Frado to usurp the white ownership represented by "our Nig." Then, Frado can deny "the [white] person who has the most power over her life proper appellation" (Foreman 48).

¹⁰⁹ Many scholars have delved into Harriet Wilson's biographical backgrounds, which were fictionalized and renamed in *Our Nig*. The historical documents and archives discovered by these scholars corroborates that the Bellmont family refers to the Hayward family, a farming family in Milford, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire. See Barbara H. White's article and R.J. Ellis's first chapter, "*Our Nig* and Wilson's Life."

represented by her mother or mother figures at those homes, discipline Frado into normative forms of blackness that maintains her inferiority in terms of physical appearance, race, gender, and class.

This chapter examines the larger question of how emotional bonds control black subjects through the specific example of this seemingly benign relationship. I call this kind of an emotional bond “disciplinary intimacy,” in order to argue that familial closeness blinds white motherhood’s maternal discipline of black daughter figures to feature the black body as inferior and subordinate to white womanhood. Through the visual demonstration of her constant physical pain, Frado breaks the presumed emotional alliance between white sympathizers and black sufferers because this alliance does not allow the sufferer to emerge as a feeling subject. Frado displays a hypersensitive body that disqualifies white observers’ authority over her performance. Moreover, in attacking white maternal authority by revealing the performative nature of their sympathy and white motherhood, Frado-Wilson authenticates her pain as the evidence of both her true motherhood and authorship.

Wilson the author witnesses many “professed fugitives from slavery” in an unnamed Northern city, one of whom becomes her husband (126). Even though Samuel has never been in the South, he plays a role of a fugitive slave to make a living by satisfying the need of Northern abolitionists: “He left her to her fate—embarked at sea, with the disclosure that he had never seen the South, and that his illiterate harangues were humbugs for hungry abolitionists” (128). By negatively presenting both the “professed fugitive” Samuel and “hungry abolitionists,” Wilson criticizes the effective but deceptive

display on the abolitionist stage. Abolitionists' uncritical sympathy for enslaved blacks is easily wedded to the manipulative performance of "imposter" fugitives, as this performance represents these imposters' deliberate subjugation to the white abolitionists' demands for black bodies as the visible markers of dependency on white paternalism.

Wilson points out Samuel's self-deceptive staging for credulous abolitionists as a negative effect, a direct demotion of Harriet Beecher Stowe's use of sympathy as an effective political force. In Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Topsy gains white sympathy by inventing her performance. However, she at last confirms that a white mother figure's sympathy is indispensable in order for her to be legible as a black female subject. In other words, without white sympathizers' mediation, Topsy cannot express her humanity to white observers or grow as an educated black woman. Consequently, this dimension of the racial hierarchy remains unchallenged at the end of Stowe's novel. Despite Stowe's hasty summary of her later career as a missionary to Africa, Topsy seems to stay in permanent childhood instead of growing into an adult in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

As Frado plays a counterpart to Topsy, Wilson debunks the limitation of maternal politics that Stowe espouses at the cost of Topsy's adulthood, by highlighting unmotherly mothers and the myth of domesticity.¹¹⁰ How can a (nearly enslaved) domestic servant be

¹¹⁰ Henry Louis Gates introduces Frado by implicitly comparing her to Topsy. "[W]hite authors contemporary to Wilson" show that "the restraint of the disorderly girl" like Topsy can be "a positive and necessary social force," says Gates. He continues, by contrast to Stowe's Topsy, Wilson lets Frado exhibit "recurring playfulness, her sass, and her 'disorderliness,'" evincing the character's "free" status (*New England* xiv). This distinctiveness of Wilson's characterization of Frado hints at the character's interpretive resourcefulness. In this essay, Frado's literary place in relation to Topsy is significant. Frado not only embodies Wilson's challenge to Stowe but also develops Topsy's achievement of performing the black subject's body that Stowe fails to fully recognize. Lisa E. Green properly points out that the two "unruly" girl characters' relatedness has been barely analyzed. Even though many critics such as Elizabeth Ammons and Julia Stern have

both a black daughter, defined as member of a white family united in domestic affection, and a socio-economic unit, defined instead by racist institutions and the white family's self-interest? Julia Stern argues that Wilson through *Our Nig* attacks "the most important mother-centered novel of her contemporary age, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" (442). Similarly, Lisa Green points out Wilson's break from Stowe's "myth of the mother-savior," maintaining that Wilson questions Stowe's "deification" of white motherhood as if it is "culturally redemptive" (139). If white desire for the black body is implicitly prevalent but embellished by Stowe's support for maternal politics in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Frado as a black subject rebuffs that desire by exhibiting the pain that results from the white mother figures and their gruesome desires for her body.

Wilson's critical view of the emotional ties of a white-mother figure and a black daughter challenges Stowe's belief in the importance of sympathy for enslaved black (children or "childish" grown-ups). Stowe considers only the sympathy of white Christian women, which gives them the power to cultivate black children in white domestic culture. However, in *Our Nig*, a white-mother figure impersonates a feeling-less devilish female (Mrs. Belmont) or a feeling but incapable mother (Mag, Aunt Abby, and Jane). The sympathy of these mother figures for Frado may fail to motivate a reader-witness to help a sufferer out of the text because this sympathy is often originated from a reader-

notices the thematical and literary connection between Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Wilson's *Our Nig*, Topsy as an equivalent of Frado is unfairly omitted or scarcely discussed from their arguments (Green 139). Topsy's transformation from a black pickanny to a self-reliant missionary resembles that of Frado from an uncontrollable black girl into a self-dependant mother (Green 140). However, Green does not go further to highlight the differences between Topsy and Frado in terms of their struggles to overcome the white spectatorship and to redeem their pained bodies. For the similar purpose yet through different performances, they fashion themselves as a feeling subject beyond their subversive characteristics.

witness's self-oriented interest that ultimately prevents a self-sacrificing action for the sufferer. Frado's sympathizers such as Mag, Aunt Abby, and Mrs. Belmont's disabled daughter Jane can witness their own powerless positions through Frado as a self-reflexive model. Their alliance in pain with Frado reminds them of their incapability of helping her and irresponsibility for her pain.¹¹¹ In addition, they undergird their racial and economic power over Frado, by witnessing her pain and silently joining the mechanism of domination that Mrs. Belmont ostensibly operates.¹¹²

How Frado or Harriet Wilson defines her racial identity eventually suggests that breaking the emotional bonds with these idle sympathizers means the assertion of an independent subject who herself can achieve motherhood in the end.¹¹³ Whites' sympathy for oppressed blacks not only is unnecessary but also prevents the black subject's achievement of selfhood. The Appendix includes a letter from Allida (whose name is

¹¹¹ Ellen Prato Fiorito analyzes the target audience of Wilson's novel, pointing out the fundamental contradiction between her "Preface" in which she appeals to her "colored brethren" and her stance toward her audience within the novel (41-42). Even though the writer apparently regards her "colored brethren" the main readers, the novel reveals that Wilson criticizes racism within Northern white abolitionist groups and their home. In short, Wilson seems to target white Northerners rather than African Americans in the North. Xiomara Santamarina argues that this contradiction stems from "a critical focus on Wilson's expose of [N]orthern racism among white abolitionists that overlooks the interrelated nature of antebellum class and race formation" (65).

¹¹² Wilson mocks any justification of a need for white sympathizers, while illustrating that Frado's best sympathizers are animals. Fido, Frado's dog given by Jack who pities her, is considered the most reliable sympathizer and humble audience to her: "[Frado] told him her griefs [*sic*] as though he were human; and he sat so still, and listened so attentively, she really believed he knew her sorrows" (42). In another page, Wilson says, "[w]hen [Frado] had none of the family around to be merry with, she would amuse herself with the animals" (53-54). Frado's intimacy with these animals indicates that the white sympathizers at home can be analogized to them because both of the humans and animals are alike in that they eventually cannot rescue Frado from Mrs. Belmont's dictatorship.

¹¹³ Wilson describes herself as "Black" according to the 1850 federal census of the state of New Hampshire. The choices were "White," "Black," and "Mulatto" (Gates, "Introduction," xiv).

believed to be a pseudonym) about Wilson when she became a mother of a child (Gates, “Introduction,” xxi). In the letter, with Mrs. Walker’s help Wilson “succeeded in procuring work for her as a ‘straw sewer’” but her sickened body failed her to continue the work. However, under Mrs. Walker’s care, Wilson poignantly exclaims, “I have *at last* found a *home*,—and not only a home, but a *mother*” (133 italics original). The phrase “at last” emphasizes that the writer never had a real home and mother before. Her previous home as a physical place serves as a conceptual stage where Frado must perform according to the mother figures’ demands. In the letter, Wilson feels an affective exchange with Mrs. Walker who may not expect her to be a racial object such as a useful labor, helpless sufferer, black “pickaninny,” or subservient maid. Otherwise, Wilson stresses her homelessness and motherlessness once again by calling her temporary caregiver a mother, while Frado says about the Bellmonts’ house, “I’ve got to stay out here and die. I ha’n’t got no mother, no home. I wish I was dead” (46). Wilson begins her story by introducing herself as a mother who desperately needs to maintain herself and her feeble child (3). As Claudia Tate insists “[m]otherhood both motivates and justifies Wilson’s authorship”; Wilson denies other mothers’ attempt to confine her within their familial and emotional bond(age), and presents herself as the only truthful mother who deserves the reader’s sincere sympathy. Wilson’s *Our Nig* is her literary breakage of the oppressive and manipulative intimacy and her declaration of her authorship to establish an emotional bond between the reader and her truthful maternal self.

Disciplinary Intimacy

Wilson's Frado rejects any attempts of white mother figures to keep her in their emotional ties. By illuminating Frado's failure or refusal to form an affective bond with these white-mother authorities, Wilson asks the readers if they are compassionate enough to establish the intimacy with the black daughter. Frado's lack of intimacy with them stands for her resistance to their unauthorized maternal control over her. Stowe's Topsy actively invites even halfhearted observers to her performance in order to prove the humanity that these observers fail to find in her "deeply Southern" black body. Without Topsy's performance, Ophelia cannot be a feeling subject whose authority must be felt by Topsy. In contrast, Frado does not exhibit her bodily expressiveness in the same way Topsy does. Rather, Frado lets her observers express their feelings for her first, as if she is testing their ability to have authority coupled with a humane sensitivity to sufferers. Even though Frado evinces visible and invisible pains, Frado's observers, unlike Topsy's Ophelia, not only fail to recover their sentiments for others but also continue on torturing her emotionally and physically. Going further than her critique on the maternal politic that Stowe ardently espouses, the writer also reveals that "white Christian hypocrisy, presumed abolitionist beneficence, exploitative Northern labor practices, and the sexual vulnerability of women in a patriarchal culture" are embedded in that politic (Tate 43-44). Frado attacks unmotherly mothers, pretentious sympathy and insincere performance, and racist practices over abolitionist ideals in the Northern home through maternal figures such as Mag Smith, Aunt Abby, Jane Bellmont, and Mrs. Bellmont.

In addition to Coviello's examination of intimacy, Richard Brodhead's concept of intimacy is especially useful in the racial context of Wilson's *Our Nig* and its disciplinary

relationship between white mothers and black daughters. Intimacy helps one particular racial group build its collective identity in the public, as Coviello illustrates for white-male writers including Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville. Race becomes its own “affective language, a way to describe one’s intimate connectedness to the distant and anonymous citizens of the republic” (7). Moreover, this intimacy also enables diverse members in a domestic sphere to share a sense of belonging and, through this particular sense to define themselves in different places of the home. In this vein, Richard Brodhead’s term “disciplinary intimacy” explains how an affective exchange is used to discipline a domestic member to function as subordinate to authority: “A first feature of this collectively composed disciplinary model is that it requires authority to put on a human face. A second feature is a purposeful sentimentalization of the disciplinary relation: a strategic relocation of authority relations in the realm of emotion and a conscious intensification of the emotional bond between the authority figure and its charge” (145). The intimacy between the white mother/mother figures and Frado leads them to identify themselves as constituents of the domestic space. By establishing an emotional exchange with Frado or by breaking a possible intimacy with her, the white mothers and mother figures pin down her as a living tool of confirming their own identities as white women and mothers.

At a glance, disciplinary intimacy seems to regard both a figure of authority and that authority’s target as subjects with independent feelings. The authoritative figure can confirm its power only when the power is felt in the target subject’s mind. In other words, even though the latter does not have the same kind of power, at the moment when the

former tries to make its power emotionally appealing to the latter, the target's subjectivity is already presumed. For instance, "benevolent" masters control black slaves by using forms of this disciplinary intimacy that bind them even more effectively within authoritarian disciplines. Topsy becomes a "paradigmatic case of the disciplinary object," as she is tamed not by Ophelia's corporal punishment but by Little Eva's attentive affection (Brodhead 159). Likewise, when a white mother expresses her power not as authority but as affection, her black daughter cannot help being enmeshed "in strong bonds of love is the way authority introduces its charge to its imperatives and norms, [. . .] enforcing the feeling of obligation to parentally embodied values" (Brodhead 146).

In *Our Nig*, the disciplinary intimacy of sympathy functions as a mechanism not for the black race's liberation from institutional and cultural racism but also for powerful operations that make that racism less visible and more practicable. Despite its guise of sympathetic alliance, white authority ultimately demands voluntary obedience, exemplified by Aunt Abby and Jane in the book. This authority can easily enforce and make legitimate its physical power over the black subject, even if it fails to build more affective ties, subjecting these bodies to cultural and economic exploitation. Mag and Mrs. Bellmont fall in this case. In a series of Frado's affectionless relations with her mother and adoptive mother-mistress, she negates the two mothers' maternal authority that attempts to designate her as a racial marker of black female inferiority. At the same time, by disregarding the surrogate mother figures' efforts to build the intimacy, Frado criticizes that the intimacy between a white mother and a black daughter perpetuates the

latter's dependency on the former's benevolence and consequent racial hierarchy within the same sex.

The white women characters use this disciplinary intimacy to determine Frado's racial identity that carries sociopolitical and class identities as well. Although a performer's body like Frado is not fixed in one racial category, observers invest in the body in the way that they determine its race on the behalf of their materialistic desires. Frado's body becomes useful when she performs her racial identities according to her observers' requests. Because of Frado's racial ambiguity, her performance reveals the structure of racial formation. In *Our Nig*, the race line between black and white is tenuous because race is not a matter of given physical characteristics but that of changeable social status. Where whiteness is socially acceptable, blackness is considered less desirable. In this sense, P. Gabrielle Foreman argues that Mag's physical whiteness is unclear. Her close reading of the novel reveals that Wilson consciously delays any definitive mark of Mag's racial identity. This ambiguous description of Mag's whiteness leaves a question of "whether Mag is legally, rather than just phenotypically, 'white'" (Foreman 60). Similarly, Xiomara Santamarina claims that, regardless Mag's biologically white body, her moral and economic "fall" racializes her as black "by subjecting her to the optionless condition of the working poor" just like black slaves in the South (74).

The indeterminacy of Mag's racial identity highlights the novel's own ambivalences and ambiguities about the writer-Frado's race. This racial characteristic of the characters challenges Wilson's contemporary readers' own assumptions on the biracial woman, prejudices toward her, and attempt to racially identify her with the

“lowly” status. Her biological black father, Jim, persuades the white woman, Mag, to marry him, saying: “I’s black outside, I know, but I’s got a white heart inside. Which you rather have, a black heart in a white skin, or a white heart in a black one?” (12).

According to Jim, blackness and whiteness together decide visible or invisible characteristics of one person. Because of his dark skin but virtuous nature, Jim claims his “white heart inside.” To Mag whose reputation as a “fallen woman” hints at her “black heart,” marrying him is beyond her choice. Her white family abandons her since she has morally defiled herself due to her relationship with a lower-class man. Even though she once had “a loving, trusting heart” (5), her neighbors “contaminate” her home, make her feel “degraded” with their “foul tongue,” and “dishearten” her (7). As a result of this humiliation, Mag’s “white skin” becomes invisible to the neighbors, while the moral defilement turns her “white” inside into black. The only way of redeeming her whiteness is, as Jim insists, to choose “a white heart” that she has lost in the past and can regain by merging with Jim. Frado, the offspring of Jim and Mag, physically and conceptually conveys both whiteness and blackness.

If Stowe’s Topsy represents the necessity of white mothers’ sympathy and teaching to convert the “heathenish” black body into a Christened one, Wilson’s Frado exposes these mothers’ monstrosity and cruelty that inscribe racial characteristics on her ambiguous body. Through Frado’s motherly sympathizers, Wilson expresses her deep pessimism over white motherhood and feminine sentiments that Stowe espouses for abolitionism. Mag lacks motherhood in determining the commercial value of Frado. The mother is reluctant to give Frado up not because she has a motherly concern about her

daughter but because Frado is not marketable enough for Mag to alleviate her economic difficulty. As Seth, Mag's second husband and Frado's stepfather, regards Frado as "a hard one" when she breaks his equilibrium, Frado's unmanageability keeps her valueless in labor market (19). Aware of this, Mag bluntly responds, "Who'll take the black devils?" to Seth who suggests that they "must give the children away, and try to get work in some other place," (16). Because of Frado's lack of marketability, Mag decides to send her to Mrs. Bellmont. Mag's abandonment of her daughter cannot be associated with the traditional motherhood, as Claudia Tate insists: "[Mag] carefully selects the Bellmont household as Frado's future place of service. Mag's decision is not based on conventional sentiments but on economics" (34). Even though Mag knows that Mrs. Bellmont is "a right she-devil," she believes that Frado needs harsh discipline at the Bellmonts household: "Mag was relieved to know her child was not driven to desperation by their intentions to relieve themselves of her, and she was inclined to think severe restraint would be healthful" (20). By sending Frado to Mrs. Bellmont, Mag aims not only at her own economic relief but also at Frado's market value as a black house servant in the future.

Ironically, Mag's unmotherly decision hints at the mother's emotional identification with the daughter. Santamarina explains: "the experience of compulsion and labor that Mag suffers becomes amplified and extended in her own daughter's inscription as the Bellmonts' 'nig' and thereby serves as grounds for identification between mother and daughter" (74). Mag's intimacy with her daughter does not occur until Mag recognizes her social blackness and gives up her motherhood. While writing

about Mag, Wilson also recovers her intimacy with the uncaring mother on the basis of the shared economic hardships and blackness. Nonetheless, Wilson juxtaposes the two mothers—grown-up Frado and Mag—to accuse Mag of abandoning Frado while emphasizing Wilson’s own motherliness.

Disciplinary intimacy illuminates Aunt Abby as a self-contradictory figure. Aunt Abby seems to share deep sentiments with Frado, and, at the same time, emotionally restrains Frado to keep her useful in the Bellmonts household. In little Frado’s mind, Aunt Abby to some extent makes up for the absence of Frado’s maternal protector. Aunt Abby shows her motherly concern with Frado’s wellbeing under Mrs. Bellmont’s dictatorship. Frado feels understood when Aunt Abby offers her a piece of cake and pie that Frado is not allowed to have at home (45). Aunt Abby and Frado can exchange their mutual emotion because Abby herself just like Frado is marginalized to her “own quarters” in the Bellmont house. Given that Aunt Abby also faces Mrs. Bellmont’s detestation and disrespectful treatment of her, her sympathetic identification with Frado must occur immediately. When witnessing Mrs. Bellmont’s cruelty to Frado, Aunt Abby urges Mr. Bellmont to “rule [his] own house” (44). However, her pressure on him is not as powerful as that of Mrs. Bird who successfully drives her husband, the Senator, to oppose the Fugitive Slave Act or as that of Miss Ophelia who overpowers the St. Clares in Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Aunt Abby herself cannot intervene in Mrs. Bellmont’s cruelty, but helplessly follows her order to go back to Aunt Abby’s “quarters” (67). Moreover, Aunt Abby’s carelessly sympathetic gesture for Frado results in Mrs. Bellmont’s anger at and extended punishment of Frado: “Aunt Abby had a glimpse of

Nig as she passed out of the yard; but to arrest her, or shew [*sic*] her that *she* would shelter her, in Mrs. Bellmont's presence, would only bring reserved wrath on her defenceless [*sic*] head" (45). By depicting that Aunt Abby's ostentatious compassion for her exasperates the mistress's violence against "defenceless" Frado, Wilson warns that an inconsiderately blunt display of sympathy can cause more negative consequences to a sufferer.

More importantly, Aunt Abby's sympathy readily disappears whenever she fulfills her capitalist purpose through the exploration of Frado. Aunt Abby exhibits her physical presence to demand her right to the Bellmonts' homestead. Frado in the Bellmont household is a sort of human property that Aunt Abby may want to keep under her right to the homestead. Foreman calls this "the contradictory investments of anti-slavery friends at home" that Wilson negatively portrays in her novel (51). This explains the reason that Aunt Abby discourages Frado from escaping the Bellmont house by "map[ping] the dangers of [Frado's] course, her liability to fail in finding so good friends as [Mr. Bellmont] and [Abby] herself" (108). Her dissuasion resembles a Southern slave owner's coaxing slaves not to run away.¹¹⁴ On the surface of this advice, Aunt Abby worries on Frado's behalf. However, given that Abby herself knows well Mr. Bellmont's involuntariness to protect Frado from his wife's cruelty, her advice does not sound

¹¹⁴ In his first narrative, Frederick Douglass recalls that his master, Hugh Thomas, discouraged him from escaping the South: "[Master Thomas] said, if I behaved myself properly, he would take care of me. Indeed, he advised me to complete thoughtlessness of the future, and taught me to depend solely upon him for happiness" (67). Similarly, Harriet Jacobs also criticizes slaveholders' leniency to keep their slaves afraid of freedom: "[Slaveholders] tell their slaves of the runaways they have seen, and describe them to be in the most deplorable condition. [. . .] Many of the slaves believe such stories, and think it is not worth while to exchange slavery for such a hard kind of freedom" (43).

considerable for Frado. To restrain the corporeal and economic abuse that Frado experiences, Aunt Abby establishes disciplinary intimacy with Frado. This intimate relationship works ultimately to perpetuate Frado's servitude and Aunt Abby's indirect but undeniable ownership.

If Aunt Abby disguises her materialistic desire as emotional identification with Frado, the disabled daughter of the Bellmonts, Jane, seems to be a better sympathizer than her aunt. Jane's bodily sickness leads her to see Frado's suffering from the family members' physical abuse. Jane is alienated no less than Aunt Abby and Frado in the Bellmont house because of her physical incapacity. Jane also knows the dehumanizing effect of Frado's physical pain through her own disability. Their bodies' pains and incurability may tie them with mutual sympathies. Jane's physical weakness reminds the readers of Stowe's little angel Eva. However, Jane incarnates the realistic version of Eva; that is, she is a sharp contrast to Eva whose sentimental power moves less sympathetic audiences toward Topsy. Whereas Eva's dying body enables her to feel Topsy's invisible pain and merges with her at last, Jane, despite her bodily pain shared with Frado, only takes advantage of Frado's vulnerable black body to uphold her own superior position over Frado. For this reason, Jane does not unhesitatingly express her sympathy for Frado. Hearing about Frado's agony from Aunt Abby, Jane hides out: "[Jane] would gladly have concealed [Frado] in her own chamber, and ministered to her wants; but she was dependent on Mary and her mother for care, and any displeasure caused by attention to Nig, was seriously felt" (46). Later, Wilson comments: "Jane needed to complete her character, but [. . .] her ill health may in a measure have failed to produce" (55). Given

that Frado develops her character as a subject in the end of *Our Nig* despite her physical adversities, Wilson indirectly contrasts Jane's incapability to consciously overcome her overdependence on Mrs. Belmont's authority to Frado's heroism as an independent mother.

As a matter of fact, the pain leaves Jane in a tenuous position between a full-bodied black woman (Frado) and a disembodied-powerful white woman (Mrs. Belmont and Mary). Since she needs Mary and her mother for her own survival at the Bellmonts' house, Jane has to obtain their favor by breaking the emotional alliance with Frado. Furthermore, at the cost of Frado's body, Jane attempts to confirm her membership in the Bellmont family. The more Frado becomes exposed to Mrs. Belmont's surveillance, the more Jane appears to be invisible and intangible. Karen Ho and Wende Elizabeth Marshall define whiteness as "invisible, normative, and blameless" (212). Jane reinforces her whiteness by keeping her disabled body invisible and consequently becoming blameless. It is not surprising that Frado refuses to leave the Bellmonts for Jane after Jane's marriage: "[B]ut so wearied out was [Frado] by her mistress, she felt disposed to flee from any and everyone having her [mistress's] similitude of name or feature" (110). As Wilson accuses Jane of her self-interest, Frado understands that Jane will make use of her in a way of overcoming her own unstable position as a white woman with a disabled body by keeping Frado's vulnerable body violated and tortured.

Among all the characters, Mrs. Belmont is the only one who never exchanges her sentiment with Frado, as Wilson depicts her "not as susceptible of fine emotions as her spouse" (25). Rather, she invests the best of her emotional energy in her youngest

daughter Mary. Mrs. Belmont's obsession with Mary draws so heavily on both the fantasy of racial purity and her anxiety about a failure at proving that purity. The only moment of Mrs. Belmont's deep sentiment for another appears when Mary dies untimely: "Never was Mrs. B. known to shed tears so profusely, as when she reiterated to one and another the sad particulars of her darling's sickness and death" (107). In fact, her white womanhood is coupled with what Mary and Frado respectively represent. Whereas Mrs. Belmont is born white like Mary, her labor at home blurs her racial identity and even "blackens" her like Frado. For instance, she complains that she cannot find any proper maid for her before having Frado: "I have so much trouble with girls I hire, [. . .]. I am tired of changing every few months" (26). It implies that she often has to perform both a white lady and a housemaid that she as a middle-class white woman is not supposed to be. Her double duty belies her white womanhood substantiated by her "given" race and class. Mrs. Belmont conceptually identifies herself with Mary, in desperately differentiating Mary from her racial counterpart Frado. Her affective identification with Mary certifies her identity that is shared with Mary. Mrs. Belmont's excessive affection for Mary parallels her emotional withdrawal from Frado. Frado becomes an antithesis of what Mrs. Belmont wants to identify with herself.

However, what troubles Mrs. Belmont is that the two girls racially resemble each other. When the Belmont members discuss whether to keep Frado, Jack notices that Frado is not completely black: "Keep her, [. . .]. She's real handsome and bright, and not very black, either" (25). As Jack observes, Frado does not have "many shades darker than Mary" (39). He also insists that Mary will call Frado "*our* Nig" soon as though the girls

were siblings. To Mrs. Bellmont, the less distinguishability between Frado and her daughter Mary may be “a calamity” (39). The novel insinuates that people are confused about the two girls’ racial identities and Mrs. Bellmont hears “the contrast spoken of” (39). Mary appears to be racially ambiguous again when she dies. On hearing about her death, Frado says to Aunt Abby, “S’posen she goes to hell, she’ll be as black as I am. Wouldn’t mistress be mad to see her a nigger!” (107). Because of their resemblance, Mrs. Bellmont’s affection for Mary alludes to the mother’s possible inclination to Frado. For the same reason, her hatred of Frado conflicts with her recognition of Frado’s endearing quality that Mary also has. Mrs. Bellmont builds the strongest affective tie with Mary, and to maintain this tie, the mother has to deny her own motherly feeling for Frado. Her motherhood serves her selfish purpose for attesting a racial division within one gender category between herself and Frado. When Frado suffers the harsh materiality of black female body, Mrs. Bellmont can reside in the ideological category of “true womanhood.”

Constructing Whiteness By “Blackening” Frado’s Body

Frado demystifies white motherhood and a mother(figure)’s sympathetic alliance with black women by revealing the nature of construction of white motherhood. All of white mother or sympathizers—Mag, Aunt Abby, Jane, and Mrs. Bellmont—construct their whiteness at the cost of Frado’s body. In *Impossible Purities* Jennifer Brody claims that racialized and sexualized “black” women were crucial to the construction of Englishness as a form of “white” male subjectivity in the nineteenth-century England. Likewise, in Wilson’s *Our Nig* Frado’s body serves as a foundation of these white women’s racial and gender identities for white female subjectivity. Illustrating a series of

events in a histrionic setting and characterization, the writer leads the readers to observe how they construct whiteness through Frado's visible, vulnerable, useful, punishable, and, therefore, black body. This abstract and undeterminable concept of whiteness becomes perceivable to both the white female characters and the readers only if Frado actualizes blackness in her performance of an orphan, indentured servant and practical slave, defenseless child, and tortured body.

The theatricality of *Our Nig* suggests that the home, supposed to be a private and affective space, turns into a conceptual stage of Frado's performance to the reader in the public. As a result, Wilson highlights the home—an idealized place of maternalist politics and domesticity for social reforms—where, in fact, family members reinforce social hierarchy between race, class, and gender. Kathleen Brown argues that, for middle-class women and children in the antebellum period, “domestic spaces consolidated social identities defined through privacy, purity, and a partial release from the manual labor that foreclosed the possibility of gentility” (215). By revealing how social discourses are reproduced and practiced in the private space through Frado, Wilson challenges Stowe's ideal of home as a site where white women actualize domestic and feminine values to cure outer society's moral corruption. Neal A. Lester claims that the novel's subtitles—*Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, in a Two-Story White House, North, Showing That Slavery's Shadows Fall Even There*—already implies its drama/theater trope. These long subtitles “establish settings for the drama” in which Wilson “unfolds [the story of Frado] locally, geographically, physically, and psychologically” (349). The story's setting “in a two-story house,” continues Lester, “affords a visible physical space, a setting, or central

stage upon which characters act out or demonstrate through their actions or inactions their ineffectuality, their conscious and unconscious prejudices” (349). It is not coincidental that the novel presents many scenes with histrionic descriptions. For example, the audiences, Mr. Belmont and Aunt Abby, are “hearing the noise” from the stage, and rush “just in time to see the last of [Frado’s] performance” under Mrs. Belmont’s directing (44). Invited to look into the Bellmonts’ private place, the reader-observer discovers the lacks of intimacy and domesticity in their house.

Lester’s term “the theater-as-rhetoric” deserves our attention to understand the significance of the theatricality of Wilson’s *Our Nig*. According to him, Wilson not only stages herself through her theatrical ego Frado’s performance, but also borrows a form of theater as “rhetorical strategy in moving her reading audience immediately into a dramatization of the moral and social ills under attack” (348). As if the writer imitates “a didactic morality play,” Wilson, at the end of Frado’s performance, leads the reader “toward rigorous moral and ethical self-examination and ultimately toward social action and reform” (Lester 349). “[T]o watch this meta-dramatic narrative unfold is,” maintains Lester, “to engage Wilson’s reading audience in an exercise that is socially and politically more immediate, more intellectually and emotionally concentrated, more intense, and ultimately more directly self-reflective” (350). In this sense, the reading audiences critically examine the sympathy that they may have for Frado, and sees that it cannot always work to mobilize them to act for enslaved blacks. By staging the Bellmont family and Frado, *Our Nig* unsettles both idle sympathizers on stage and action-less audiences on the other side of the stage.

We, reading *Our Nig*, shall not expect the same kind of spectacular performance that Stowe in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* offers as literary piquancy for the reader who might be bored with the writer's didactic rhetoric. The most active characters, Mrs. Belmont and Mary, punish Frado in a sedentary manner. As they whip her in a locked room or kitchen, their motion is spatially restricted. The rest of the family members are motionless and physically confined in a small space. Aunt Abby stays in one chamber of the house to demand her right of the homestead, as if she believes her physical presence in the house is demonstrative enough to retain her right against the Belmont family's indifference with her. Another daughter, Jane, is physically disabled and remains almost invisible and voiceless in her little room. Our protagonist, Frado, is "the only moving power in the house" (62), although she often complains about her physical feebleness and the constant pains restrains her from dynamically acting. For these reasons, Wilson's characters may hardly be considered outwardly "acting" in front of the reading audiences.

Nonetheless, Harriet Wilson stages the text itself, which is the most actual and dramatic action. Because the novel is based on her personal history, the writer has to take a theatrical voice in transferring the memory into written language. On the one hand, the main character, Frado, is the performer of Mrs. Belmont who controls Frado with her matriarchal authority within the text. On the other, Frado is the performer of Harriet Wilson who actualizes the writer's selfhood that was once denied by her white mistress and other Belmont members. Additionally, the third-person omnipresent narrator represents Wilson's dual selves: one is Wilson, the writer-self, who creates the characters to reconstruct the history centering Frado; and another is Frado, the character-self, who

plays a role of little Harriet on the writer's literary stage. Regarding these double-layered character and voice in Wilson's *Our Nig*, R. J. Ellis contends that the narrator leads the reader's attention to "how Frado is performatively *staging* a self-identity, rather than experiencing a straightforward moment of self-discovery" (160). The novel, therefore, discloses the characters' lack of actions in front of Wilson's audience who expects them to perform. Watching the characters' inability to act for Frado, the audience may feel uneasy with his or her own immobility outside of the text.

The novel mainly focuses on events in the kitchen and dining room of the Belmont house. According to the grammar of sentimental fiction in the nineteenth century, a kitchen stands for the ideal of Christian white women's sentimentality and morality. Gillian Brown, exemplifying the kitchens in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, argues that the domestic values embodied in kitchen "represent an alternative, moral, feminine, organization of life which could radically reform American society" (Gillian Brown, *Individualism*, 17). However, the kitchen in this novel is not a private sphere of the white family but a miniature of the collective experience with race, class, gender, and maternity in public. Rather than the most private, feminine, and intimate place, Stowe's projection of her feminine ideal onto the kitchen actually provides an aberration of paternalism in a domestic sphere. For instance, Myra Jehlen maintains that Stowe "reaffirm[s] [women's] feudal placement, at the same time establishing an equivalent place of subservience for blacks" and "appropriates the patriarchal ideology only to force it to repossess itself" (399). What is sought in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is "not autonomy but reconciliation" between the domestic and public space, once patriarchy is "reformed"

(Jehlen 399). Wilson bluntly uncovers Mrs. Belmont's kitchen run by her matriarchal authority that is not indistinguishable from its white-male counterpart. Her kitchen is the most public and anti-feminine place in the house where "true womanhood" is impossible.

Our Nig illustrates the kitchen from the black female subject Frado's perspective. In his review of Ishmael Reed's *Reckless Eyeballing*, Darryl Pinckney conceptualizes the kitchen's symbolic meaning to black women. According to him, black women's concerns "had earlier belonged to what was considered the private, rather than the public [. . .]. But it turned out that the concerns of the kitchen were big enough to encompass the lore of struggle and survival." He uses the kitchen as a metaphor of black women's private territory where they create public discourses on black female subjectivity distinguishable from white feminism and black masculinity. Similarly, Laura Sloan Patterson argues that kitchens in literary texts about slavery offer "important political arenas in the criticism of these [texts]" (19). The transparency of the family affair on Wilson's stage elucidates that Frado's personal experiences in the private space are intersected with public discourses in antebellum America. The Belmont house of a "white bourgeois household" serves as a site "in producing and reproducing the classed forms of racial inferiority" (Santamarina 69). By exposing Mrs. Belmont's private kitchen, in Julia Stern's term, "through her reading public," Wilson leads the readers to find their responsibility for Frado's hardships (458).

The kitchen in the Bellmonts household is operated by Mrs. Belmont's monstrous motherhood that reveals the horror and terror of a white matriarchy's violence and cruelty. Mrs. Belmont as a director of Frado's performance enjoys demonstrating her

power in this specific space. Her “favorite exercise” is “to enter the apartment [kitchen] noisily, vociferate orders, give a few sudden blows to quicken Nig’s pace, then return to the sitting room with *such* a satisfied expression, congratulating herself upon her thorough house-keeping qualities” (66 italics original). The cruelty of Mrs. Bellmont’s daily routine is represented by a rawhide: “At first she wept aloud, which Mrs. Bellmont noticed by applying a rawhide, always at hand in the kitchen. It was a symptom of discontent and complaining which must be ‘nipped in the bud,’ she said” (30). The rawhide at the mistress’s hand breaks the peaceful stereotype of a caring mother’s cooking place, as she replaces kitchen utensils with the rawhide. As the “symptom of discontent and complaining” suggests, the kitchen is not a place for abundant foods and physical satisfaction. In addition, Mrs. Bellmont’s language, “nipped in the bud,” figuratively indicates that Frado’s body serves as a raw ingredient in the kitchen, as if her body could be “squeezed” or “bitten.”

The kitchen and dining room stand for respectively opposite meanings in the Bellmonts’ house. Frado is ordered to eat “her breakfast, consisting of a bowl of skimmed milk, with brown bread crusts, [. . .], standing, by the kitchen table, and must not be over ten minutes about it. Meanwhile the family were taking their morning meal in the dining-room” (29). The spatial division between kitchen and dining room corresponds with the social division between Frado and the Bellmont family. Food consumption with proper manners is part of social and domestic rituals, taking place in a dining room in a Victorian house. Mary Titus points out that Catherine and Harriet Beecher sisters like other domestic reformers regard the dining room as “a sacred space where the family

could commune together” (245). However, this dining room disguises the cruelty of black domestics’ working condition in the kitchen. According to Titus, the separation of kitchen from dining room stands for the “‘ritual break’ between black food preparation and white consumption” (247). As Mrs. Bellmont’s allusion to Frado’s “edible” body, the white family consumes foods at the cost of Frado’s body that is materialized and violated in the kitchen. More importantly, Titus notes that black women, ironically in the kitchen, could “establish an authority that potentially threatened the white household at its very center—in the dining room and its rituals” (247). In the scene of the family dinner, Frado demonstrates that her body cannot be consumed in the kitchen, by taking Mrs. Bellmont’s seat in the dining room.

Even though Mrs. Bellmont rules over Frado in the kitchen and dining room, Frado changes them into a stage for her struggle and survival against Mrs. Bellmont’s oppression. Because of his sickness, James relies on Frado’s attentive care. Staying at a dinner table with the brothers is one of James’s requests that Frado must follow. After the family finishes dinner, Frado “seat[s] herself in her mistress’ chair” to have her meal (71). Wilson stresses Frado’s intentional act to usurp Mrs. Bellmont’s place by using the emphatic pronoun “herself.” When Frado is about to have a clean dessert plate, Mrs. Bellmont enters the kitchen, her stage, and orders, “Put that plate down; you shall not have a clean one; eat from mine.” However, Frado thinks, “[t]o eat after James, his wife or Jack, would have been pleasant; but to be commanded to do what was disagreeable by her mistress, *because* it was disagreeable, was trying.” Then, she takes the mistress’ plate to Frado’s dog Fido who washes it “to the best of his ability with his tongue” (71).

Through this subverted role-play, Frado plays a role of Mrs. Bellmont in the dining room, while her mistress is dehumanized to a status lower than the dog, Fido.

Frado actualizes the performance arranged by herself not by the stage director Mrs. Bellmont because the performer Frado considers her order “disagreeable.” In fact, Frado as a performer notices that Mrs. Bellmont would not be a capable director as early as her arrival at the Bellmont house. Mrs. Bellmont, as depicted “self-willed, haughty, undisciplined, arbitrary and severe,” speaks in a voice of “self-importance” (25). While performing against the mistress’s order, Frado prioritizes the dog instead of Mrs. Bellmont. During her performance of feeding the dog with Mrs. Bellmont’s plate, Frado replaces her with Fido. A black domestic (slave) is lower than a house dog, as Harriet Jacobs illustrates in her narrative. The cook for the Flints has to eat what their dog refuses to eat (Jacobs 12-13). Although Frado does not have to eat what Fido leaves, her status is not much different from the cook who Jacobs observes. In the scene, Mrs. Bellmont is usurped by Frado first, and then, even is superseded by her black servant’s dog. Frado’s theatrical act alludes that the white woman is displaced from the table for human beings because of her “cruel appetites” the same as the dog’s (Kyla Tompkins 218). Through this role-play, Frado converts Mrs. Bellmont’s stage into her own space for the transgressive performance. Frado’s acting of Mrs. Bellmont reveals the performative nature of the white race and femininity that Mrs. Bellmont maintains by forcing Frado to play a specifically racialized and gendered role in the house.

Frado’s unruliness suggested in the beginning of the novel insinuates her resistance to the white mother figures’ attempt for directing her body. Reminding the

readers of Topsy's merrymaking performance in the streets of New Orleans, Mag says that little Frado "is such a wild, frolicky [*sic*] thing, and means to do jest as she's a mind to." Because she is "a hard one" with her unruly behavior, Mag and stepfather Seth decide to abandon her as an indentured servant to the Bellmonts (18-19). In addition, after showing Frado's chamber, the Bellmonts' son Jack remarks that Frado "would soon outgrow the quarters" where she must stay (27). He outwardly means that the chamber will be too small for Frado to reside as she grows up. Nevertheless, his attention to her over-sized growth can be associated with Ophelia's interest in Topsy's being "grow'd." Leading the readers to infer Frado's unrestricted growth from Jack's remark, Wilson suggests Frado's possibility of metaphorically "outgrowing" the assigned space in the Bellmont house. Frado outmatches the two mothers with her expressive and expansive body, which characterizes the theatrical demonstration of her resistance to their disciplines.

Frado's schooling is significant in that she as a black girl learns the necessity of being theatrical to survive. After overcoming the schoolmates' antipathy against her for being black, Frado understands her place as one "who looks not on outward appearance, but on the heart" (32). She tries to "normalize" her difference by appealing to the schoolmates, and performs "on the heart." As a result, Frado witnesses "a manifest change of [their] deportment towards 'Nig.' Her speeches often drew merriment from the children; no one could do more to enliven their favorite pastimes than Frado" (32-33). At school, Frado behaves like a popular clown with "at some sly prank" among the

schoolmates for pastimes (38). Frado's popularity again reminds us of Topsy's spectacular performance in front of the "young uns."

However, Frado's performance in favor of the schoolmates does not give her relief from the domestic violence. Because of her jealousy of Frado's popularity, Mary sets up Frado's alleged fault by pretending that Frado pushed her to hurt her into a ditch. Mary exhibits her soiled body with the "anger flashing" eyes (34). Although Mary acts so poorly that Mr. Bellmont neglects her gesture, Frado is trapped by Mary's routine performance. Frado fails to switch the patterns of her performance according to a different stage setting, which she learns gradually in the Bellmonts household. Honestly responding to Mrs. Bellmont's interrogation, Frado as a good-hearted schoolmate still performs "on the heart" to her. Yet, Frado does not know the slippery language of Topsy's "Dunno" and mischievous grins, but "passionately" and "truthfully" says, "I did n't do it! I did n't do it!" (34). Her honesty results in more punishment for her. From this incident, Frado realizes the necessity of faking herself or of wearing an actor's mask to outplay the hostile co-performer Mary and to confront the stage director Mrs. Bellmont. Consequently, Frado's performance not only aims at survival at the Bellmont house but also promotes her self-expressive performance to rebel against the white motherly figures who attempt to discipline her.

Embodying Whiteness on Frado's Stage

Lois Leveen pays attention to Frado's *performing blackness* by employing some of the ideas of Saidiya Hartman. Hartman, who is mentioned for the argument on Topsy in the previous chapter, explains whites' voyeuristic pleasure and terror at African

Americans under slavery. Leveen insists, “[t]he white members of the Belmont household all ‘enjoy’ Frado’s ‘performance’ of blackness, although the nature of that enjoyment varies” (571-72). Under Mrs. Belmont’s directing, Frado is instrumentalized not only as a house servant but also as a racial object on which the Bellmonts’ economic and racial identities heavily depend. According to Debra King, a slave owner’s power cannot dispense with “the slave’s symbolic representation as an outsider and a failed social being—a socially dead, living being” (*Pain* 16). As a result, the owner can “validate their relationship to inherited power” (King, *Pain*, 16). Frado’s *performing blackness* racially objectifies her, molds her into the blackness that Frado is required by Mrs. Belmont to embody through hard toils and constant pains on the body.

It is notable that Wilson does not describe how Frado feels but gives the readers snapshots of what Frado’s observers see. By letting the in-text observers mediate Frado’s feelings, the writer creates the rhetorical distance between Frado and readers. This distance allows a space for the readers’ meddling in the story where Frado’s observers are incapable of helping her. Frado invites the out-of-text observers to see her body’s stillness in pain, which this chapter calls Frado’s *performative blackness*. In the observers’ minds, Frado’s body becomes so vivid that they imagine her pain with their painless bodies. While witnessing Frado’s performance of stillness in pain, the readers learn how her unmovable body offers emotional power.

In contrast to Topsy who corresponds to her observers’ expectation for a lively bodily movement, Frado cannot move her body for dramatic exhibition. Instead, she must bear bodily pains in a static manner. Frado is exposed to dangers of physical injury,

mutilation, corporeal punishment, and disease. As a matter of fact, the white characters are not exceptional to these dangers. Jane, as discussed above, conceals her sufferable body out of sight in order to maintain her whiteness. Even though Mrs. Bellmont does not express any anxiety about her physical vulnerability, she can conceive that anxiety while disembodying herself as an absolute power that violates Frado's body. Carol Henderson argues that "the *physical* marking of bonded Africans" results from whites' "*imagined* anxieties concerning the corporeality of American personhood." Nevertheless, the physical signs of "branding (a sign of ownership and possession) and whip-scarring (a sign of punishment)" on the black body "bec[o]me the *signatures* of slavery and crystallized, in vivid fashion, those assumptions maintained in the social systems of that age that held black life in such low regard" (Henderson, *Scarring*, 23). Therefore, Frado's ailment signals Mrs. Bellmont's victory over her, and certifies the mistress's ownership of her body as a mere labor-source and living commodity. As far as Frado feels bodily pains, she herself also notices that she is deprived of a right to her own body. Frado's physical vulnerability to Mrs. Bellmont's violence indicates Frado's racial identity that marks her inferior to Mrs. Bellmont.

Although the main tension that steers the plot of *Our Nig* comes from Mrs. Bellmont's physical and consequently emotional torture of Frado, Wilson does not straightforwardly depicts how much pain Frado's body feels. Given that Frado is the writer's fictional persona, the character's silence on or Wilson's omission of attentively described pain is questionable. Instead of expressing the pain with descriptive language, Frado lets a third observer see, hear, and describe it. For instance, when Mrs. Bellmont,

believing Mary's invented story against Frado, punishes Frado, Jack seeks the innocent girl and sees "her mouth wedged apart, her face swollen, and full of pain" (36). The readers hear about Frado's "full of pain" not from Frado herself but from Jack. Even if an observer is ready to witness the pain, Frado in severe pain often passes from sight. A good example is the scene in which Mrs. Bellmont kicks Frado for punishment: "Before [Frado] could rise, another foiled the attempt, and the followed kick after kick in quick succession and power, till she reached the door. Mr. Bellmont and Aunt Abby, hearing the noise, rushed in, just in time to see the last of the performance. Nig jumped up, and rushed from the house, out of sight" (44). Mr. Bellmont and Aunt Abby want to "see" what happens in the kitchen, which Wilson calls "the last of the performance." However, before they see her suffering, Frado disappears.

Then, why does Wilson avoid illustrating Frado's pain graphically and directly? The writer recognizes, above all, that Frado like other black slaves is not allowed to express her pain and, secondly, that she is even not supposed to be sentient. Punishing Frado for her rebellious gesture in the dining table, Mrs. Bellmont threatens: "if [Frado] ever exposed her to James, [Mrs. Bellmont] would 'cut her tongue out'" (72). Even in writing about what the observers see and feel about Frado, Wilson excludes Frado's own sentiment as if the writer pretends not to have experienced it. In so doing, Wilson shows that not only are blacks silenced but also they are not supposed to feel for themselves. Nevertheless, because every observer cannot miss her pain in looking at Frado, the writer's omission of description on the pain reveals the immense gap between its seriousness and language's inexpressibility of it. Through her intentional reticence about

the heroine's suffering, the writer cautions against any attempts to assume the pain and to confine it within the frame of language.

The forced silence and language's inexpressibility of the pain leave room for an observer's visual imagining of Frado's body in pain. Suffering Mrs. Bellmont's oppression, Frado becomes a visible object for the pain's public consumption in this imagination.¹¹⁵ For example, Jack is insensible to her pain when Frado takes a risk of breaking her neck during repairing the roof of the family barn. Looking at Frado, "Mrs. B. and Mary did not care if she 'broke her neck,' while Jack and the [working] men laughed at her fearlessness. Strange, one spark of playfulness could remain amid such constant toil" (53). In Jack's imagination, Frado's body is in danger but playfully escapes it. His amusement can be associated with a circus audience's excitement of seeing an acrobat's or even an animal's dangerous performance. However, differently from an acrobat, Frado's body is directly exposed to possible injuries. As Wilson remarks, it is "[s]trange" that the sadistic audience finds something "playful" in Frado's "constant toil" and physical endangerment. Moreover, just as Mrs. Bellmont exploits Frado as if she were a slave with an unlimited source of physical labor, Jack converts the value of her bodily pain into capital, without noticing Frado's humanity instead of the consumable physicality. When Frado challenges Mrs. Bellmont's authority in the dining room by taking a risk of getting punished for this, Jack gives her "a bright, silver half-dollar" as a

¹¹⁵ In *African Americans and the Culture of Pain* Debra Walker King argues that this public consumption of the black body's pain is discovered in "the popular and recurring image of black bodies in pain as a normalized representation of suffering" (15). Photos, film, and other cultural products have regarded the black body as material representations of pain. And, she claims that this "misrepresentation of the black body ultimately assists in building the mythology of who is and who is not 'American'" (15).

reward for her rebellious performance against his mother (72). However, he does not help her relieve from the mother's harsh punishment for her challenge later.

In addition to Jack's imaginative self-gratification, an observer's lack of imagination is equally problematic. An observer easily fails to sympathetically identify him or herself with Frado since her pain transcends what white observers can perceive. An observer's sympathetic identification with a sufferer is possible only within the observer's imaginative replacement with the sufferer. However, because of its extremeness Frado's body in pain does not allow an observer to readily imagine the pain. While Jack is blind to Frado's physical agony, other observers like Mr. Bellmont eschew it since they cannot stand its goriness. In Mr. Bellmont's mind, the physical signs of Frado's pain are too visible and overwhelming to watch them. When Mrs. Bellmont's anger at Frado looks pent-up, Mr. Bellmont walks out impatient with his wife's beating of Frado: "No sooner was [Mr. Bellmont] out of sight than Mrs. B. and Mary commenced beating her inhumanly" (35). However, "while the tempest raged within, Mr. Bellmont went for the cows, a task belonging to Frado, and thus unintentionally prolonged her pain" (35). He worsens his wife's cruel treatment of Frado, first, because he does not intervene in Mrs. Bellmont, and second, because he unwisely expresses his concern about Frado by making up her absence from her routine work. In other words, his reluctance to see and imagine Frado's suffering as his own "unintentionally" exasperates her pain. Critically presenting these insensitive observers, Wilson asks the readers to attentively "see" and "feel" the sign of Frado's pain instead of playfully appropriating or avoiding it.

The way that Wilson leads the readers to “see” and “feel” Frado’s suffering body matches Harvey Young’s phrase, “Being becomes becoming” (17).¹¹⁶ Frado gradually performs herself out of Mrs. Belmont’s directing, actualizing her *performative blackness*. Frado performs the body in pain as it is. Although her body is static and inactive due to the pain (“being”), she demonstrates the body itself as a tool to make her observers act for her (“becoming”). In so doing, Frado confronts both idle sympathizers and racist antagonists who use her for their selfish purposes. As Cynthia Davis speculates, “[l]anguage in *Our Nig* is no longer antithetical to pain, instead, language serves to make pain and even ‘our nig’ herself intelligible” (399). Frado converts her pain into a language accusing the white sympathizers of their failure to speak for Frado, by not inscribing racial difference residing between a sympathizer and a sufferer but transcending it.

Frado’s bodily pain remains incurable even though the white sympathizers pretentiously display affection and pity for her because that it only results in racializing and gendering Frado’s pain as exclusively experienced by blacks. Through Frado, Wilson alludes that the history of the black body’s pains in the context of racism and slavery can hardly be imagined or described by white writers, in particular, Stowe. By disqualifying the white observers’ sentiment for her, Frado evades the affective loop of the disciplinary intimacy through which they have reinforced the racial hierarchy. She does not ask any

¹¹⁶ Young revises E. Patrick Johnson’s study of Marlon Riggs, the black documentary filmmaker who died untimely because of an HIV-complicated illness. Johnson focuses on Riggs’s death as a moment when the filmmaker becomes “reconstituted in our current discourse on AIDS” (qtd. in Young 17). Despite his death, his body enters the discursive realm of blackness, which Young calls, “Being becomes becoming.” However, Young does not agree that a black body needs to die to be revived in discourses. Just like Frado’s body already exists in Jack’s imagination, the body “is always discursive, even while fleshed (or projected across flesh)” (18).

relief from the bodily pain or understanding of her sentience in order to become a feeling subject like Topsy. Rather, Frado's constantly aching and suffering body per se manifests her ontological certainty regardless of the observers' approval of her subjectivity. The sheer material factualness of the pained body authenticates her as a feeling subject with ineradicable humanity.

Frado's power emerges notably when her body and its pain reverse other characters' roles. Frado for the first time discovers the power of physical suffering when confronting with Mary during Mrs. Bellmont's absence from the house. One day Frado is too sick to work according to Mary's demand. Despite her effort to stand up, Frado's body helplessly "sink[s] down" (64). Mary becomes so enraged at Frado's delayed performance that she brings a large carving knife to threaten Frado for prompt fulfillment of her duties. The knife wielded by Mary mistakenly gets stuck in the ceiling, invoking "Mary's mental vision a picture of bloodshed, in which she was the perpetrator, and the sad consequences of what was so nearly an actual occurrence" (65). Because Frado's bodily materiality can be easily mutilated and violated, Mary immediately associates the scene with Frado's "bloodshed" body. "[T]errified" by her own imagination, she steps back from her co-performer Frado (65). It indicates that the vulnerability of Frado's body can obfuscate Mary from performing the whiteness. From Mary's bewilderment, Frado finds that her body's pain can reassign the co-performer's role as a "perpetrator" instead of a "white director." Even though the black body is accompanied by pain, the pain not only makes Frado's body "visible and legible to the readership," as Kyla Tompkins argues (216), but also entitles Frado to somewhat control others.

While in imagining Frado's bloody body, Mary recognizes the instability of her whiteness, Wilson's antagonistic stage-director Mrs. Belmont has to belie her whiteness in order to empower herself. An irony is that Mrs. Belmont symbolically becomes Frado in her own effort to prescribe the girl's body. Whereas Mrs. Belmont intends to establish her whiteness by materializing Frado's "useful" body, she does not succeed in differentiating her body from Frado's after all. Mrs. Belmont must demonstrate to Frado how to perform blackness prior to ordering her to imitate it. For example, Frado is called by Mrs. Belmont to learn how to feed the hens: "[Frado] was shown [by Mrs. Belmont] how it was *always* to be done, and in no other way; any departure from this rule to be punished by a whipping" (29 italics original). Mrs. Belmont deliberately designates Frado's identity as a black slave by treating her as if she were a domestic slave of a Southern home (Ellis 169). If Frado were a real slave as those in the South, she might have black "mammies" and "aunties" who could teach her a domestic slave's duties. However, in her Northern home, Mrs. Belmont's performing blackness is a prerequisite for Frado's satisfying performance. To see Frado's performance, Mrs. Belmont has to perform blackness better than Frado can do, and, at the same time, Frado becomes an audience of her mistress's performance that "blackens" Mrs. Belmont.

In this educational role-play, Mrs. Belmont unintentionally demonstrates her white body as a consumable workforce and tangible material just like Frado's black body. Simply put, the white mistress must cast herself as a black slave to maintain her whiteness. The role-play questions any presence of innate racial characteristics. Not only does Mrs. Belmont's whiteness become blurred but also Frado's blackness turns out to

be undetermined. Mrs. Bellmont as a “white” woman embodies putative “black” behavior, and Frado as a “black” woman witnesses the estranged blackness through the mistress’s white body. Consequently, Frado as a primary audience of Mrs. Bellmont observes “the performative nature of whiteness” with which white Americans, represented by Mrs. Bellmont in the novel, establish themselves “as the unmarked, unchallenged normative site of power” (Brody 8-9). This theatrical inversion on stage makes Frado’s bodily realization of *performative blackness* possible.

Frado’s pained body facilitates these switched roles between Mrs. Bellmont and Frado. When Frado has been tortured for a long time and at last becomes gravely ill, Mr. Bellmont ventures to protect her from his wife’s cruel treatment by encouraging Frado to confront her mistress. He tells Frado, because “he ha[s] seen her many times punished undeservedly,” “when she [i]s *sure* she d[oes] not deserve a whipping,” she needs “to avoid it if she could.” Mr. Bellmont as a witness testifies to Frado’s hardships and his wife’s cruelty. He resolves to show sympathy for her because he has observed Frado’s physical sickness: “You are looking sick, [. . .] you cannot endure beating as you once could” (104). Significantly, Mr. Bellmont’s comment on her physical limit is crucial to Frado’s realization of her body’s productivity. She has been exploited not because of her blackness but because of her body’s usefulness and the Bellmont family’s dependency on it. Even though Mr. Bellmont is still a detached sympathizer who does not practically help her, Frado at least uses his encouragement and support to justify her upcoming defiance of Mrs. Bellmont. The following quote describes the famous wood-file scene:

It was not long before an opportunity offered of profiting by [Mr. Belmont's] advice. [Frado] was sent for wood, and not returning as soon as Mrs. B. calculated, she followed her, and, snatching from the pile a stick, raised it over her. "Stop!" shouted Frado, "strike me, and I'll never work a mite more for you;" and throwing down what she had gathered, stood like one who feels the stirring of free and independent thoughts. By this unexpected demonstration, her mistress, in amazement, dropped her weapon, desisting from her purpose of chastisement. Frado walked towards the house, her mistress following with the wood she herself was sent after. She did not know, before, that she had a power to ward off assaults. Her triumph in seeing her enter the door with *her* burden, repaid her for much of her former suffering. (105)

Because of her body's sickness, Frado cannot promptly follow Mrs. Belmont's order. She takes this moment as "an opportunity" to "profit" Mr. Belmont's advice. Notably, Wilson uses the term "profit" to describe how Frado subversively demonstrates her sick body to justify her unwillingness to surrender herself to Mrs. Belmont's directing. Frado's black body becomes a site of racial and economic investment: her body is essential to the Belmont family's attestation of their whiteness, social and sexual superiority, and economic domination. In this scene, Frado knows the chance to retrieve her own physical capital, the pained body. Even though Mrs. Belmont "calculate[s]" the value of Frado's performance, she cannot confront Frado who refuses to offer her labor to

her. By demonstrating a gesture of the refusal to be exploited by the white family any more, Frado can feel “the stirring of free and independent thoughts.”

More significantly, the pain of Frado’s body enables her to perform the unperformable. She not only refuses to follow Mrs. Bellmont’s plan but also creates a new form of performance: performing an unmovable body with pain. Because the pain sanctions her unwillingness to conduct her duty, Frado displays her pained body as a shield from Mrs. Bellmont’s abuse. Frado’s defiance of Mrs. Bellmont’s directing is neither allowed nor expected. Just as Mrs. Bellmont has showed the model performance of blackness to direct Frado, she plays Frado’s role again in this scene. Even when Mrs. Bellmont demonstrates what Frado must imitate, Frado has remained the director’s audience in the previous scenes. By contrast, at this time, while Mrs. Bellmont plays a role of Frado by fulfilling Frado’s job, Frado performs the director’s role, as she “walk[s] towards the house, her mistress following with the wood.” The role-play is an act of self-realization to Frado. She discovers her power “to ward off [Mrs. Bellmont’s] assaults” and her triumph, observing that her oppressor now goes through Frado’s “former suffering.” As a result, Frado asserts that she “remember[s] her victory at the wood-pile. She decide[s] to remain to do as well as she could; to assert her rights when they [a]re trampled on” (108). Her act of “remaining,” in other words, of exhibiting her unperformable body refers to her theatrical insistence on “her right.” By staging this scene in her novel, Wilson makes her reader witness how Frado performatively re-appropriates her body from the Bellmont family’s attempt to materialize the black body.

Finally, Frado's pain authorizes her right to demand the reader/audience's sympathy with her and aids for her livelihood. Her first husband, Samuel, is depicted that he has not undergone enough pain to establish his subjective selfhood as a black man. What Frado first discovers from him is the lack of the evidence of his physical pain: "He was a fine, straight negro, whose back showed no marks of the lash, erect as if it never crouched beneath a burden" (127). His bodily firmness is a quite contrast to Frado's pain-stricken body that cannot often be erect. She assumes that he must have suffered from less visible pains, which she also experiences at the Bellmont house. Therefore, Frado feels "a silent sympathy" with Samuel and opens "her heart to the presence of love" till he turns out to be an "arbitrary and inexorable tyrant" (127). Frado not only contrasts her pained body to his painless body, but also juxtaposes her truthful performance to his deceitful performance. Wilson emerges from Frado's mask to warn the reader/audience to correctly judge the pitfall of sympathy that blinds her to penetrate Samuel's insincerity. By confessing her own mistake of overlooking Samuel's deceptive theatricality, Wilson declares that her pain is real, constant, and worthy of the public's attention.

The most vivid image behind Frado's sickened and unmovable body is the writer Harriet Wilson. Although Wilson has suffered from pains, hunger, and endless labor, she does not cease to move. Out of the text, she restlessly takes care of her sick son, works for survival, writes the story, and looks for a publisher among antislavery friends. Within the text, Wilson stages the characters in front of her reader/audience. She revives Frado as a main performer, redirects the in-text director Mrs. Bellmont, and relocates the incapable sympathizers in the margin of the textual stage. On Wilson's stage, the black

body of her theatrical persona—Frado—is alive through the chronic suffering. *Our Nig* ends with the writer's appeal to the reader's emotion: "Still an invalid, she asks your sympathy, gentle reader. Refuse not, because some part of her history is unknown, save [sic] by the Omniscient God. Enough has been unrolled to demand your sympathy and aid" (130). The writer performs an act of writing in the midst of her physical sufferings as a residual of her abusive servitude for the Bellmont family and as the result of Samuel's abandonment. Wilson mentions the word "sympathy" twice, which "aid" entails. Remaining with unutterable pains, Frado/Wilson does not show any effort to recover health but expresses the necessity of living with the pained body for the reader's sympathy and aid. The pain authorizes her not only to be a feeling subject who is independent of insensitive observers but also to be an authentic mother who affectionately shares her child's suffering from being poor and black. The pained body becomes Frado/Wilson's survival strategy and solemn right to demand for the reader's payment for a ticket to her sincere performance titled *Our Nig*.

Chapter 5. Performative Texts: Sojourner Truth's (R)evolving Stage and Immortal Body

The former slave Sojourner Truth's (auto)biography, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, has sparked debates among scholars in African American studies, nineteenth-century American literary studies, and historians. Distinguished from other popular former slave writers such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, Truth did not claim that it was "written by herself" in her book's title because Truth was never literate enough to write her own narrative; therefore, it was up to her observers and transcribers to leave written records about her notable life. Since its first publication in 1850, the *Narrative* has questioned the issues surrounding the unlettered writer's authorship, autobiography as a genre, and the authenticity of Truth's voice as it was mediated by multiple scribal voices. It is not surprising that scholarly attention to Sojourner Truth's *Narrative* has focused on her role in producing written texts about herself.¹¹⁷ In the context of this scholarly discussion, this chapter uses three different editions of *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1850, 1875, and 1884) in order to argue that a performer's recognition of his or her corporeality enables her to create a literary text as a conceptual

¹¹⁷ The *Narrative* is barely mentioned as a text that requires our attentive reading for interpretation, presumably, as John Ernest assumes, because she did not write it herself (459). Nell Irvin Painter confirms, "To this day, the *Narrative* remains outside the canon of ex-slave narratives" (109). For example, William Andrews omits Sojourner Truth from his authoritative book *To Tell A Free Story: The First century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865*. Carla L. Peterson maintains that Olive Gilbert and Frances Titus used Truth to establish their identity as those who "'achieved' Culture writing on behalf of a child of Nature whose attributes are chiefly physical and thus 'ascribed'" (30). In the same context, Jeffrey Stewart critically views Gilbert as "trapped in her paternalistic view of slaves" and "unable to respect Sojourner's moral and spiritual sensibilities" (x, xl). However, Jean M. Humez argues that the *Narrative* needs to be understood beyond conventional approaches to a written text whose autobiographical subject is different from its writer. In this sense, Xiomara Santamarina asserts Truth's significance in helping these amanuenses produce works on herself (39).

stage. Despite the fractured portrait of Truth in these versions of the *Narrative*, my project studies where Truth omits her authorial voice, thus avoiding being fixed by one scribal voice. In this manner, Truth could weaken the authority of literate others and present herself as the central force behind her various observers who wrote what was collected in the *Narrative*.

Sojourner Truth was born as the slave Isabella Bomefree in upstate New York in 1797 and literally “walked away”¹¹⁸ for her freedom in 1827 after her owner, John Dumont, broke his promise to emancipate her. After her spiritual rebirth as a “Sojourner Truth” on June 1, 1843, Truth became an itinerant preacher. She is mostly remembered for her remarkable public speaking career when she began participating in the abolitionist and women’s rights movements at age fifty-three. The *Narrative* illustrates Sojourner Truth’s memorable speeches and encounters with political celebrities of her time. However, her performance in public could be preserved only in her observers’ written descriptions, for print culture in nineteenth-century America was often dissociated from oral and nonverbal performance (Worthen 7; Stetson and David 11). Some scholars have maintained that Truth’s unlettered orality gave her less credibility than former slave writers such as William Wells Brown and Frederick Douglass, and a few have even pathologized her illiteracy.¹¹⁹ Truth’s unlettered orality is not the only reason for the lack

¹¹⁸ Truth chooses to “walk away” rather than “escaping” because she believed that she deserved her freedom after the promised date. This chapter discusses this in detail later.

¹¹⁹ Carleton Mabee guesses that Truth might have learning disability as well as the interaction of her experience of slavery and the development of her character, suggesting her only remaining handwriting as its evidence (63). His speculation is not far from the view that regards illiteracy as a symptom of medical and intellectual disability caused by the oppression of slavery. Emphasizing

of scholarly attentions to political aesthetics in the *Narrative*. The multi-layered structure of the *Narrative* is another one. As John Earnest calls it a “cultural event” or a “complex bricolage” of (auto)biographical narratives, the *Narrative* includes memorabilia, letters, newspaper articles, essays, reviews, and autographs. Ironically, her illiteracy and disorganization of the *Narrative* not only increased the fascination with her for her contemporary Americans but also help our twenty first-century scholars reconsider African American autobiographical discourses.

The controversial issues on Truth’s *Narrative* that Truth scholars have raised can be summarized by the following three categories: literacy/illiteracy, authorship, and authenticity. First, if an unlettered individual needs literate others to make a written text about her/himself, the limit of articulation in a written form tends to keep the text secondary and, therefore, inferior to first-hand testimonial texts.¹²⁰ This tendency assumes that a written text can preserve a spoken narrative as it is more accessible to readers than a temporary storytelling event.¹²¹ Although we consider Truth’s oral narrative as equally important as her transcribers’ writing, another question follows: who has authorship in the case of the narrative told by Truth and written by two amanuenses

Truth’s intellect expressed by her gifted speech, Erlene Stetson and Linda David criticize this tendency to see her orality as “a pathology, a condition of negation” (11).

¹²⁰ See Jean Fagan Yelling’s *Women and Sisters: The Antislavery Feminists in American Culture*, 198 n. 3.

¹²¹ In analyzing Rigoberta Menchu’s *Testimonio*, John Beverley notes that *Testimonio* challenges “the loss of the authority of orality in the context of processes of cultural modernization that privilege literacy and literature as norms of expression” (97). However, the relation of the narrator to her interlocutor or transcriber suggests that the narrator’s lack of literacy contributes to the “truth-effect” that the form of *Testimonio* generates (94-95). Similarly, Truth’s illiteracy, on the one hand, hinders her reader’s understanding of Truth’s “true” aspects. On the other hand, this distance created by her amanuenses’ intervention in the writing process is ironically conducive to Truth’s rhetorical strategy to keep her authority and authenticity intact.

and multiple contributors? This question falls in the second category—authorship—of the issues on the *Narrative*. Truth's two amanuenses—Olive Gilbert and Frances Titus—tried to make their presences less visible by deleting their names in the front page and prefaces. At the beginning of the 1850 *Narrative*, Gilbert even confesses any possible distortion and exaggeration of Truth's narrative due to Gilbert's own lack of understanding of Truth. However, even if Truth had written a narrative titled "written by herself," her authorship as a black writer would not have been the same as a white writer's. In the Western tradition, writers of autobiography are seen to possess "a self-generating autonomy similar to that of the liberal subject" (McCoy 156). By contrast, black autobiographers could not assume "sanction for their self-affirming literary acts" in addressing white readers (Andrews 2). For this reason, William Andrews maintains that African American writers' invention of a literary form is crucial to appeal to white-dominant readership (3). This necessity of artfulness in an African American writer's autobiographical narrative entails another question about the authenticity of Truth's story. While the amanuenses mediated Truth's voice with their languages, Truth's narrative could have been distorted. In this sense, Margaret Washington simplifies the complexity of the *Narrative* by believing it as a "problem" of white testimony on behalf of a black subject (181). This "problem" in proving authenticity of the *Narrative* is the third controversial issue that this chapter investigates.

This chapter does not regard Truth's illiteracy as a limitation or as stigmatization by the legacy of slavery. At the same time, her illiteracy is not considered the only source of her subversive power. Truth did not intentionally refuse to educate herself, and it is

necessary to examine her negotiation with her amanuenses in light of this. Carla Peterson suggests that Truth's illiteracy to some extent "made possible her appropriation of different modes of 'writing' and enabled her to enter 'modernity'" (39). Truth's corporeality becomes as conspicuous as her illiteracy because her bodily labor during the enslaved past makes her physicality notable, as if it is considered as a counter example of intellectuality. Alison Piepmeier in *Out in Public* asserts that Truth's lack of literacy contributes to her corporeal and spectacular power because she overlooks Truth's agency that makes that power possible. According to Piepmeier, because Truth's body was "dramatically different from traditional models of feminine embodiment," she and her amanuenses "capitalized on these differences, emphasizing Truth's size, her strength, and her oratorical power" (93-94). "The body in the tall tale is often unattractive, even grotesque,"¹²² says Piepmeier, "due to its excessive features, including height and strength," which leads the critic to conclude that Truth also has a "body of the freak" (93). To emphasize Truth's "freakishness," Piepmeier depends heavily on the discourse of true womanhood as if it could be applied to women of color in nineteenth-century America. In fact, the cult of true womanhood in this period excluded black women. Sojourner Truth "converted this exclusion into an enabling discursive and political strategy, one which allowed her to invent new forms of black womanhood" (Merish 217). Obsessively spectacularizing Truth's corporeality, Piepmeier neglects Truth's agency that uses her unconventional, or more specifically, unwomanly body for her own purpose to

¹²² For instance, Piepmeier uses the frame of a tall-tale character invented by Davy Crockett to explain the similarity of Truth's narrative. However, this critic demonizes Truth's body by asserting that her body's peculiarity per se causes observers' awe like Crockett's character with his abnormal-sized body amuses readers.

contest different gender issues between black and white women. Rather, Piepmeier's *Out in Public* stands in the position of a white voyeur obsessed with Truth's exceptional body and whom Truth criticized by stating, "It is the mind that makes the body. If I had no mind, I would be withered up" (235).

This chapter does not simplify Truth's corporeality as if her exhibition of the black body in public would ensure that her observers understood Truth's manipulation of performance and writing. Illiteracy cannot be read simply as a direct sign of Truth's corporeal excessiveness and does not serve as a spectacular force. Rather than Truth's illiteracy, this chapter focuses on the dynamics, caused by that illiteracy, between the two amanuenses Gilbert, Titus, and the storyteller Sojourner Truth. The amanuenses were supposed to dictate Truth's story and to collect her vestiges printed in the popular press. Yet, their control over the manuscript influenced Truth's storytelling strategy, as Truth understood the importance of a printed text. In addition, Titus also struggled to transform the Truth inscribed by the earlier amanuensis Gilbert in her 1850 *Narrative* into a different Truth whom Titus wanted to illustrate in her edition. Simply put, Truth's *Narrative* is reactivated upon an individual reader's discovery of "an African American presence always engaged in a struggle with the terms of her public presentation and reception" (Ernest 461). This chapter highlights this struggle by focusing on how the three women—Gilbert, Titus, and Truth—participated in the narrative-making process.

Truth understood that her public image depended on the press to the extent that she controlled it. Truth maintained her friendship with antislavery newspaper editors including William Lloyd Garrison (*Liberator*), Marius Robinson (*Anti-Slavery Bungle*),

and Oliver Johnson (*National anti-Slavery Standard*) who were willing to help her views on religion, antiracism, women's rights, and her petition for land grants to post-war blacks (Stetson and David 6). Truth also already learned the publicity and its power of a printed publication. When she was accused of poisoning one of "prophet" Matthias's followers, Truth sued her accusers for slander with the help of the British-born newspaper editor Gilbert Vale whose investigative book on the case supported Truth's innocence.¹²³ Because of her awareness of the impact of the press on the public, Truth needed to intervene in her transcribers' writing. As she often insisted, "I cannot read but can hear": Truth attempted to administer the *Narrative* written by others through what Andrews calls "a complex of linguistic acts in a discursive field" (23). Beyond her manipulation of linguistic representations, Truth's expressive performance is crucial to her control over literate others. For this reason, while all autobiographies show performances of self, Truth's *Narrative* becomes, as Richard Douglass-Chin calls it, a *metaperformance* of multiple narrator/storytellers. The *Narrative* strategically interrupts a reader's consistent imagining of Truth and inconsistently exposes the complex and problematic realities of what it means to be the black woman speaking in a white/male American public domain (Douglass-Chin 59-60).

¹²³ Gilbert Vale conducted an interview with Truth to get her side of the story before the public and published *FANATICISM; ITS SOURCE AND INFLUENCE, Illustrated by the Simple Narrative of Isabella, in the case of Matthias, Mr. and Mrs. B. Folger, Mr. Pierson, Mr. Mills, Catherine, Isabella, &c. &c.—A Reply to W.L.Stone, with descriptive portraits of all the parties, while at Sing-Sing and at Third Street.—Containing the Whole Truth—And Nothing But the Truth* (New York, 1835). Xiomara Santamarina and Jean M. Humez similarly argue that, even before letting Olive Gilbert write the narrative, Truth understood the possible influence of its publication and attempted to control over Gilbert's intervention in Truth's narrative.

Specifically, Truth plays in and out of the contradictions of her expressive body that breaks down the binary notion between performance and recorded writing, through her visual and conceptual exhibition of her subjectivity. W. E. Worthen explains the seemingly incompatibility of performance and writing: “Performance art seems to oppose the deterministic reproduction of texts with the fashioning of something different, to avoid the logocentric mastery of a dramatic script, an antecedent verbal order that prescribes the force of the performance” (101). Truth had the same kind of dilemma in presenting her public self and making written records. When Theodore Tilton proposed to write her biography, Truth “replied in effect that she expected to live a long time yet, and was going to accomplish ‘lots’ before she died, and didn’t want to be ‘written up’ at present” (*Narrative* 1884, 156). At the same time, Truth could not solely rely on her appearance in public without observers’ witness and writers’ recording of her. The split between performance and writing rests upon the traditional Western dualism of body and mind. Performance as a bodily act exists in a limited place and lasts only briefly. It does not necessarily demonstrate a performer’s mind, as the performer becomes a spectacle for observers’ appreciation. In contrast, writing evinces a writer’s mind through the mediation of language. The permanency of a written text transcends the materiality of a writer’s body; that is, even though a writer writes in a certain place and time, her or his writing can survive the writer as the writing proves the victory of the writer’s mind over body.

In the same vein, black performance in antebellum America was considered to emphasize African Americans’ corporeality, which was rarely associated with their mind.

The persistent hierarchy in body and mind determined that black performance was inferior to published writing. Notably, Truth integrates the mind/body split by utilizing her bodily performance as a medium of mind, demonstrating that the body reproduces written texts in which her body is preserved to prove her mind. In other words, Truth preserves her performance in a written form while recognizing that writing fossilizes her and, by contrast, her performance has only a limited number of observers for a short time. While Truth's performance exists in the precise historical moment and place in which she performs, written texts on her performance preserve Truth and opens up the importance of her performance to readers in different times and places. If in Western thought "writing has become the guarantor of existence itself," Truth turned over this thought by suggesting how her embodied practice generates writing to perpetuate her temporal and material presence as a nineteenth-century black woman (Taylor xix). Rather than being entrapped within a written language, Truth reaches out to those who may live beyond the nineteenth-century print culture, literacy-illiteracy hierarchy, and racial divisions.

As Sojourner Truth demonstrates, in fact, performance and writing are always linked. Truth invited writers to her performance, and their writing became part of her performance. In short, her observers' act of writing consists of Truth's theatrical exhibition of her body. The printed text--the *Narrative*—does not deny her performing body's materiality. Instead, the *Narrative* indicates that that body's materiality is essential to producing writing, and, consequently becomes inseparable from the disembodied and immaterial aspect of her; that is, her mind. Truth's performed and embodied existence manufactured the recorded memory of her through the mediation of

her observers. As many critics such as Peggy Phelan believe, unless her public speeches and actions were recorded, documented, or circulated through printed media, Truth's performance could hardly reach a wider range of observers beyond the place and time that the performance happens (Phelan 146). Nevertheless, through the display of her performing body, Truth hosts a collective memory of African American women that her observers might imagine, remember, and even situate. This constant interaction centering observers' experiences with African American women does not allow Truth's performance to disappear at once. Rather, her body in performance is remembered, reproduced, and recorded as a set of "acts and spectral meanings" in which multiple observers continuously participate (Schneider 104). In doing so, Truth combines her performance and written text through collaborative works to make the *Narrative*. Consequently, she neither lets the performance disappear nor remains a fixed figure in a written form.

The coinage of "fleshy writing" helps us understand the conflicted textual dynamics of Truth's *Narrative* as an analog for her problematic relation to the hegemonic domains of literacy, performance, and the black body. The term explains how a subjective perception of the bodily experience constitutes a writer or storyteller's language of agency. Sojourner Truth's *Narrative* exemplifies that this subjective perception can lead an unlettered and former slave woman to produce writing beyond the strict boundary between performance and written text. Overcoming this binary is not only key to Truth's producing of her *Narrative* but also crucial to relocating Truth not as a passive storyteller who was framed by literate observers, but as an active performer. This

performer invited those observers to write about her, and, at the same time, liberated herself from the lettered boundary, which each observer differently set up for his or her own writing on Sojourner Truth.

In the tradition of slave narratives, well-known white abolitionist editors circumscribed former slave writers in the way of maximizing the intended audience's understanding of life under slavery. This editorial control was often fulfilled through prefaces, interviews, footnotes, and epigraphs in a slave narrative. Gérard Genette calls these editorial interventions "paratext," defining it as "the means by which a text makes a book of itself and proposes itself as such to its readers, and more generally to the public" (261). Lydia Maria Child insists that she did not touch any contents of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents of a Slave Girl*, and William Lloyd Garrison in the front of Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* introduces to the reader the first moment when he met the former slave. Both of the editors added their commentaries so that the authors of the narratives could gain more legitimate authority. Beth McCoy maintains that the paratext in slave narratives serves "an indirect white supremacy, [. . .] [which] interferes with the fugitive writer's authorial primacy" (157). However, she also adds, saying "even as African Americans diagnosed paratextual space as one way through which white supremacy could be channeled, they also saw that same space as offering possibilities for resistance" (159). Truth utilizes the paratextual spaces for her resistance to any textual fixation of her performance by letting multiple writers speak with their incongruous and cacophonous voices.

Even though Truth's actual text—her performance—is located outside of the *Narrative*, these paratexts in the *Narrative* reveal dynamic transactions between Truth outside and the writers inside of the text. Like Genette regards a paratext as a site of “transaction” between the text and what lies outside it (261-62), these writers' paratexts serve as the privileged site, on the one hand, where they attempt to control readers' understanding of the texts and the authors, and on the other, where readers witness the narrative-making process through the textual interactions between the editors and the former slave writers. Interestingly, Genette also maintains that paratexts without text exist as forms of “disappeared or aborted works of which we only know the title” (263), which explains Truth's case. Sojourner Truth's *Narrative* consists of various paratexts such as prefaces, transcribed narratives, letters, newspaper articles, and even autographs except the text or Truth's own writing. This apparent absence of her authorial text belies the title, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*. However, Truth offers her physical presence as a centering text in a certain historical time and place that enables observers to produce multiple paratexts. In other words, these paratexts cannot but be derivative of what the reader has to imagine the real text, Truth's performing body. By analyzing Truth's text, and Olive Gilbert's and Frances Titus's paratexts, the following three sections discuss how to read Truth's enduring identity in the midst of various scribal voices through a dynamic of different observers' retrospective remembering of Truth's performances.

Sojourner Truth, the performer of fleshy writing: “She is constantly on the move”

Sojourner Truth, as argued earlier, understands the limitations of a written text in representing her. First, Truth realizes that even a gifted writer cannot perfectly

demonstrate her or his observation of Truth in printable language. Although Harriet Beecher Stowe was one of the most well known writers in Truth's time, one observer of Truth confesses after meeting with Truth, "The graphic sketch of [Truth] by the author of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' has doubtless been read with interest by thousands. No pen [including Stowe's], however, can give an adequate idea of Sojourner Truth" (100).¹²⁴ As a matter of fact, Stowe depends on the "Libyan Sibyl," the mythic symbol of African beauty in white European mind,¹²⁵ to describe Sojourner Truth, while recognizing the writer's own incapability of properly describing what Truth looks like. When Stowe published the article, "Sojourner Truth, the Libyan Sibyl" in 1863, on her encounter with Sojourner Truth,¹²⁶ Truth expressed her discontent with Stowe's piece: "I do n't [sic]

¹²⁴ When I use the original editions published in 1850, 1875, and 1884, I indicate the years and page numbers in parentheses. Without an indication of year, page numbers in parentheses refer to the modern edition based on the 1884 edition of the *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* reprinted by Penguin Books in 1998.

¹²⁵ The Libyan Sibyl was a prevalent image of romanticized Africa in the nineteenth century America. Stowe must have used it for her writing about Truth. The Libyan Sibyl is a character from Greek and Roman mythology, having an ability to foretell the future. This image from Greek and Roman sources is juxtaposed with romantic conceptions of African Americans and of Africa. Under the name of the "Libyan Sibyl," Stowe displaces Truth as an object of art. Some of her contemporary readers did not agree with Stowe's naming of Truth as "Libyan Sibyl." For example, the Springfield *Republican* insists that "Libyan Sibyl" was not suitable for Truth because the name indicated not a Christian Sibyl but a classical one. On their contemporary controversy over the "Libyan Sibyl," see Mabee 115.

¹²⁶ At Andover, Massachusetts, in 1853, Sojourner Truth, the former slave and now preacher, antislavery lecturer, and women's rights activist, paid an unannounced call on Harriet Beecher Stowe, the best-selling white author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Although Truth published her autobiography *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* in 1850, her reputation was not comparable with that of Stowe. As a matter of fact, whereas Stowe began to write professionally from the mid-1830s, Truth was known only as a former slave speaker with a "strange compound of wit and wisdom" (Mabee 113). Since her obscurity prevented her from approaching a wider public, Truth journeyed to ask Stowe directly for a short introduction on the autobiographical narrative. Stowe's blurb for the book indisputably brought Truth public attention. Since Stowe nicknamed Truth "Libyan Sibyl" in her essay "Sojourner Truth, The Libyan Sibyl" (1863), Truth has been widely known with the name. Stowe struggles to achieve her authorship as a self by her writing

want to hear about that old symbol” (118). Second, Truth knows that a written text about her results from a writer’s mediation between language and her performance. When asking people to read the Bible for her, she noticed that adult readers added their ideas and opinions, which prevent her from independently understanding the scripts. Through this experience, Truth learns that “the spirit of truth spoke in those records [of the Bible], but that the recorders of those truths had intermingled with them ideas and suppositions of their own” (74). For these reasons, Truth needed to invent a way of transcending the boundary that is permissible only in a writer’s perception and use of language.

Most importantly, Truth believes that a bodily presentation must precede a written text, instead of consecrating the latter to justify her authorial voice in a printed form. In this sense, the *Narrative* becomes part of her actual performance that the reader only assumes through the testimonials in print. In Truth’s childhood, her mother told her about God. Then, Truth “believed [God] not only saw, but noted down all her actions in a great book, even as her master kept a record of whatever he wished not to forget. But she had no idea that God knew a thought of hers till she had uttered it aloud” (40). If the “great book” means the sacredness of a written text that unlettered slaves could not access, God maintains his authority through the “great book” just like her master has a “record.” This analogy between God’s book and the master’s record indicates that, in her mind, these writings convey the absolute power that slaves should obey.

At the same time, Truth is well aware of the importance of a written text under her name. The *Narrative* can authorize her experiences, which otherwise were transient in

about Truth, and Truth tries to manipulate Stowe’s response to her in order to be correctly represented in her *Narrative*.

a limited time and place, through printed letters. Yet, Truth denies a written text's value if it is not based on a person's perceptible actions, as she does not consider that the "great book" is possible without her loud utterance of thoughts. In other words, Truth's audible and visible actions generate that book, and, therefore, God's authority depends on her performance. Truth's understanding of a written text sharply contrasts with Stowe's way of sanctifying her book, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Stowe claims that God wrote the novel.¹²⁷ Whereas Stowe withdraws her voice from the text to empower her writing, Truth embodies a written text about her by emphasizing her physical presence that produces the text.

Truth prioritizes her performing body rather than literate observers' writings in making the *Narrative*. Right after the reflection on God's great book, she narrates the beginning of her bodily presentation in order to urge God to write it in his book: "[Truth] was deeply impressed with the idea [of the great book], that if *she* also were to present her petitions under the open canopy of heaven, speaking very loud, she should the more readily be heard; consequently, she sought a fitting spot for this, her rural sanctuary" (40). Truth tells Olive Gilbert that she created her stage in her childhood. This creation of her actual stage for God's writing coincides with her situational stage—Mrs. Benson's parlor—for Gilbert's writing of the *Narrative*. Her performance to lead her observers to write about her is also associated with her public appearance as a speaker with a resounding voice. As Truth's observer, Gilbert says that Truth tells her story "in the deepest and most solemn tones of her powerful and sonorous voice. Its effect ran through the multitude, like an electric shock" (83). Gilbert's deep feeling like "an electric shock"

¹²⁷ See Gossett for a discussion of Stowe's claim to divine inspiration (93–97).

from Truth's storytelling proves that Truth was not passively recorded by Gilbert. Rather, as a result of her seeking a "fitting spot" for her performance and presenting "her petitions," Truth actively manipulates the transcriber to be sensitive to her story and, accordingly, to write down it.

As discussed earlier, Truth's performance is not limited to the production of the *Narrative*. It enables the observers to look self-reflexively into their own visible corporeality that is intersected with political discourses on race, class, and gender in the nineteenth century. Gilbert can advocate her antislavery agenda through Truth's storytelling, filling the gap in the unspeakable part of the woman slave's life with Gilbert's preconception of white womanhood and the "decent female body" in the domestic sphere. In a similar process but towards a different result, Titus breaks from the stereotype of Victorian womanhood, which explains her life before meeting Truth, by moving out in public to accompany with Truth. Likewise, Truth demonstrates her body to serve as a looking glass through which an observer reflects the meaning of her or his body in relation to American slavery and its derivative ideologies.



[Figure 1: The frontispiece from the *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* in 1850]

The readers/observers of Truth examine themselves because their social and cultural identities function as a key to interpreting the incongruous aspects of Truth in both the *Narrative* and public stages. In 1858 Sojourner Truth exposed her breast in front of a mob insisting that Truth must be an impostor, “a man disguised in women’s clothing” (94). This alleged assertion came from the mob’s misunderstanding of gender representation, as the Victorian concept of womanhood fails to explain Truth’s African beauty and physicality. Just like Gilbert relies on her belief in gender norms and domestic value to understand Truth, the mob’s claim on the evidence of Truth’s female body reveals their own ignorance of the black, ex-slave, and hard-working womanhood that Truth embodies. She tells the mob: “[i]t seems that it takes *my* black face to bring out *your* black hearts; so it’s well I came,” and later, “You are afraid of my black face, because it is a looking-glass in which you see yourselves” (Fitch and Mandziuk 21). By exhibiting her black body as “a looking-glass,” Truth returns the mob’s gaze at her to them.

Truth’s look redirecting the reader/observer’s gaze appears in the frontispiece from the *Narrative*. Truth added the image of herself as both forms of embroidery, engraving, and daguerreotype to the *Narrative*’s cover [Figure 1]. The first image purports to come from a photograph of Truth as Isabella, although no such photograph was ever taken.¹²⁸ When recollecting her encounter with Truth ten years ago in order to write the article on her, Stowe could have had a look at Truth’s *Narrative* for a reminder of her. About Truth, Stowe describes, “[o]n her head she wore a bright Madras

¹²⁸ Painter claims that the drawing is from an unknown artist’s imagination (109).

handkerchief, arranged as a turban, after the manner of her race” (103). In Stowe’s mind, Truth’s headscarf stands for her racial heritage. However, to other readers from the laboring class, it may indicate that Truth is a hard-working woman. As Painter explains, it was rare that mid-nineteenth-century African Americans had their photographs or painting for their own use (196). Furthermore, even though there were few, African Americans suited up for the printed production of their images; for instance, Frederick Douglass used his engraving for the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. The under-privileged readers can notice that, in contrast to this fashion, Truth demonstrates her working-class persona in this image, as if she was in the middle of her daily toil.

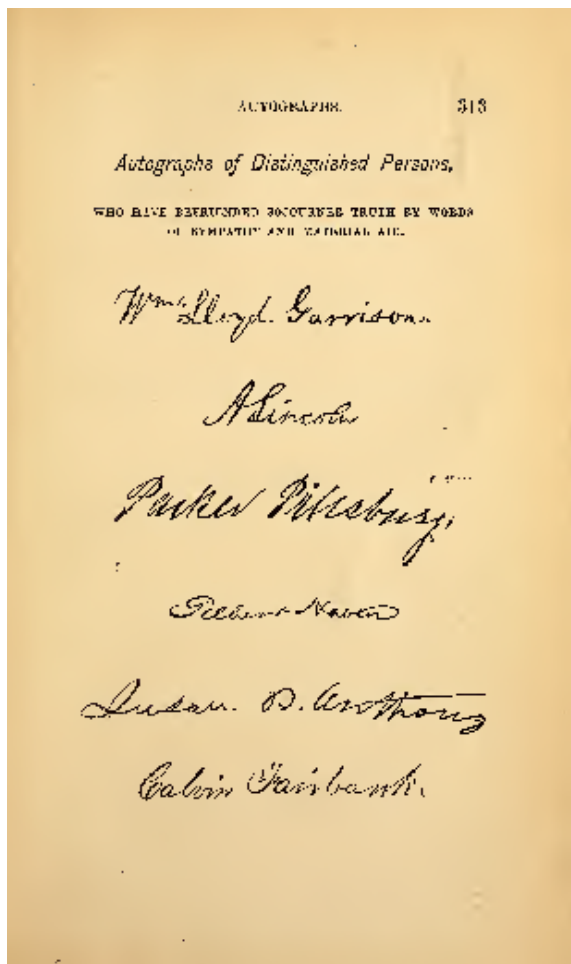


[Figure 2: Unknown Photographer, *Sojourner Truth*, 1864. *Carte de visite*. Gladstone Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress]

Likewise, the reader, who is not present in Truth's live performance, unmistakably witnesses Truth's inspiring body—not only her embodied presence itself but also her body economically, politically, culturally, and legally imagined by the observers' positions in a complex network of the nineteenth-century U.S. society. Therefore, as John Earnest suggests, what is the black corporeality about Sojourner Truth is “a function of her situation within these raced contingencies and of her ongoing negotiation of the ideological currents that defined the course of her life” (464). Truth's famous word in her *carte-de-visite*, “I sell the shadow to support the substance,” indicates her intention to visualize her body in the *Narrative* [Figure 2]. First of all, as Ivy Wilson points out, the alliterative phrasing hints at Truth's “command over the sonic impulses of language” (3). Despite the printed—that is, fixed and unmovable—image of Sojourner Truth, the one sentence creates rhythmic sounds that envision Truth's oratorical power and bodily movement in the reader's mind. Second, if the shadow refers to the visual image of her body, and if her observers and readers recognize its visible corporeality at the first sight of her performance and the written texts about it, Truth maintains that their visual perception of her corporeality is crucial to apprehend the “substance” of Truth's being black, freed, and female. Truth “sells” her shadows, but this trade does not transform her “substance” into a commodity. This claim reverses the idea on the black body in the antebellum period when African Americans were subject to commodification under slavery.

The autographs included in the “Book of Life” exemplify how the observers of Truth come to engage in her performance. Above all, while the observers share their

autographs with Truth, she can situate her performance in the political area created by them. According to one Detroit paper, Truth diligently asked famous people for autographs during her lecture trips (155). Then, the paper reports that the writers of these autographs were willing to add their names to the “Book of Life.” For instance, E. W. Turning says to Truth, “In writing my name in your ‘Book of Life,’ it gives me great



[Figure 3: the first page of the autographs section in the *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* of 1875]

pleasure to say that our acquaintance of some twenty years has made me largely your debtor” (183). The autographs are the evidence of Truth’s relations with famous political

and religious leaders such as William Lloyd Garrison, Abraham Lincoln, and Parker Pillsbury [Figure 3]. She uses these names to establish her own fame in the network of these people. In addition, by asking their autographs, Truth becomes part of American history that achieves abolitionism, women's rights, and social reform movements.

Frances Titus introduces this section in the "Book of Life": "Here are names that are indelibly stamped upon the pages of their country's history, and inseparably connected with it—names which will reverberate down the centuries, and the echoes be caught by the generations in the coming time—'immortal names that were not born to die,'" [. . .] (215). These "immortal names that were not born to die" can be alive in Sojourner Truth's "Book of Life," as if Truth preserves them in history.

The autographs, furthermore, demonstrate that Truth's observers were not detached spectators but participants in Truth's spectacular performance. Writing an autograph is a physical action; that is, an autograph conveys a signer's specific bodily movement with a pen. Then, the person responded to Truth by writing an autograph that would show the signer's distinctive handwriting. While Truth uses the signers' autographs to maintain her social equivalence with them, she "inevitably comes to shape the forms this writing takes, making the signer in a sense dependent on [Truth]" (Peterson 39). Truth visited and met the signers in person, as if she drew a large circle in which the signers were placed. The signers' bodies moved within the boundary of Truth's movement that the reader certainly knows. The reader of the *Narrative*, simultaneously, can envision the bodily movement of Truth and the signer transacting over a piece of paper. The autographs section in the "Book of Life" offers the textual panorama that in

the reader's mind evokes the image of the physical encounters between the observers/signers and Truth.

Most importantly, Truth locates these famous signers in the frame of the specific places and times where and when Truth intended to visit. In other words, Truth is a central force to design the signers' movements. In this vein, the reason why any indication of the context in the "Book of Life" is missing can be explained. Like the compilation of the letters and articles, Truth (and Titus) did not add any explanation of how she obtained the autographs, keeping the reader wondering about her encounter with these celebrities. For instance, Truth must have obtained President Lincoln's signature when she visited with him in the White House in 1864. However, by not mentioning the particular site of their meeting, Truth neglects the authority that the White House represents for President Lincoln. Instead, she highlights his bodily participant in her performance for social reform movements, when his autograph is placed on the same page. The missing context of the situation in which Truth met the signers leaves Truth as the only reference to that context. As she continues on her performance in the *Narrative*, the signers come to attend Truth's ongoing movement instead of imposing their authorities upon her.

Sojourner Truth in the *Narrative* remains *fleshy* not only because she demonstrates her corporeality as the tool of its publication but also because the contributors of the *Narrative* become part of Truth's fleshy performance. Instead of asserting her authorship or depending on others' authority, Truth as a looking glass invites them to her performance. As a result, they could write about her through their

reflexive and even parochial understandings of the emancipated woman's experience in the mid-nineteenth-century North. At the same time, the contributors' participation in the *Narrative* comes to be reframed according to Truth's physical movement that seems to continue at the end of the book. By producing the *Narrative*, Truth exhibits her body as the evidence of her immortal performance that demonstrates the black womanhood transcending any authorities of politics, literacy, gender, race, and class. The *Detroit Post* says, "Sojourner calls Battle Creek her home, but as *she is constantly on the move*, she visits that place but seldom. Her great object, she says, in visiting this city and others, is to 'stir up' the people [. . .]" (156 emphasis added). While Truth's moving body, which is prevalent throughout the *Narrative*, forces the observers and readers to envision the kaleidoscopic aspects of Sojourner Truth, Truth lives and grows *fleshy*.

Olive Gilbert and Sojourner Truth (1850)

One of the critiques of Olive Gilbert is that she distorted and misrepresented Sojourner Truth for Gilbert's antislavery agenda in her transcription of the *Narrative* in 1850. Richard Douglas-Chin regards Gilbert's editing issue as the "grammar of interruption" of "white tendencies to reify and/or silence [Truth] as exotic object" (87, 86). In the same vein, Jeffrey Steward argues that Gilbert ultimately "marred" the *Narrative* (xxxix). This attack on Gilbert seems to neglect the circumstance in which Gilbert transcribed Truth's story. When Truth was an avid member of the Northampton Association, an intentional community oriented for reformist causes,¹²⁹ Gilbert visited

¹²⁹ The Northampton Association was founded in 1842 by two leading abolitionists, Samuel L. Hill, an ex-Quaker, and George Benson, who was William Lloyd Garrison's brother-in-law. One of the notable members was the black David Ruggles who became blind while trying to protect fugitive slaves. He experimented with water cures, which was popular among abolitionists such

Truth between 1845 and 1846. Gilbert herself was not a member of the Association but a feminist-abolitionist and close friend of William Lloyd Garrison. The purpose of Gilbert's visit to the Association was to meet with Truth, for Gilbert was deeply interested in the hard-working ex-slave woman (Mabee 52). After acquainting herself with Truth, Gilbert did not write down Truth's story in a tête-à-tête. Instead, Truth the storyteller, Gilbert the stenographer, Sarah Benson the founder's wife and host, and many other women listeners at the Association gathered in a large room and "shared radical vision that transcended the racial divide that the larger society tried to impose" (Washington 187). These women were nodding, gasping, sobbing, and adding comments while listening to Truth's extraordinary life story. Gilbert's version of the *Narrative* shows a form of communal and performative writing. As a result, the transcriber could hardly wield her scribal influence on the storyteller, but her writing conveys double-voiced rhetoric and its tensions. In writing the communal and polyglot text, Gilbert recognizes the distance between herself and Truth, but maintains her own authorial voice to make up her limitation of understanding Truth's black-female ex-slave's experiences within the writer's background of white-middle class womanhood.

Gilbert's edition carries a questionable point that makes us hesitate to assert her "interruption" in the first place. Olive Gilbert did not reveal her name as an amanuensis in the first edition of the *Narrative* published in 1850. Moreover, she omitted the author of the "Preface," William Lloyd Garrison, from the edition as well. Presumably, Gilbert might have withdrawn her name from the *Narrative* because of her humility so that Truth

as Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison. Truth also recovered her health through Ruggles's water cure. See Mabee 43-59 and Painter 88-102.

the storyteller could be in the spotlight. However, as Mabee speculates, her and Garrison's well-known names could have encouraged advocates of abolitionism and women's rights to buy the *Narrative* (52), and Truth would not have had to visit Harriet Beecher Stowe for a blurb in spite of Stowe's underestimation of Truth in 1853. In addition, Gilbert even seems to be afraid of any accusation of her misunderstanding of Truth. She starts the *Narrative* with a note, saying: "It is due to the lady by whom the following Narrative was kindly written, to state, that she has not been able to see a single proof-sheet of it; consequently, it is very possible that divers [*sic*] errors in printing may have occurred, [. . .] especially in regard to the names of individuals referred to therein" (1850:12). She calls herself the objectified third-person "the lady," as if she were not the same person as Truth's amanuensis.

Although she excuses any mistake in the book for the lack of accurate evidence, the complete elimination of her name in the *Narrative* still keeps the reader wondering about her intention. What leaves the reader with more questions about Gilbert's nameless amanuensis self is her ways of creating a distance between Sojourner Truth and the unnamed transcriber in the *Narrative*. In other slave narratives, white writers of paratexts emphasize their distances from former slave writers in two ways: first, white writers corroborate the authenticity of the narratives' contents; and, second, they confirm the distance between former slave writers and themselves by maintaining that they did not edit the narratives. By contrast, on the one hand, Gilbert as a paratext writer announces possible errors and misinformed facts about Truth's life story in the "Note." On the other hand, Gilbert underscores her distance from Truth not to support Truth's independence

but to make her own intervention in Truth's narrative. In spite of the absence of Gilbert's name, she exists audibly and visibly as much as Sojourner Truth does.

The circumstance of Gilbert's writing appears to be obvious when she calls slaves the third collective pronoun ("they") as not related to the white middle-class women listeners in the Northampton Association. With an effort to bridge between African American slaves and white listeners/readers sharing universal humanity, Gilbert says, "they were still human, and their human hearts beat within them with as true as affection as ever caused a human heart to beat" (13). The repetitive use of the pronouns, "they," "their," and "them," also indicates that Gilbert feels the unbridgeable difference between Truth and herself. She uses quotation marks to quote Truth's direct words and adds parentheses for her own comments to Truth's story. For instance, in explaining that Isabella had to take care of her father, Gilbert comments, "(I was about to say, 'their brother-in-law'—but as slaves are neither *husbands* nor *wives* in law, the idea of their being brothers-in-law is truly ludicrous.)" (16). As a result, Gilbert underlines her location separate from Truth on the textual level, while continuously reminding the reader of her presence not merely as an amanuensis but also as an antislavery advocate and commentator.

The distance between Gilbert and Truth enables Gilbert to create a former-slave persona. Stewart argues that "Gilbert seizes upon Sojourner's life story as a vehicle for her own indictment of slaveowners and their justifications for slavery. [. . .] Sojourner's narrative thus provided Gilbert with an opportunity to find her voice" (xxxix). Facing her limit in understanding Truth, Gilbert invents her own version of Sojourner Truth by

following a format of well-known slave narratives and by framing Truth in the cult of true womanhood in the mid-nineteenth century.

First, Gilbert uses existing slave narratives to fill the gap between Truth's spoken narrative and Gilbert's misunderstanding of the narrative. To do this, she typifies Sojourner Truth as if she shared experiences with other Southern slaves depicted in many testimonies on the institution of slavery. In particular, Douglass heavily influenced Gilbert's perception of slavery, as she quotes his famous narrative. She praises "[he] has devoted his great heart and noble talents entirely to the furtherance of the cause of his down-trodden race," citing his labeling of holidays as "safety-valves, to carry off the rebellious spirit of enslaved humanity" (43). Gilbert's association between Douglass and Truth reveals that Gilbert mistakes Truth's memory of "Pingster," Dutch immigrants' Pentecost, for the example of Truth's childish desire for its festivity. In Gilbert's mind, Truth considered everything "so pleasant" at her former master, the Dumonts, and wanted to go back to the Dumont household (43-44). Whereas Gilbert borrows Douglass's critical view on holidays to enslaved African Americans, Truth is described as immature and subservient to her old master as though the "safety value" works on Truth. In addition, the appendix suggests Gilbert's intention to highlight Truth's narrative as one of the testimonials to Southern slavery. Gilbert added an extract from *American Slavery As It Is* collected and published by Theodore D. Weld in 1839 to the 1850 *Narrative*. In this way, Truth's 1850 *Narrative* becomes a lived story about a naïve slave woman's emancipation that is not terribly different from other slave narratives.

Second, Gilbert judges Truth through the lens of white middle-class domesticity that results in Gilbert's portrayal of Truth as "an impoverished, pathetic figure, a bad mother whose religion is fervent but whose outlook is paranoid" (Painter 260-61). The amanuensis could not understand Truth's whole-hearted dedications to ideal communities such as the Matthias Church and the Northampton Association. In Gilbert's mind, Truth was "naively convinced—quite mistakenly—that the association would look after her for the rest of her life" (Mabee 52). Therefore, for her defense of Truth, Gilbert assumes that, because Truth never had an ordinary home and family life under slavery, the former slave woman sought a substitute for family and home that would function as the sanctuary of morality and comforts. "Of course, it was not in her power to make to herself a home, around whose sacred hearthstone she could collect her family, as they gradually emerged from their prison-house of bondage;" claims Gilbert. To this white middle-class woman, a home is a place where "[Truth] could cultivate their affection, administer to their wants, and instill into the opening minds of her children those principles of virtue, and that love of purity, truth, and benevolence, which must ever form the foundation of a life of usefulness and happiness" (48). However, in the *Narrative*, the lack of Truth's domestic life is described as if that is why she neglected domestic values such as affection, childcare and discipline, and feminine virtues. While lamenting this as a result of slavery, Gilbert blames Truth's children for failure to look after their elderly mother: "Isabella's children are now of an age to know good from evil" and "[have to] turn [Truth's] expecting eyes to them for aid and comfort," but "they forget this" (49).

Regardless of her efforts to understand the difference between Truth and herself, Gilbert (unintentionally) pays no attention to the agency that Truth ultimately wants to prove by telling her life story. When dealing with the dilemma in her own misunderstanding of Truth and linking the gaps between her limited view on slavery and Truth's experiences, Gilbert speculates that slavery prevented slaves from intellectually growing and being consciously independent. Explaining Isabella's hard works for her master as a result of her immaturity, Gilbert comments: "[Isabella] became more ambitious than ever to please [her master]. [. . .] At this time she looked upon her master as a *God*; and believed that he knew of and could see her at all times, even as God himself. [. . .] She then firmly believed that slavery was right and honorable" (22-23). Gilbert confirms her opinion of slavery again: "And the writer of this knows, from personal observation, that the slaveholders of the South feel it to be a *religious duty* to teach their slaves to be honest, and never to take what is not their own!" (23). To make sense of Truth's seeming faithfulness to her owner, Gilbert applies her second-hand experiences with slavery and considers Truth blind to the difference between her owner and God. However, a few pages later Gilbert's assertion contradicts Truth's pursuit of freedom. Truth insists that she "walked away by day-light" (29) to follow God's word that she should "take her freedom into her own hands" (27). This demonstrates that Truth clearly distinguished her owner from God, and that her self-emancipation by simply walking out of the Dumont household was different from other slaves' "escape," as Gilbert mistakenly titles her chapter.

In spite of Gilbert's struggles to move closer to Truth, she fails to overcome her preconception about slavery, its dehumanizing effects on slaves, and white middle-class values. Her framing of the 1850 *Narrative* as a slave narrative from an educated white woman's perspective, after all, leaves Truth incomprehensible. Gilbert often does not understand what Truth tells her. Even if she understands, Gilbert cannot find proper language to describe Truth, as she confesses: "[Truth's words] were perfectly original and unique, and would be well worth preserving, were it possible to give the tones and manner with the words; but no adequate idea of them can be written while the tones and manner remain inexpressible" (41). Without suppressing her fascination with Truth's oral performance, Gilbert realizes the limitation of describing Truth's tones and manner in a written language. For this reason, the distance between the amanuensis and Sojourner Truth is highlighted once again in Gilbert's final comment on her. Gilbert guesses that Truth's "energy of naturally powerful mind" is "untrammelled [*sic*] by education or conventional customs," downplaying Truth's distinctiveness by using the words "child-like simplicity," "purity," and "native enthusiasm" (83). In separating herself from the storyteller Truth, Gilbert finds her own place on the opposite side of Truth. Gilbert exists as an un-Truth because she can confirm her freedom, "culture," domesticity, and womanhood through this antithesis.

The most important aspect of this distance is that Truth appears to understand it well and even allows Gilbert to intervene in her storytelling. Although her listeners could misunderstand her, Truth did not attempt to explain every detail that the listeners would hardly believe or imagine. When Truth was telling her life story in Mrs. Benson's parlor,

“There are some hard things that crossed Isabella’s life while in slavery, that she has no desire to publish, for various reasons” (55). Truth insists, “they’d call me a liar! They would indeed!” Nevertheless, she does “not wish to say anything to destroy [her] own character for veracity, though what [she says] is strictly true” (56). Feeling the need of limiting her narrative, Truth to some extent provokes the listeners’ imagination about her unspeakable past and association with other slave narratives. Gilbert substitutes this “omitted” or “forgotten” part with the stories about the cruelty of slavery that she has heard from various sources. For example, the episode about the murder of a slave woman in “D___ county in Kentucky,” which is quoted right after Truth’s reluctance to tell unbelievable stories, does not seem to be told by Truth (57-58). Indeed, to make Truth’s narrative similar to a former slave’s testimonial, Gilbert inserts the episode in which Truth’s narrative was missing. In so doing, Gilbert confirms her agenda for abolitionist causes within Truth’s narrative.

In addition to proclaiming her antislavery purposes through her work on the *Narrative*, Gilbert builds the women’s emotive alliance by offering her bodily sentiments as a medium between language and Truth’s indescribable experiences. This signals the possibility of Gilbert’s transformation from a pen-tied transcriber into a feeling subject who can overcome the limit of letter. When Truth tells how her master sent her son, Peter, illegally to a slaveowner in Alabama, Gilbert writes:

‘I have no money, but God has enough, or what’s better! And I’ll have my child again,’ These words were pronounced in the most slow, solemn and determined measure and manner. And in speaking of it, she says, ‘Oh my

God! I know'd I'd have [Peter] agin. [. . .] Why, I felt so *tall within*—I felt as if the *power of a nation* was with me!”

The impressions made by Isabella on her auditors, when moved by lofty or deep feeling, can never be transmitted to paper, (to use the words of another,) till by some Daguerrian [*sic*] art, we are enabled to transfer the look, the gesture, the tones of voice, in connection with that quaint, yet fit expressions used, and the spirit-stirring animation that, at such a time, pervades all she says. (30-31)

For Gilbert, who highly values womanhood and domestic life, Truth's motherly agony ties Gilbert to her emotionally. Truth's "slow, solemn, and determined measure and manner" does not look like the inscrutable "native enthusiasm" at this moment. Following Truth's escalating feelings, Gilbert also cannot suppress her excitement of Truth's bodily expression, as the short phrases cut by commas hint at Gilbert's breathlessness in tension. Truth feels "so *tall within*" with "the *power of a nation*" in her. Then, Gilbert as well as other "auditors" are "moved by lofty or deep feeling," although she cannot describe it. Gilbert's recognition of her inability as a writer in this scene does not seem to frustrate her. Rather, she uses her own bodily feeling as a way of proving Truth's expressiveness that "can never be transmitted to paper." As if she were a camera on a silvered copper plate for a daguerreotype of Truth, Gilbert claims witness to Truth's look, gesture, and voice of "the spirit-stirring animation." Transcending the limit of written language, Gilbert participates in Truth's feeling-provoking performance by authorizing her own feeling body rather than ability to write.

Despite Gilbert's claim of an emotional identification with Truth at some points, Truth remains incomprehensible to Gilbert. Twenty years later after the publication of the *Narrative*'s first edition in 1850, Olive Gilbert wrote to Truth on January 17, 1870: "You and I seem to move around as easily as soap bubbles—now here—now there—making our mark, I supposed, everywhere, though mine is a very quiet mark compared to yours. [. . .] I did not think you were laying the foundation of such an almost world-wide reputation when I wrote that little book for you" (187). Comparing herself and Truth to "soap bubbles," Gilbert highlights their activism and public works in the past years but admits that Truth is better known than herself now. When writing the *Narrative* called "that little book," Gilbert did not foresee that Truth would gain a "world-wide reputation" because she failed to understand a racial subjectivity that was expressed through an unconventional oratorical and sensorial performance. In Gilbert's 1850 *Narrative*, this performance is treated as an example of Truth's "child-like simplicity" and at best "native enthusiasm." At the moment of Truth's silence and inscrutability, Gilbert fills them with her assumptions and knowledge of Southern slavery. However, her humility towards her edition of the *Narrative* and fame insinuates Gilbert's unrestrained awe of Truth and remorse for what she neglected about her greatness.

Gilbert's letter continues: "I was much pleased with Mrs. Stowe's enthusiasm over you. [. . .] She proposed, I think, that you should have a statue and symbolize our American Sibyl" (188). In an attempt to picture Truth in the frame that Gilbert can understand, the amanuensis depends on Harriet Beecher Stowe's myth-making project on Truth. Stowe calls Truth "Libyan Sibyl" in her 1863 article, reflecting the Truth who

visited Stowe for advertising the first edition of the *Narrative* in 1853. Regardless of Truth's distaste for the myth that Gilbert may not know (118), Gilbert fossilizes Truth once again as an Ancient African female symbol—lifeless and voiceless—while neglecting Truth's energetically on-going and tangible performance in their time. Gilbert's letter was collected by Truth and arranged for the later editions of the *Narrative* by the second amanuensis Frances Titus. Titus underlines the distance between Truth and Gilbert by placing the letter in the way that Gilbert's misunderstanding and limit as a transcriber for Truth appear to be obvious. More importantly, by spotlighting the distance, Titus conversely indicates her closeness to and better understanding of Truth. The following section explores how Titus establishes her voice not merely as an amanuensis for Truth but also as Truth's fellow performer for African Americans' and women's rights movements.

Frances Titus and Sojourner Truth (1875, 1884)

Different from Olive Gilbert—who was an educated and skilled writer well known as one of the radical social leaders of her time—Frances Titus, Sojourner Truth's neighbor in Battle Creek, was literate but barely trained to be a professional writer. Mabee takes inconsistency, omissions, and poor organization in the *Narrative* edited by Titus, to evince her lack of writing skills (203).¹³⁰ Not surprisingly, the complexity of Titus's versions of the *Narrative* including the “Book of Life” published in 1875, 1878, and 1884, have often been ignored because of its structural uniqueness and lack of one

¹³⁰ Mabee discovers that Titus had attended a history class for women in Battle Creek in 1870, led by Lucinda H. Stone, who had been a teacher at Kalamazoo College and supported equal education for women. However, Mabee describes Titus's writing skill as “unseasoned” after all (203).

authorial voice that illustrate an atypical aspect of Truth's *Narrative* as a slave narrative in the antebellum period.

However, as a result of Titus's apparently less skillful editing and writing, Titus's compilation of the *Narrative* and supplemental materials creates, as Painter suggests, "problems of its own," a "fractured portrait" with "neither single author, coherent viewpoint, nor chronological order" (Painter 261). These "problems" in a "fractured portrait" invite the reader to Truth's noteworthy performance underneath the written text, as Douglass-Chin finds a clue about Truth's "subversive strategies that seek to overturn hegemonic systems of power" (78). Simply put, this (dis)organization of the narrative more accurately demonstrates Truth's power as a performer. My reading of Titus's editions focuses on the two aspects of Titus's editions. First, it discusses how Titus transforms Gilbert's former slave woman Sojourner Truth into Titus's mythic activist Truth. Second, by underlining this transformation, the rest of this chapter explores how the seeming disorganization of the narrative serves as an excellent example of the fleshy writing that distinguishes Sojourner Truth in American literary history.

Truth had more control over Titus's editing and writing than she did with Olive Gilbert, because Titus served as her personal assistant and companion whereas Gilbert was relatively detached from Truth. Therefore, the same kind of distance between Gilbert and Truth in the 1850 *Narrative* cannot be found between Titus and Truth in the later editions. Nonetheless, Titus still has a sort of editorial independence from Truth. To help Titus reedit the *Narrative* and "Book of Life," Truth provided newspaper clippings, letters, autographs, and other printed articles on herself. Among the three scrapbooks in

which Truth collected memorabilia on her, only one scrapbook remains and Titus rearranged its rather sparse contents (Fitch and Mandziuk 9). Yet, Truth's involvement in Titus's writing was limited. Titus was the one who selected from these papers for the revised edition (Mabee 202). In the middle of the "Book of Life," Titus says, "But few of the autograph letters contained in her 'Book of Life' will be published, as it is beyond her limited means to give *all* to the public. [Truth] trusts [Titus] scribe to make the selections" (171). Gilbert takes Truth's silence as a way of turning her narrative into an antislavery testimonial, which in turn renders her work less reliable for Truth herself. In contrast, at the moment of Truth's silence, Titus authorizes her role as Truth's transcriber who was trusted to determine what should be published. In fact, Titus imitates Truth's performance rather than controlling Truth within the various paratexts in the *Narrative*. Backed up with Truth's confidence in her, Titus creates different kinds of textual gaps in collecting and editing processes, that is, the multiple distances between Truth and the reader, between one and another contributor, and between this and that "Truth."

The 1875 and 1884 consecutive versions of the *Narrative* hint at Titus's gradual affirmation of authorship through her devotion to Truth. In her 1875 edition, Titus added William Lloyd Garrison's name to his original preface, presumably because she expected that his fame would boost the book's sale. However, Titus still did not include Olive Gilbert's name as an original transcriber of the 1850 *Narrative* in the 1875 edition. Given that Olive Gilbert was well known in the circle of the women's rights movement at the time of the publication, Titus's omission of Gilbert's name makes the addition of Garrison's name to the book questionable. The following fact puts forth a different

speculation about Titus's intention. As well as Garrison's name, Titus put her name on the first page of the *Narrative*: "Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1875, BY MRS. FRANCES W. TITUS, In the Office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington," which continuously appears in the later editions. Without Gilbert's name, this note gives a misleading impression that Titus wrote the entire narrative. Along with Garrison's name, Titus also builds her own reputation as someone with enough social influence to ask the well-known abolitionist for a preface.

Furthermore, in the 1884 edition, Titus left off Garrison's entire preface and rewrote her own introduction to the *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*. This change suggests that Titus no longer depends on an authoritative figure to support her editorial work. Instead, Titus begins to claim her authorship from the first page of the 1884 *Narrative* by substituting Garrison's preface with hers. In the new preface, Titus also differentiates her work from Gilbert's without revealing the first amanuensis's name: "The first 128 pages of this book are reprinted from stereotype plates made in 1850. Since then, momentous changes have taken place. Slavery has been swallowed up in a Red Sea of blood, and the slave has emerged from the conflict of races transformed from a chattel to a man" (4). If Gilbert illuminates Truth as a former slave by associating her life with other slaves' narratives, Titus demarcates the line between Gilbert's Truth and her Truth by asserting the beginning of a new era for African Americans after the end of slavery. Titus's omission of Garrison's and Gilbert's names from the *Narrative*, therefore, can be understood as Titus's attempt at reintroducing Truth not merely as a witness to slavery but also as a social reformer and African American leader. Solidifying her intention,

Titus starts the “Book of Life” with President Lincoln’s remark on Truth: “A true sentinel, [Truth] slumbered not at her post; [. . .] yet, ever responsive to the calls of humanity, she cheerfully lent her aid to the advancement of other reforms, especially woman’s rights and temperance” (89). As this quote suggests, Titus’s Truth is so alive that she can ever respond “to the calls of humanity.”

In order to keep Truth in existence in the *Narrative*, Titus uses three tactics: first, she neglects a chronological and geographical order in the “Book of Life;” second, she eclectically uses different observers’ conflicting witnesses to Truth which multiplies the images of Truth, in particular a sense of gender norms; and, third, Titus textually restages Truth’s “fleshy” body in a way that forces the reader to rethink of the black female body in public; that is, Truth revives not as a black woman *object* under the public’s examination but as a *subject* who returns the public’s scrutinizing eyes to themselves. Consequently, Titus creates numerous gaps among and between different observers, multifarious but substantial Truths, and various readers.

The reader of the *Narrative* has a hard time to figure out in what way Titus arranged the collected pieces of writings because of the missing and confusing dates of the scrapped articles and letters in the “Book of Life.” The lack of chronological order may reinforce some reader’s suspicion that Titus did a cursory job of collecting and editing the “Book of Life.” Titus must have recognized the problem of this date-less arrangement: “[Truth] carries with her a book that she calls the Book of Life, [. . .]. It will be difficult to arrange these accounts in the chronological order of events, but no effort has been spared to furnish correct dates” (90). Titus excuses Truth’s original

collection for the lack, as if Titus herself is not in charge of the collection. Nevertheless, Titus does not try to correct the arrangement or at least to offer all the dates of articles and letters that she collected after Truth's death. This makes the reader wonder about Titus's purpose of neglecting the dates in the *Narrative*.¹³¹

This unintended (or intended) temporal ambiguity can indicate that Titus considers physical time meaningless in explaining Truth's heroic aspect. In the 1884 edition, Titus revised the first paragraph of the *Narrative* written by Olive Gilbert in 1850. Gilbert wrote: "The subject of this biography, Sojourner Truth [. . .] was born, as near as she can now calculate, between the years 1797 and 1800" (1850: 2). Titus revised this beginning for the 1884 edition that was published one year after Truth's death. Her *Narrative* of 1884 starts:

The subject of this biography, Sojourner Truth [. . .] was the daughter of James and Betsey, slaves of one Col. Ardinburgh, Hurley, Ulster Country, N.Y. Sojourner does not know in what year she was born, but knows *she was liberated under the act of 1817, which freed all slaves who were forty years old and upward*. Ten thousand slaves were then set at liberty. Those under forty years of age were retained in servitude ten years longer, when all were emancipated. (9 emphasis added)

¹³¹ According to Carla Peterson, Titus used some of the more notable journalistic trends in mid-nineteenth-century America: "the democratization of news whose focus is now broadened to include all social spheres, the increasing emphasis of news on elements of human interest, and finally the belief that news can provide objective, value-free, and impartial reportage" (Peterson 32).

According to Gilbert, at the time of Truth's death, she was roughly eighty-five years old. However, Titus indirectly suggests that Truth was older than 100 and six because Truth must have been at least forty years old when the Act of 1817 was enacted.¹³² In the "Book of Life," Truth's mysterious longevity is used to embellish her independence from the legacy of slavery. For instance, Truth is "as ignorant of [her age] as is the fossil found in the limestone rock, [. . .] which has been scoured by the waves ever since the sea was born." While other former slaves could not know their birthdates under slavery, Truth purposely counts "her years from the time she was emancipated" because she "thinks it is what we accomplish that makes life long or short" (212). In explaining the difference between a physical age and Truth's spiritual age, Titus illustrates Truth as a figure who converts the lack of a slave's personal history into a foundation for her own history of independence. By omitting Truth's birth date from the memoriam again (224), Titus also shows her respect for Truth as a heroine of self-made history.

The confusing chronology in the *Narrative*, furthermore, emphasizes the immortality and continuity of Truth's expressive corporeality. Titus quotes one article from a Brooklyn paper when a rumor about Truth's death was circulated: "Sojourner Truth, whom the newspapers lately described as dying, reported herself in person to us last week, a living contradiction of the false rumor. The old lady says that, so far from being at the point of death, she has not experienced for many months any symptom of sickness. Her age is now eighty, but her spirit continues as youthful as ever" (119).

¹³² The State of New York enforced the Act, which freed all slaves who were forty years old and upward. Ten thousand slaves were set at liberty, while those under forty years of age were remained in servitude ten years longer. This explains why Truth's children were still slaves when she gain freedom.

According to Painter's endnote, in spite of her knowledge of Truth's actual age, which was sixty-seven at that time, Titus does not attempt to correct this inaccurate information. Rather, she seems to reinforce another rumor about Truth's supernatural longevity and physical strength. In addition to Truth's timeless liveliness, her constant physicality is emphasized in the disorderly arranged timeline of the "Book of Life."

Even when Titus added the dates of quoted articles, these articles seem to have been placed randomly as they neither share any geographical commonality nor mention contemporaneity. A letter sent to Truth from an acquaintance in Topeka, Kansas written in December 31, 1870 follows Truth's postscript written in Florence, Massachusetts in February 18, 1871 (160). The former is an invitation letter, and the latter shows Truth, who was busy in getting petitions for freed African Americans signed. Similarly, the 1870 letter of Warren Samson who lived in Hammonton, New Jersey comes before Laura Haviland's letter from Toledo, Ohio in January 12, 1866 (200). Samson depicts Truth's spiritual aspect, while Haviland's letter suggests that Truth successfully collected donations for African Americans. Likewise, these letters are not related to one another in any terms of the different places, times, and various contents, as Titus remains quiet about the reason for this random placement of the letters. By placing these letters about the different aspects of Truth on the same pages, Titus multiplies Truth according to time, place, and a variety of her characters. When Sojourner Truth appears as the only one key to linking all of them, the reader of the *Narrative* cannot but imagine Truth timelessly and restlessly moving around to fulfill many works.

The “Book of Life” finishes by highlighting Truth’s ever-lasting performance once more. Titus adds an interview of Sojourner Truth at the end of “A Memorial Chapter,” which was edited after Truth’s death. The interview does not indicate when, where, and by whom it was conducted. It starts with Truth’s allegedly “centenarian” age; for instance, the interviewer describes Truth as “the ancient negress” with “the whole demeanor of the centenarian,” asking “Who would have believed, except on irrefutable evidence, that the erect and rapidly approaching figure had been on this earth one hundred and three years?” (234). Because, different from many articles and letters in the “Book of Life,” the interviewer faithfully wrote down what Truth said, the reader can listen to Truth’s voice with less intervention of the observer’s assumption and judgment in Truth’s saying. This somewhat plainly reported interview ends with a remark for Truth’s continuing trip: “Sojourner will leave for Kansas in a day or two” (242). Truth’s mystical physicality beyond one specific time and place, vividly revived in this last sentence, hints at her unceasing movement. Following her acquaintances’ memories of Truth at the moment of her death, Titus countermands the physical demise of Truth through this interview that keeps Truth performing visually and audibly on the textual level.

In addition to leaving Truth out of the reader’s limited view on time and place, Titus creates disagreements and conflicts by matching contradictory observations of Truth. Although Titus does not directly offer indisputable facts about Truth, she subtly

steers the reader toward a better understanding of Truth.¹³³ One of the notable misunderstandings of Truth is her sex. Truth was famous for her manly physicality in her loud voice, energetic speech, remarkable six-foot height, and courage to ignore gender norms. For this reason, some observers mistook her for a man. When *St. Louis Dispatch* falsely introduces Sojourner Truth as “the name of a man,” *Leavenworth Times* directly denounces the article by saying, “Considerable ignorance is displayed in the first sentence” (164). This attack is reinforced by another writer from *Kansas City Journal*: “Ignorance of the sex of this noted personage, Sojourner Truth, by the writer of the above, is proof of wonderful lack of general information. Certainly, knowledge does not sojourn in that head, and truth without knowledge has but poor dispatch in the affairs of men and women” (164). Titus places all the three articles on the same page, making the three different writers talk to one another about Truth’s biological sex. Some people’s misconception about Truth’s gender identity, as the first article shows, can also be corrected by this textually arranged conversation. Unless Titus implicitly directs the reader’s attention to the truth about Sojourner Truth, the amanuensis leaves the reader confused by locating incompatible aspects of Truth side by side. In the case above, Titus leads the reader to ask about Truth’s mysterious corporeality that demonstrates both male and female characteristics, keeping the reader in her or his imagination of Truth’s bodily image. To picture the figure of Sojourner Truth, the reader has to collect her or his preconceptions of sexes and gender images and consequently to break and refigure them in the imagined site of Truth’s body.

¹³³ Mabee argues that Titus omitted or “corrected” harsh comment by others about Truth, and changed a significant word in the way that the reader of the *Narrative* would find Truth much more favorable than the original articles demonstrated (203).

The reader's confusion and effort to solve it generate the multiplied images and meanings of Truth, which in turn belie one another. One New Jersey paper reports that a superintendent of a local church heard about Truth as "the radical—the renowned, saintly, liberated, oratorical, pious slave" and invited her for a speech. However, the paper's writer finds later that "we do most decidedly dislike the complexion and everything else appertaining to Mrs. Truth" because she "is [a] crazy, ignorant, repelling negress, and her guardians would do a Christian act to restrict her entirely to private life" (137). Interestingly, whereas the writer calls her "slave" in describing her virtues that he heard, Truth becomes [a] "negress" to be "restricted" as soon as he observes her in person. The description seems to owe its suddenly changed attitude to the writer's physical encounter with Truth, as he closely observed the "complexion and everything else appertaining" to her. Following the writer's description, the reader visualizes how the "crazy, ignorant, repelling" aspects of Truth emerge on her physicality. Nevertheless, the reader's imagination is challenged again when Titus defends Truth through an article coming right after the previous one: "Then to show their ignorance, their lilliputian [*sic*] minds, they write of her as being a crazy woman, and old mummy that ought to be enclosed in an asylum" (138). The close placement of these conflicting observations of Truth forces the reader to break out of any fixed ideas on a "restricted, therefore, controlled" slave and a "freed, therefore, irrepressible" black woman, and the beauty or ugliness of a black and manly woman's body.

Titus witnessed that Truth's performance in public had roused questions about her body as it challenged American sexual normativity. In the mid-nineteenth century,

Americans were obsessed with their sexual identities—normative manhood and womanhood—and the public representations of them.¹³⁴ “Proper” representations of their sexualized bodies guaranteed their qualities to participate in the mainstream culture of American citizenry. In other words, Truth, as a woman speaker who broke “true womanhood” and stepped out of a private and domestic sphere, and as a former slave woman whose body was accustomed to hard toil as much as men, could not have this gender-specific identity in the American culture of this periods. In the early part of the “Book of Life,” Titus places William Hayward’s observation of Truth’s appearance in front of a pro-slavery crowd in Indiana on October 1, 1858. Regarding Truth’s upcoming visit to antislavery meetings in Northern Indiana, a rumor was circulated that “Sojourner was an impostor; that she was, indeed, a man disguised in woman’s clothing” (94). As Carla Peterson has pointed out, “[A] black woman speaker is predictably masculinized, and she is also racialized as ‘painted.’ Yet the term ‘painted’ also sexualizes her, and dangerously so, as an actress, and perhaps even a prostitute” (21-22). After the crowd and Democrats insisted that Truth “submit her breast to the inspection of some of the ladies present” (95), Truth told them, “her breasts had suckled many a white babe, to the exclusion of her own offspring [. . .] and she quietly asked them, as she disrobed her bosom, if they, too, wished to suck!; [. . .] that it was not to her shame that she uncovered her breast before them, but to their shame” (95). This episode exemplifies what Deborah Garfield notes on a black woman in public: [She] “was too frequently

¹³⁴ Regarding antebellum manhood, See Paul Gilmore’s *The Genuine Article*, Robert Reid-Pharr’s *Conjugal Union*, and Peter Coviello’s *Intimacy in America: Dreams of Affiliation in Antebellum Literature*.

refigured by detractors into the visual metaphor of striptease, as if the female voice, confounding sound and flesh, were the exposed body itself” (102).

As Painter calls this episode “a triumph of embodied rhetoric” (140), Truth subverted the meaning of a black slave woman’s body displayed in public sphere. At slave auction markets in the South, the body as a commodity was meant to be measured, be priced, and be sold. Even in the North, the body pertained to spectacular values that were placed to public eyes for antislavery propaganda. The black woman body was hardly imagined to be private and fully dressed because of its dehumanized publicity and materiality. For this reason, when appearing as a black antislavery advocate woman, Truth knew that she could not but appear to “be there in the body” differently from other white abolitionist women (Dudden 3). By exhibiting her bare breast, Truth infantilized the proslavery crowd. The white men in the crowd symbolically become emasculated, and the white women who deny Truth’s womanhood find themselves to have failed to affirm their own motherhood, as black women slaves now replace their motherly roles. As Douglass-Chin asserts, this episode illustrates how Truth becomes the example that “black women fought an objectifying embodiment in which they were degraded and often hypersexualized” (59). At the same time, Truth subverts the meaning of the black woman body in public; by showing off the materiality of her body, Truth proves the undeniable but less noticed humanity that the body carries and turned the officious observers’ eyes to their own bodies to ask if their white bodies had the same degree of humanity (“it was not to her shame [. . .] but to their shame”). Titus understood Truth’s distinctive location in the antislavery circle. Therefore, she converts Gilbert’s ex-slave Truth into Titus’s black

heroine Truth by introducing this episode in the beginning of the “Book of Life,” which exemplifies the “embodied rhetoric,” that is, fleshy writing.

If Gilbert discovers a rhetorical conduit for promulgating her antislavery agenda in Sojourner Truth’s storytelling, Frances Titus achieves her new persona as a woman activist by imitating Truth’s performance in a textual level. Gilbert offers many hints at the circumstance in which she was transcribing the *Narrative*; that is, Sojourner Truth was telling her life story and Gilbert was transcribing in sighs, tears, and nods. As a result, the reader of the 1850 *Narrative* can picture the two women and other listeners in Mrs. Benson’s parlor at the Northampton Association as somewhat motionless, simply sitting. By contrast, Titus does not give any clue that the reader guesses in what circumstances Titus was editing and writing the *Narrative*. Moreover, because, differently from Gilbert, Titus tends to withdraw her personal voice from the text, the reader can hardly assume Titus’s identity and motive. The only indication about the amanuensis is Samuel May’s letter to Titus: “Mrs. F.W. Titus, Can you inform me who wrote out (or otherwise complied) and edited the narrative of Sojourner Truth’s life? [. . .] If you can tell me where Sojourner Truth is now, and as to her health and circumstances, I shall be glad and further obliged to you” (186). Given that the “Book of Life” compiles the letters addressed to Truth and writings about her, May’s letter to Titus seems out of place. Consequently, by inserting this letter in the middle of the “Book of Life,” Titus leads the reader to ask about Titus’s role in relation to Sojourner Truth. In addition to this letter, Titus omits her reply to May from the book, keeping the reader

wondering about her. This withdrawal of her direct and controlling voice from the text resembles Truth's strategy to create her textual body through the reader's imagination.

With this lingering question—"Who is Titus?," Titus visualizes her presence in the book. As she is the only person who knows "where Sojourner Truth is now," Titus insinuates that she continues on the move along with Truth. By inventing herself to be in motion through the *Narrative*, Titus reveals that the *Narrative* is possible in her collaborative movement or performance with Truth. In doing so, Titus presents herself not only a transcriber for Truth but also an active participant in Truth's social activism.

The most distinctive power of Sojourner Truth's performance is that it transforms the two amanuenses to engage in activism that can produce discourses on these activism. The transformation from an invisible observer of Truth to an embodied participant in Truth's performance is not limited to Gilbert and Titus. Numerous celebrities of her time also demonstrate this transformation by becoming part of Truth's text—her bodily presentation—and paratext—her representation in print. Truth operates her overarching power to make various paratexts work in the way that they envision the text, that is, Truth's dynamically performing body. Sojourner Truth displays her body as a representation of the national and historical entity, that is, America. One anecdote illustrates her notion of the black body as a symbol and a means of dematerializing the black body. She interpretes the stars and red stripes in the American flag as an image of an African American slave's mutilated body, calling them "'scars and stripes' upon the negro's back" (Truth 169). By representing the black body as the national image and by embodying the flag's symbol as a slave's body, Truth rejects both the fixed materiality

and the abstraction of the body. According to Merish's term, this strategy can be named "transformative corporeality of embodied performance" (226). To achieve the constant transformation of her tangible body's performance in the *Narrative*, Truth needed to place herself in textual motion, transcending spatial and temporal limitations on stage through the mediation of white transcribers of that moving body. In this respect, Truth's *Narrative* shows how she invented fleshy writing. The *Narrative* as Truth's textual body performs on the stage that continuously revolves in the reader's mind.

Conclusion

This dissertation, “Performing Bodies and Performative Texts: The Bodily Culture of the Antebellum United States and Fleshy Writing,” suggests a non-traditional way of articulating agency by analyzing literatures, images, and the popular press about the critical moment of slavery and abolitionism in the U.S. history.

To conclude this dissertation, I want to bring up my story because it is crucial to explaining how I started this project years ago. Whenever I introduce myself as an Asian scholar studying African American literature and culture, some people wonder about what aspect of African American culture has inspired me. They ask this question for two reasons: First, I am not black and my interest in African American culture seems unusual. Second, it is often believed that the distinctiveness of black intellectualism, history, and culture is hardly shared with outsiders of this collective experience. I’d like to answer the two questions at once by explaining how the Black Studies led me to see the meaning of being human through its victorious achievements.

When I was eleven—as a slow learner, I just began to read and write—I realized that my own mother had never read a fairy tale to me and could barely write letters. Since then, I could see how she performed not to let her children know about her incomplete literacy. She was not only the person who performed. So did my older sister and I—without my mother’s knowledge, we began to forge her handwriting, so that we did not have to bother her to write a letter to our teachers. My child-body became invisible underneath written words. And, this invisibility seemed to empower me. Canonical American literature somewhat assures me of the importance of being bodilessness to affirm a writer’s authority. Ralph Waldo Emerson attempts to transcend his corporeal

limitation by insisting on the transparent eyeball that penetrates Nature as objective truth. Walt Whitman's body endlessly expands till it disappears in abstract ideals for equality, freedom, and democracy. In doing so, they claim the legitimacy of the "I", as Emerson's "Self-Reliance" and Whitman's "Song of Myself" suggest.

However, when I read Frederick Douglass's *Narrative*, I could see that this transcendental moment of the disembodiment does not happen to marginalized groups including women and/or blacks. Douglass's I/eye is corporealized to be susceptible to physical violence just like his enslaved body is exposed to brutalizing powers of Southern whites. Even if young Douglass hides in a closet, he witnesses Aunt Hester's bloody body and imagines his own tortured body. In addition, while working as a caulker in Baltimore, Douglass was gang-beaten by other white coworkers: "In an instant, I gave a sudden surge, and rose to my hands and knees. Just as I did that, one of their number gave me, with his heavy boot, a powerful kick in the left eye. My eyeball seemed to have burst" (63). The slave's burst eye fails to see beyond his violated body and their violent bodies. Only the physical outlines between the enslaved self and the freemen, and between black and white, appear obvious to his corporeal eyes. His burst eyeball overturns Emerson's confidence in the universal subject's "transparent eyeball," questioning the possibility of abstracting the black body and its experience. In this way, Douglass guided me to ideological, aesthetic, and philosophical conversations among different writer groups of that period.

I do not say that corporeality impedes African Americans' notion of agency or that white-male writers always successfully overcome the material boundary set by their

bodies. Rather, the body and any experience through that body made antebellum Americans understand a new type of subjectivity. Simply put, an embodied subject—who possessed visible, material, and sensorial body—appeared to be centered in antislavery movements. Language of human corporeality was prevalent throughout politics and a variety of aesthetic forms during this period. The lived experiences of slaves were introduced ever more audibly and visibly through live testimonials at antislavery fairs in the North. Ex-slaves graphically portrayed the cruelties of Southern slavery on the abolitionist stage, rousing antislavery sentimentality among feeling observers. The ex-slaves' bodies prompted these observers to reconsider the integrity and political expressiveness of the human body that had been regulated by the States, commodified in capitalist economy, and brutalized under slavery. In addition to antislavery politics, many art productions such as theater and literature portrayed bodies in pain as a conduit for agitating readers to be sensitive to sufferings of the black "other." Abolitionist writers such as Lydia Maria Child and Harriet Beecher Stowe believed that discovering readers' bodily sentiments for enslaved blacks would lead them to participate in producing discourses, which had excluded blacks and women from political power.

I, then, wondered if the feeling and visible bodies functioned only as an ideological and cultural channel to becoming a subject, how could I understand antebellum African Americans whose corporeality was often considered to deny their humanity under slavery of the South and in the racist culture of the North. Does the bodily culture underscore the division between body and mind? As the Cartesian concept of the split of mind and body exemplifies, the traditional Western culture

weighed mind over body. This belief in the mind-body dualism confirmed the hierarchy among cultural products such as oral arts, literacy, print, and performance. For this reason, Douglass proved his mind by mastering the oppressor's language. He saw the way to freedom in written language and demonstrated his agency through his heroic struggle to educate himself. However, what about a majority of enslaved blacks who were not allowed to acquire literacy? If they did not master literacy, could they not have agency or prove that agency? We remember Henry "Box" Brown as a performer rather than a writer. He packed himself in a wooden crate and became a showman as a mesmerist and conjuror under the show names Professor Box Brown and the African Prince. His unpacked and exhibited body evinced his agency. What about the theatrical transformation of Ellen and William Craft? Ellen Craft dressed as a white planter and her husband, William, pretended to be her personal servant on their way from Georgia to slavery-free Philadelphia. Their passing, cross-dressing, and performing enabled them to pursue freedom. The human body per se became the embodied rhetoric of an individual's perception of and response to their antebellum society.

I found how performance is the key to explaining the human body as the cultural rhetoric of this period when I watched Steven Spielberg's film *Amistad*. Wondering about the Amistad revolt and the African captives' story, I began to search 19th-century newspaper articles on the Amistad Africans and discovered that the film does not reveal the back story of the Amistad revolt leader and hero, Cinque: he was once a victim of slavery and illegal slave trade, but became a slave trader himself when he went back to Africa. The actors in the film not only play the Africans but also perform their theatrical

gestures. The audience of the film watch double or multiple masks of the Africans. Just like enslaved blacks used multilayered language because they needed to appropriate, transform, and reinvent white oppressor's language, the Amistad Africans must have showed multilayered performance. Unfortunately, no documents written by the Africans elucidate how the Africans felt about their being exhibited as the heroic model or enjoyable spectacles in front of curious American observers. I only could guess their intention by interpreting their observers' writings. Frederick Douglass's "The Heroic Slave" helped me examine how African Americans would feel about being the object of public observation both in proslavery South and antislavery North. In this novella, Madison Washington, the leader of the slave ship *Creole* revolt, invites a white observer/reader to his situational stage and teaches him how to participate without ogling and thus fetishizing the black body in pain.

If abolitionists tried to appeal to observers' sentiments by exhibiting ex-slaves' bodies in public, sentimentalist women writers turned a private home into a place where public discourses on slavery would be tested. Since the domestic sphere becomes a microcosm of antebellum America in their novels, that sphere functions as a situational stage on which a white mother figure disciplines her black daughter into normative forms of blackness. This affective discipline keeps a black daughter inferior in terms of physical appearance, race, gender, and class. However, they outgrow white mother figures because their bodies do not follow whatever their mother figures define as normative forms of blackness. Topsy in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is often considered one of the most racist characters because of the apparent lack of her voice, that is, her agency.

However, when she playfully performs how a bad daughter makes a good white mother, Topsy not only invalidates blackness in the white mother's mind but also reveals the shaky foundation of whiteness the mother displays. Similarly, Frado in Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* displays a hypersensitive body that disqualifies white observers' authority over her performance. Her tortured and pained body is not the evidence of the black body's vulnerability and weakness. Instead, it empowers her to debunk that whiteness is merely performed just like blackness.

Sojourner Truth is an excellent example of how the bodily performance is crucial to claiming agency in case of marginalized subjects. She was born into slavery and never learned how to read and write. Nevertheless, Truth published her narrative numerous times in her life, as many friends and acquaintances wanted to write about her. Because she understood her subjectivity through her enslaved, gendered, and racialized body, she could produce writing about herself transcending the strict distinctions between body and mind, between literacy and illiteracy, and between performance and written text. As a public speaker, she stood up on stage, voiced out, sang, and even exposed her body in front of audiences. They were inspired to record her spectacular performance. These audiences created myths of Truth in their writings: Harriet Beecher Stowe called her "Libyan Sibyl" and Frances Gage's witness of Truth's "Ain't I Woman" speech made Truth a precursor of black feminism. However, these different and various audiences' observations of Truth contradict one another, keeping readers wondering about what Truth/truth is. Not only does Truth embody her agency in the narrative, but also makes her narrative, the written text, perform.

Sojourner Truth forced me to go back to the memories of mother's performance. My mom never asked my sister and me how we noticed her secret or never said that she had already known that my sister and I forged her handwriting. Nevertheless, she noticed and knew it. And, mom did not teach the importance of literacy by suggesting herself as an opposite example. Rather, she let us pretend to be her in writing. She let us witness frustration, anger, fear, and challenge as a less-educated working-class woman in her everyday performance. At the same time, I realized that written language fails to fully and exactly describe them, and I had to invent various scribal voices for mom's performance. I could see how Truth maneuvered her corporeality, as her body was emphasized because of her illiteracy, to transcend the limit of letters and educated others' attempt to fix her in the frame of written language.

When I mentioned the dissertation title, "Performing Bodies and Performative texts: The Bodily Culture of the Antebellum United States and Fleshy Writing," I had a few similar questions: some people wondered if the title has a typo, kindly pointing out that the word "fleshy" should be "fresh" or "flash." We use the word "fleshy" to indicate that a person or part of body has a substantial amount of flesh. While looking into the performances of antebellum African American writers, black characters, and public speakers, I could not help imagining that their bodies is so powerfully expanding, exuberant, and extravagant that observers always failed to restrict those bodies within their writings and preexisting norms, instead, became part of the bodies' performances. Antebellum African Americans came to *flesh out* their being human in the context of slavery and abolitionism. To explain this through written texts, I coin the term "fleshy

writing.” In doing so, I attempt to explain the theme of a subject’s flesh whereby the subject decodes his or her discursive body and encodes body’s resistance to oppressive discourses in written language. Fleshy writing helps us understand conflicted textual dynamics in antebellum literature, especially recorded by African American writers and storytellers. Ex-slaves and black women in antebellum literature dismantled the hegemonic domains of literacy and publication, proving that their corporeality empowered them to publish their stories.

Because my mom’s performance makes me see how a silenced body revives in a written text, her fleshy body is omnipresent in my dissertation. Likewise, the fleshy presence of African Americans drove me to delve into this project. At the same time, my bodily movement to write down about their performances is another kind of fleshy writing. Fleshy writing regards language itself as a bodily act. Therefore, it rejects the idea that writing serves as the evidence of mind; rather, fleshy writing suggests that body and mind are inseparable in affirming agency. Here is the answer to the question of why I study African American literature: I was inspired by African Americans’ triumphant history and intellectual culture. The Black Studies demonstrates undeniable humanity for which people in the margin of every society continuously struggle beyond cultural and socio-economic hierarchies that undervalue these people’s expressions of agency. And, I see this struggle in myself, family, underrepresented students, outsiders of various collectives, and those who I encounter everyday. The bodies that they carry in public often belie their subjectivity, affect identity-building and knowledge, and challenge their notion of selfhood. Nonetheless, those bodies are essential for a marginalized individual

to confirming and retrieving agency through continuous conflicts with mainstream societies.

Nineteenth-Century Newspapers

- Baltimore Sun* (Baltimore, MD)
- Cleveland Daily Herald* (Cleveland, OH)
- Emancipator* (New York, NY)
- Liberator* (Boston, MA)
- National Anti-Slavery Standard* (New York, NY)
- New England Weekly Review* (Hartford, CT)
- New London Gazette* (New London, CT)
- New York Commercial Advertiser* (New York, NY)
- New York Herald* (New York, NY)
- New York Mirror* (New York, NY)
- Pennsylvania Inquirer and Daily Courier* (Philadelphia, PA)

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