

UNFINISHED JOURNEYS:
NARRATIVES OF SLAVERY FROM OLAUDAH EQUIANO
TO TONI MORRISON

by
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for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE



University of Edinburgh

August 1991

Declaration

ABSTRACT

The work carried out for this thesis has been done without assistance or collaboration.

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Despite the obvious way in which slave narrative is 'married' to historical context as both public testimony and personal, imaginative expression of a specific experience, slave narrative presents the reader with unfinished journeys. The narratives which are the focus of this study are partial autobiographies, to the extent that Olaudah Equiano, Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass each lived beyond the experiences about which they wrote. This is most obvious in the case of Douglass, who wrote three autobiographies. We are fortunate that Douglass wrote and re-wrote his life, and it is not unreasonable to wish, however fancifully, that Equiano and Jacobs had done the same. It is impossible to predict what their imaginary autobiographies would contain, beyond details of their lives in freedom which have come to us through historical sources, but it seems safe to assume that, like Douglass, Equiano and Jacobs would have opened doors that remained closed in the first narratives, in order to re-vision the past and shed light on the present. Indeed, the very act of imagining the slave narrator as creative agent beyond his or her journey to freedom, opens readers' minds to the possibilities of slave narrative. This is the imaginative journey performed by the fictional narratives of slavery, *Dessa Rose* and *Beloved*, into the world the slaves made, to probe and specify experiences in slavery and freedom. For the slave narrator, 'storying' his or her life was a beginning, not an end: their lives in freedom awaited them, and that long-awaited and cherished freedom was no more predictable or pre-determined than was the experience of slavery. 'Storying' slavery was a cathartic process through which the past was given meaning and order, and through which the storyteller could return to an image of the unrealised self in order to make it whole. Slave narrative is an engaged body of writing-- it participates in contexts which precede it, if African cultural practice is acknowledged as a vital presence in the slaves' lives, and in the narratives through which many ex-slaves were able account for their experiences in slavery. Slave narrative reflects mythic dimensions which transcend it, if realms of family, community and religion shaping childhood, adolescent struggle, and adult dilemmas are acknowledged as significant in slave narrative. The unfinished journey of slave narrative also is immediately evident in black creative traditions which acknowledge the slave's voice-- spoken, sung and written-- as its first utterance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Postgraduate Scholarship, awarded by the Postgraduate Studies Committee, and the David Masson Bursary, awarded by the Arts Faculty, enabled me to undertake this study with the security of financial support. I am happy to record my thanks to the University of Edinburgh for this money over a three year period, without which I could not have completed the dissertation.

Gratitude must be expressed for the help I received at the University of Edinburgh library, particularly from Jill Evans in the Reference Room, for meeting many Inter-library Loan requests. This service proved invaluable, particularly in securing overseas material. Also at the Main Library, 'the Apple man', Toby Morris, in User Support, made my entry into the world of technology not only painless, but also inspiring, and liberating. All the practical problems which Toby helped to solve, with his characteristic zest and good humour, enabled me to work with confidence and pleasure on my Mac. Many thanks Toby, for opening doors.

I had the opportunity to teach first year English Literature tutorials, 1989-1990. I feel a debt of gratitude not only to Professor Paul Edwards and to Roger Savage, for making possible this stimulating challenge, but also to the fifteen students with whom I shared the year. As is often the case, the 'teacher' learns much from her students. I especially want to thank Joel Petry, Jim Craig and Denis Brown, tutorial students who became valued friends. The women who manage the office of the Department of English Literature have been supportive in many ways, especially during my year teaching, which I appreciate. Neeltje Brady, secretary of African Studies, has been a supportive friend for many years. Thank you Neeltje, for coffee, and your sense of humour.

The debt to my supervisor, Professor Paul Edwards extends beyond the appreciation I feel for opportunities such as teaching, which broadened my literary horizons. His supervision has been exacting and stimulating-- I

complete the dissertation with a sense of satisfaction, but also aware of the possible directions in which my subject may take me in the future. Though the deficiencies of this study are the result of my limitations and in no way reflect the quality of supervision, the substance of the dissertation owes much to Professor Edwards' skill as a teacher. This study is dedicated to my supervisor, on the eve of his retirement.

My family, in Illinois, Colorado and Scotland, sustain me, and I have needed and appreciated their support, especially in the final year of bringing the dissertation to completion. Eva Leerberg, a true healer, helped me stay well. Maura and Duncan Robertson are patient friends who keep me grounded: "Out of the strain of the Doing, into the peace of the Done". Deb, Patty, Gwen, and my sisters, Susan and Alison, are mentors. I draw on Toni Morrison's words in thanking Dennis, for steady, patient, practical help, and all the love. You are a friend of my mind.

INTRODUCTION

This study, *Unfinished Journey: Narratives of Slavery from Olaudah Equiano to Toni Morrison*, will take as its starting point autobiographical accounts of ex-slaves, specifically basing itself upon eighteenth century Anglo-African and nineteenth century African-American material. Four slave narratives are central to this study: Olaudah Equiano's eighteenth century account, *The Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African, Written by Himself* (1789); Frederick Douglass' first and second autobiographies, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845), and *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855); and Harriet A. Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* (1861). Two contemporary, fictionalised narratives of slavery, Sherley Anne Williams' novel, *Dessa Rose* (1986), and Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved* (1987), conclude this study.

For the purpose of making clear the ways in which slave narrative is gender specific, this study includes comparative accounts of the treatment of basic themes in the narratives. Part one of this study includes chapters one through four, and seeks to place the narratives of Equiano, Jacobs and Douglass in relation to literary theory and in terms of theme, purpose and audience. It seeks to answer the question, what meanings can be made apparent through the apparently straight-forward designation 'slave narrative'? Chapter one explores authenticating structures and conventions embedded in both formal and more congenial relationships between slave narrator, editor and audience, and accounts of gaining literacy skills in the narratives of Equiano, Douglass, and Jacobs. Chapters two and three focus on the slave narrator's use of literary convention. Chapter two explores the association of male slave narrative and picaresque literary convention, and seeks to place the picaresque in a broad context, including African dimensions as well as the European literary convention. Chapter three explores the association of female slave narrative with conventions of sentimental or domestic writing, in an attempt to bring into focus the complexity of relationships between black and white women in

slavery. It recognises the black picaresque potential of black women's writing, and seeks to establish limits of the association of the domestic realm and female experience. Chapter four identifies and investigates strategic voice in the slave narratives, focussing on literary strategy, and the particular importance of silent spaces in slave narrative.

In Part Two, detailed close readings focus on the presentation of images of women in the narratives of Equiano, Douglass and Jacobs. In chapter five, the narratives of Equiano and Jacobs are compared in order to begin to identify the basis of differences and of similarities in male and female presentations of black and white women. In chapter six, female presence in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) is established as a significant revision of the absence of the maternal in the 1845 *Narrative*. Chapter six relates the restoration of female presence in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) to Douglass' quest for home figured in that text. The argument moves to its conclusion through an account of two contemporary black women's novels which can be seen as self-consciously placed within the conventions and concerns of slave narrative. Chapter seven will focus on Sherley Anne Williams' *Dessa Rose* (1986) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). Both Morrison and Williams have expressed interest not only in the historical period of slavery, but also in its documentation-- how, why and by whom the experience of slavery was recorded. The setting of *Beloved* and *Dessa Rose* in nineteenth century American slavery and its aftermath, the main focus of these two novels on female characters and their experiences of slavery and freedom, and a preoccupation with 'storying' slavery in *Beloved* and *Dessa Rose*, draw from and comment on the roots of Black writing. *Dessa Rose* and *Beloved* conclude this study as affirmations of the expanded understanding of slave narratives established in the study. All references to *Dessa Rose* (1986), are to the 1988 Futura edition, and all references to *Beloved* (1987) are to the 1988 Picador edition.

While this study is not an historical account of slave experience, and does not read the narratives simply as historical documents, the chapters which follow are enhanced by a basic introduction to the lives of Equiano, Douglass and Jacobs. The Igbo Olaudah Equiano, named Gustavus Vassa by one of his 'owners', Captain Pascal, was born in Essaka, possibly Iseke, around 1745, in what is now eastern Nigeria, the youngest son of a devoted mother and a

locally important, highly respected, titled father. Equiano was about 11 years old when he and his sister were kidnapped by marauding African neighbours. During a six-month journey to the coast, the siblings were separated and temporarily reunited, and Equiano experienced forms of African slavery which contrasted with his experiences of slavery in America and Europe. Having eventually arrived at the West African coast, Equiano was sold to European slave traders and transported to the West Indies, to the southern United States, and to England, where he eventually settled as a freeman. Equiano's early adolescence and young manhood were spent as a slave, most often aboard ships, during which time he gained literacy and other useful skills, and he emerged as something of an entrepreneur. As a slave, Equiano was owned by a succession of masters-- the British naval officer, Michael Pascal, Captain James Doran, and the Quaker Robert King. Equiano earned enough money to buy his own freedom when he was in his early twenties. As a young freeman, Equiano travelled widely, proved himself to be versatile and influential, and became a passionate and effective abolitionist in Britain, a country he loved as a 'home away from home'. Equiano married a white woman, Susanna Cullen, and they had two daughters, Ann Maria and Joanna. In 1789 Equiano published his two volume narrative, which went through one American and eight British editions during his life-time, and was translated in the eighteenth century into Dutch, Russian and German. All references to Equiano's *The Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African, Written by Himself* (1789), are to the 1969, two volume edition, edited by Paul Edwards. References to this text will indicate the page number, preceded by the volume number ('I' or 'II').

Frederick Douglass was born Frederick Baily around 1817. He never knew his father, who was probably a white man, rumoured to be Douglass' mother's master. Douglass had infrequent but significant contact with his mother, Harriet Baily, who died when Douglass was quite young. Douglass spent his early childhood in Tuckahoe, Maryland, under the care and protection of his maternal grandparents, in particular his grandmother, Betsy Baily. This happy time in Douglass' life ended when he was taken to the plantation of Colonel Lloyd, where Douglass worked as the slave of Capt. Aaron Antony, the plantation 'manager' under Col. Lloyd. As a young adolescent, Douglass was sent to work as a domestic slave in the Baltimore household of his master's brother, Hugh Auld, followed by a more brutal experience of slavery under Mr Covey, and then a more benign experience of slavery at Mr. Freeland's farm.

Following an unsuccessful attempt to escape north with other slaves, Douglass was returned to Baltimore and, under Hugh Auld's supervision, was able to learn the trade of caulker at various shipyards. On September 4, 1838, Douglass escaped from Baltimore to freedom in New York, dressed as a sailor, carrying sailor's papers borrowed from a friend. Three days later he married Anna Murray, a free black woman from Baltimore. They had four children. In 1845 Douglass published *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*. In 1855, he published his second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*. At this time Douglass established his own newspaper and severed both working and social relationships with William Lloyd Garrison, the influential and well-known abolitionist who had provided Douglass' first public speaking opportunity, and made possible Douglass' first 'career' in freedom as a fugitive lecturer. Douglass had a long and distinguished career as a writer, newspaper editor, and lecturer, through his involvement in the Abolitionist Movement, the Women's Rights Movement, as well as through his involvement in various activities supporting the advancement of black people's welfare before, during, and after the Civil War. All references to Douglass' first autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845), are to the 1982 edition, edited by Houston A. Baker Jr. All references to Douglass' second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), are to the 1987 edition, edited by William L. Andrews. In order clearly to distinguish references to Douglass' autobiographies, page numbers will be followed by the date of the autobiography from which the reference has been taken, [i.e. (p.1/1855) or (p. 2/1845)].

Harriet A. Jacobs was born a slave in Edenton, North Carolina, around 1813. Though orphaned at a young age, she knew her father, a skilled carpenter, and her mother, before their deaths. Following the deaths of their parents, both Harriet and her brother John were cared for by their maternal grandmother, Molly Horniblow, who owned her own home and made a living as a baker, having gained her freedom as an adult woman. After the death of Jacobs' beloved childhood mistress, Jacobs was willed to the young daughter of Dr and Mrs James Norcom, in whose home Jacobs worked as a domestic slave, and suffered persistent sexual harassment from Dr Norcom. Jacobs intended to infuriate Dr Norcom, and thus prompt him to sell her, by forming a relationship with another white man. As an adolescent, Jacobs entered into a

sexual relationship with a neighbour, the lawyer Mr Samuel Tredwell Sawyer, which resulted in the births of Jacobs' children, Joseph and Louisa. But Dr. Norcom did not sell Jacobs, and he threatened Jacobs, and her children, with the prospect of a hard life as field labourers, if Jacobs continued to refuse to become his concubine. Around 1835, Jacobs ran away to prevent her children from becoming plantation slaves, and to thwart Dr. Norcom's sexual demands. In running away, Jacobs travelled only one mile from the Norcom home to her grandmother's house, where she lay hidden in a tiny attic for nearly seven years, before escaping to the north in 1842. Shortly after Jacobs went into hiding, Mr Sawyer bought the children's freedom, and though Mr. Sawyer did not free them as he had promised Jacobs, the children were safe from Dr. Norcom. In freedom, Jacobs joined her children in New York, and worked as a nursemaid for Mr and Mrs Willis, during which time she travelled with them to Britain. In 1852, Mrs Willis bought Jacobs' freedom, and in 1861, Jacobs published her narrative. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written By Herself*, bears the name of the well-known feminist abolitionist, Lydia Maria Child, as editor, but does not name the author, Harriet Jacobs, who preferred to remain anonymous. Jacobs also wrote pseudonymously, changing the names of people and places in her account: Jacobs refers to herself, the narrator of *Incidents*, as Linda Brent; Dr. and Mrs. Norcom are designated Dr. and Mrs. Flint; Mr. Sawyer is called Mr. Sands; Jacobs' children, Joseph and Louisa, are referred to as Benjamin and Ellen; and Mr. and Mrs. Willis are designated Mr. and Mrs. Bruce. In order to avoid the confusion which would result from referring to 'double-named' characters, this study uses the pseudonyms which Jacobs herself deployed in her narrative. However, because Jacobs is discussed in this study as both author of, and protagonist in, the narrative, I shall refer to Harriet Jacobs by her real name, and not by the pseudonym, Linda Brent. All references to Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written By Herself* (1861), are to the 1987 edition, edited by Jean Fagan Yellin, which includes a selection of letters written by, or to, Jacobs. In extracts from Jacobs' letters quoted in this study, no corrections have been made to Jacobs' (lack of) punctuation, or to spelling or grammatical errors, in line with Yellin's treatment of the letters. In quoted extracts from Jacobs' letters, double spacing between sentences ^{or words} indicates where punctuation has not been provided by Jacobs.

This study, *Unfinished Journeys: Narratives of Slavery from Olaudah Equiano to Toni Morrison*, is distinguished by range of material, some of which is unknown and much of which is undervalued. Comparable works normally restrict themselves to *either* male *or* female writers, and limit the field of inquiry on the basis of the temporal and geographical origin of the slave narrative. Because of the wide range of this study, thematic focus on the image of black women in the narratives and novels, provides essential unity. Furthermore, this study is unique in engaging contemporary fictionalisations of slavery which draw imaginatively on the slave narrative, and which validate the wider parameters of the slave narrative tradition explored in this study.

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Was he naming what he saw, or creating what he did not?

--Beloved

We was seeing ourselves as we had been and seeing the thing that had made us

--Dessa Rose

CHAPTER I. PAINTING BY NUMBERS?

FORM AND CONTENT IN SLAVE NARRATIVE

For hundreds of women and men who had been slaves, the journey from slavery to freedom found a final expression in the written word. Their narratives are both personal, creative expression-- "I exist, and know because this is how it felt", central to the romantic assertion and expression of self-hood - and public testimony pressed into service by abolitionists to stir public sympathy and muster support . The narrative could never be *simply and solely* a personal journey and rarely was it *just* propaganda. This tension, central to slave narrative, is explored throughout part one of this study, by questioning conventional ideas of slave narrative which can be seen to diminish the complexity of the ex-slaves' tale. In "The Black Canon: Reconstructing Black American Literary Criticism", Joyce A. Joyce rightly identifies the writer/audience relationship as a crucial governing dynamic of black writing since slave narrative (1). In this chapter, I wish to show that relationship bringing into focus the dilemmas inherent in the ex-slave becoming, in Houston Baker Jr.'s words, "a sharer in the general public discourse about slavery" (2). ^{This dilemma will} be explored in the narratives of Olaudah Equiano, Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs. But in Joyce's statement below, this "concentrated" relationship seems emptied of the qualities which would allow us even to *recognise* the dilemmas faced by the slave narrator. That recognition is pivotal if we are to see slave narrative as more than propaganda, and to proceed with questions of authenticity, 'truth' and narrative control, not because we doubt the ex-slaves' experience, veracity or skill, but because limitations faced by the ex-slave disclose much about his or her superficially 'plain, unvarnished tale':

In the first works of Black American literature the responsibilities of the writers to their audience was as easy to deduce as it was to identify their audience. The slave narratives, most of the poetry, *Clotel* and *Our Nig* were all addressed to white audiences with the explicit aim of denouncing slavery. This concentration of the relationship of Black Americans to the hegemony, to main-stream society, continues to this day to be the predominant issue in Black American literature, despite the change in focus we find in some of the works of black women writers (3)

It is true that Joyce's subject is not slave narrative, or the slave narrators' "relationship..to the hegemony" (or, for that matter, the early novelists, poets or those black women writers whom she identifies as exceptions), but it is crucial to the aims of her argument that such a relationship is presented as "easy to deduce", a tendency in criticism of black literature regretted by Henry Louis Gates Jr: "for all sorts of complex historical reasons, the very act of writing has been a 'political act' for the black author... and because our life in the West has been one political struggle after another, our literature has been defined... as primarily just one more polemic in these struggles" (4). James Olney in " 'I Was Born': Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature", (5), designates slave narrative as polemic and, more specifically, abolitionist propaganda, the form, content and themes of which are determined by white sponsors. The importance of literacy for the ex-slave, and the complexity of relationships which result, are lost in Olney's argument, as I hope to show. As I shall demonstrate in chapter seven, both Toni Morrison in *Beloved* and Sherley Anne Williams in *Dessa Rose*, explore, in different ways, 'word-bonds' which draw upon the slave narrative in ways more complex and intriguing than the "easy to deduce", deterministic relationship suggested by Joyce and put forward by Olney. I argue in this chapter that authenticating structures embedded in both formal and more congenial relationships between slave narrator, editor and audience, and accounts of gaining literacy skills in the narratives of Equiano. Douglass and Jacobs, demonstrate this.

What is the nature of the relationship between slave narrator, audience and white sponsors? How does it fashion slave narrative-- or is such a question irrelevant to material which^{is} as Olney would have it, simply propaganda? Is it useful, as Olney does, to bring to slave narrative the expectation that it should share the aims and intentions of the autobiographical tradition of Augustine, Rousseau, Thoreau and others ? How can slave narrative be placed if viewed as outside of, or different from, established literary tradition ? It is not my aim to

present alternative readings of the autobiographical tradition upon which Olney draws in order to establish a context for slave narrative, or to argue for a specific placement of slave narrative within this or another tradition of writing, though critics have linked autobiography and slave narrative. Angelo Costanzo may over-state his case when he identifies Equiano as the father of Afro-American autobiography, but this is not surprising in a study which attempts to firmly establish Equiano in the American slave narrative tradition (6). As does Keith Sandiford's study of eighteenth century slave narrative, Costanzo looks at the influence of spiritual autobiography on Equiano's narrative, showing a similarity between it and, for instance, Benjamin Franklin's autobiography. Similarly, in her PhD dissertation, Josephine Adams identifies the narratives of Sojourner Truth and Harriet Jacobs with spiritual autobiography (7). I have not chosen to pursue slave narrative specifically as autobiography, or to engage with the considerable body of autobiographical criticism, Olney being a prolific and respected figure in this critical tradition. However, as these examples suggest, such issues as gender, as well as slave narrative outside of the nineteenth century American tradition, must inform studies of slave narrative, a point I shall pursue in this chapter and throughout this study.

I *do* take exception to assumptions embedded in Olney's article which would make it impossible to retrieve slave narrative from the literary 'no man's land' where he leaves it. Olney assures whoever might read a half dozen or more slave narratives that the reader will experience "a sense not of uniqueness but of overwhelming sameness... [the reader] is sure to come away dazed by the mere repetitiveness of it all: seldom will he discover anything new or different but only, always more and more of the same" (8). Olney views the ex-slaves' literate act as child's play: "the slave narrative, with ^uvery few exceptions, tends to exhibit a highly conventional, rigidly fixed form that bears much the same relationship to autobiography in a full sense as painting by numbers bears to painting as a creative act" (9). Douglass' 1845 *Narrative* is one of Olney's "very few exceptions", a point to be taken up later. If slave narrative is as elementary as Olney believes it to be, then the reader, dazed and overwhelmed by repetition and "sameness", will certainly agree with Olney that "ex-slaves do exercise memory in their narratives, but they never talk about it as Augustine does, as Rousseau does, as Wordsworth does, as Thoreau does, as Henry James does, as a hundred other autobiographers (not to say novelists like Proust) do" (10). And

with the revered fathers of autobiography foremost in the reader's mind, Olney defines slave narrative:

Slave narrative is most often a non-memorial description fitted to a pre-formed mold, a mold with regular depressions here and equally regular prominences there-- virtually obligatory figures, scenes, turns of phrase, observances, and authentications -- that carry over from narrative to narrative and give to them as a group the species character that we designate by the phrase "slave narrative" (11)

Olney insists on grounding his argument in the rarified world of 'High Literature' and excludes slave narrative from it as "something other than autobiography in any full sense, and something other than literature in any reasonable understanding of that term as an act of creative imagination " (12). Estelle Jelinek's thesis put forward in the introduction to her survey of women's autobiography is equally relevant to slave narrative: "My argument is with critics who ignore women's autobiographies because they do not fit their criteria of a 'proper' autobiography, one which has the characteristics found in men's autobiographies" (13). Olney draws on Paul Ricoeur, who gives to the reader the phrases "emplotment" or "episodic dimension" and "configurational dimension" which assist Olney in sorting out "the place of time and memory both in autobiography in general and in the ^{Afro-}American slave narrative in particular" (14). Olney then brings his/Ricoeur's observations to bear on slave narrative:

...the writer of a slave narrative finds himself in an irresolvably tight bind as a result of the very intention and premise of his narrative, which is to give a picture of "slavery as it is"... Thus the ex-slave narrator is debarred from use of ^{of}memory that would make anything of his narrative beyond or other than the purely, merely episodic, and he is denied access, by the very nature and intent of his venture, to the configurational dimension of narrative (15)

While the limiting assumptions embedded in the argument are apparent in "irresolvably", "debarred", "anything... other than", "purely", "merely", it is Olney's designation of the relationship between narrator, sponsor and audience as deterministic that can be seen to account for his objectionable definition, and dismissive treatment, of slave narrative. In so doing, Olney sets slave narrative adrift in a literary 'no man's land', territory defined and controlled, not by the ex-slave, but by powerful outsiders whose explicitly political aims-- to denounce slavery and abolish it-- determine the boundaries of slave narrative theme, content and form. In denying all other contexts and

fields of influence possibly shaping slave narrative, and in privileging an extreme version of the ex-slaves' relationship to "the hegemony, to mainstream society", Olney ultimately renders the slave narrator powerless and mute, and the narrative ineffectual and uninteresting. As Olney puts it, "the truth is that behind every slave narrative that is in any way characteristic or representative there is the one same persistent and dominant motivation, which is determined by the interplay of narrator, sponsors, and audience and which itself determines the narrative in theme, content and form" (16). From this perspective, the ex-slave's achievement of literacy is trivialised because the relationships necessitated by the achievement of literacy cannot emerge as other than simple and predictable.

The contemporary comic-book version of Equiano's narrative, or nineteenth century English anti-slavery scrap-books, both of which bear about as much resemblance to literature as "painting by numbers does to painting as a creative act", illustrate the limitations of Olney's argument in its exclusive focus on an American geography of slave experience, and a gender-blind approach to this terrain (17). The comic-book, directed at school children for use in a wide range of lessons, is child's play, but with a serious purpose. Bright, lively illustrations accompany text which retains the spirit, as well as some of the subtle ironies, of the 1789, two-volume text. Following illustrated extracts from the narrative, which guide the young reader along Equiano's journey from slavery to freedom, a variety of lessons and activities involve children in history as lived experience, from a unique point of view. For example, basic geography is taught by asking children to chart on a map Equiano's journey to slavery from the West Coast of Africa, to the West Indies and coastal colonial America, and finally to England; a chemistry lessons asks children to identify examples of water as solid, liquid and gas encountered by Equiano on the Phipps expedition to the Arctic (18). Clearly, this is not the terrain of nineteenth-century American plantation slavery, but a unique record of experience in slavery and freedom that requires a wider vision of slave narrative than Olney's narrow perspective offers. Indeed, Olney's argument would not allow a distinction to be made between the comic-book and the narrative which inspired it, let alone acknowledge Equiano's contribution to ^{the} slave narrative tradition.

In " 'A Burning Zeal for Righteousness': Women in the British Anti-Slavery Movement, 1820-1860"(19), Bill and Rosamund Billington describe anti-slavery

scrap-books or albums, put together and sold by British ladies' anti-slavery societies to encourage "moral and economic consciousness raising" of women, and to win them to the cause. "Propaganda aimed at women and children", the scrap-books were assembled to narrate themes and provide moving images of slavery. Olney devalues the role of the ex-slave in the creation of the slave's narrative to such an extent that no distinction could be made between slave narrative and scrap-books put together solely for propaganda purposes. Both the scrap-books and Olney's argument evoke a silent, deracinated slave presence. Clearly, no slave figured in the creation of these albums which are hardly the same as slave narrative, despite both being put to similar uses, and drawing on stock scenes and atrocity themes (20), such as female and child exploitation. In the Billingtons' observation that "women aroused by the material would have guide-lines for conducting their own organisation" (21), the word "aroused" might remind us that explicit, violent descriptions of brutalised women and children may be pornographic in effect if not in design, which, as we shall see, Douglass challenged in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, and Jacobs avoided altogether in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*:

A typical album contained illustrations emphasizing the brutal exploitation of slave women and children, including their semi-nakedness and exposure to the lash of overseers. Britannia was often shown as a 'Godess-like Woman' intervening between the man with the lash and pleading female slaves, ultimately triumphing as the scourge fell from the man's bloody hands and pious female slaves prayed to the 'great massa' as their children were torn from their arms. Other material for the albums was taken from the planters' own newspapers in the West Indies, proof that female slaves were treated like cattle, bought, sold, whipped and branded (22)

Women's anti-slavery activities such as those described by the Billingtons invite speculation regarding the limitation of Olney's male-only world of slave narrators, abolitionists and audience. How does gender shape the relationship between the slave and literate white society, a question dramatised and explored in different ways by Williams in *Dessa Rose*, and by Morrison in *Beloved*? Is it significant that women often provided the ex-slave with his or her first lessons in reading and writing, as is the case with Equiano, Jacobs and Douglass? How are we to respond to criticism, to be discussed in chapter three, which reveals that white British and American women writers, at least since the seventeenth-century, faced obstacles, and adopted literary strategies, similar to those characteristic of early black writing? Reasons for the absence of American

women's poetry in the early eighteenth century are similar to those faced by the ex-slave, particularly the female slave, including serious doubt about her innate ability to write 'real literature'. For example, the eighteenth-century American poet Martha Brewster was made to 'perform' to prove her literacy: "apparently a number of people doubted whether or not she had actually written her poems, and thus she was forced to paraphrase a Psalm extemporaneously in the presence of a number of witnesses-- a clearly humiliating experience" (23). But Olney's approach will give us no help in answering the questions posed above, nor does it take seriously dilemmas inherent in the written word for those peripheral to "the hegemony, to mainstream society", to return to Joyce's words. Women in British anti-slavery societies made significant choices in selecting images of female and child exploitation, not to mention the image of the 'Goddess-like Woman' Britannia as a symbol of moral triumph (and English supremacy?). Such choices were certainly influenced by a specific, intended audience of women and children, and can be seen to "link the anti-slavery movement with the powerful evangelical missionary movement", as the Billingtons' point out (24). Such choices also *identify* and *differentiate* female experience in slavery, images of which will be explored in subsequent chapters, particularly the image of the defenceless female slave conventionally associated with male slave narrative. As we shall see, similar experiences in slavery for Jacobs, Douglass and Equiano do not negate the role of gender in shaping and specifying that experience. These slave narrators will be shown to use and revise conventional images of defenceless, sexually exploited female slaves in close readings of part two of this study.

Olney's "Master Plan for Slave Narrative" given below, lists the "species character" of slave narrative like ingredients in a recipe, A through E and 1 through 12, but little can be gleaned about slave narrative, or the experience of slavery, from Olney's list. How are we to respond to master-captains in Equiano's narrative presented simultaneously as loved father figures who betray and are capable of unpredictable, non-violent cruelty? What do we make of a detailed family history, as in Jacobs' *Incidents*, which tells not just of family disruption and dispersal through sale, but also of the family's efforts to stay together, to ensure safety and freedom for as many family members as possible--sometimes with the help of white men and women? How can Olney's "Master Plan" help us account for *My Bondage and My Freedom*, where, as we shall see in chapter six, Douglass re-figures the narrow idea of slave narrative which

underpins Olney's list of ingredients? Olney's "Master Plan" seems to suggest that, like the nineteenth century English ladies' scrap-books, slave narrative is little more than "obligatory figures, scenes, and turns of phrase" pieced together, amounting to propaganda no more serious or complex than a child's comic-book:

- (A) An engraved portrait, signed by the narrator.
- (B) A title page that includes the claim, as an integral part of the title "Written by Himself"...
- (C) A handful of testimonials and/or one or more prefaces or introductions written either by a white abolitionist friend of the narrator... or ^{by} a white amanuensis... in the course of which preface the reader is told that the narrative is a "plain, unvarnished tale"...
- (D) A poetic epigraph...
- (E) The actual narrative:
 - 1) a first sentence beginning, "I was born...", then specifying a place but not a date of birth;
 - 2) A sketchy account of parentage, often involving a white father;
 - 3) description of a cruel master, mistress, or overseer, details of first observed whipping and numerous subsequent whippings, with women very frequently the victims;
 - 4) an account of one extraordinarily strong, hard working slave...;
 - 5) record of the barriers raised against slave literacy and the overwhelming difficulties encountered in learning to read and write;
 - 6) description of a "Christian" slaveholder... and the accompanying claim that "Christian" slaveholders are invariably worse than those professing no religion;
 - 7) description of the amounts and kinds of food and clothing given to slaves... ;
 - 8) account of a slave auction, of families being separated and destroyed... ;
 - 9) description of patrols, of failed attempt(s) to escape, of pursuit by men and dogs;
 - 10) description of ^{successful} attempt(s) to escape, lying by during the day, travelling by night guided by the North Star, reception in a free state by Quakers who offer a lavish breakfast and much genial thee/thou conversation;

11) taking of a new last name (frequently one suggested by a white abolitionist) to accord with new social identity as a free man, but retention of first name as a mark of continuity of individual identity

12) reflections on slavery.

(F) An appendix or appendices composed of documentary material...(25)

Olney does not begin to suggest what the slave narratives central to this study hold in store for us. While these narratives exhibit characteristics listed by Olney, his recipe for slave narrative represents received notions about these texts at their most confining. Jean Fagan Yellin identifies a number of ways in which Jacobs' narrative is unconventional, but in doing so, Yellin takes for granted that male slave narrative conforms to Olney's recipe. Yellin, however, does not limit the potential of slave narrative as severely as Olney. For example, Yellin points out that, like other slave narratives, *Incidents* presents the recurrent struggle for freedom, but Jacobs' tale is unique because it foregrounds family and community. Yellin observes:

Although the slave narrator has been likened to the 'rootless alienated' picaro, Jacobs... locates herself firmly within a social matrix... Her recurrent efforts to free herself and her children are shown in the context of the attempts of successive generations of her family to free their children: Her grandmother managed to emancipate one son; her father failed to free her brother or herself (26)

In chapter two I specify and examine problems which emerge in the reading of male slave experience as picaresque. As we shall see, there is nothing "sketchy" in Equiano's "account of parentage", and it does not involve a white father, though it does involve highly complex relationships with white surrogate fathers, far removed from the simplicities implied by Olney's scheme. Also, in Douglass' 1845 *Narrative*, the alienation of his early years, communicated through images of brutalised female slaves and "a sketchy account of parentage" is thoroughly revised in *My Bondage and My Freedom*. I hope to show in subsequent chapters that neither Equiano nor Douglass can be adequately described in terms of the European picaresque tradition.

It is true that *Incidents* begins, "I was born a slave;" as Olney's recipe calls for, but the semi-colon and qualification which follow this statement--"but I never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away" (p. 5)-- cannot be regarded as other than central to the tensions and ambiguities of a young slave

girl's life, reflected in her narrative. As I explore at some length in chapter three of this study, the early chapters of Jacobs' narrative presents a complex history of her immediate and extended family, as well as the relationships between it and generations of masters and mistresses. Nor can we discount or overlook the significance of *Incidents* beginning with this account of "Childhood", as the chapter is entitled. This study repeatedly reveals the importance of childhood to Equiano, Douglass and Jacobs as a time during which the narrator was rooted in black communities outside of, and usually concealed from, the web of paternalistic relationships activated in slavery. Yellin's identification of rootedness, family, and community in *Incidents* is a necessary corrective to male bias in slave narrative criticism. Far from initiating the recital of a predictable slave narrative childhood as suggested by Olney's "Master Plan" (items one through three), Jacobs immediately introduces interrelated themes of friendship, deceit, and betrayal linking her own family and the Norcom family, designated Dr. and Mrs. Flint in *Incidents*. Jacobs' relationship to her grandmother, as well as to Jacobs' childhood mistress, are of fundamental importance to understanding "accounts of parentage" (specifically when, as in the case of Jacobs' children, a white father is involved), and to understanding "cruel masters and mistresses". While Jacobs' words below, "such was the story my grandmother told me... I have often heard her tell how...", would signal for Olney the failure of the "configurational dimension" of memory, I am immediately made aware of, and interested in, the narrator's self-conscious positioning as story-teller, as well as receiver of family history shared orally. Such ^{ISSUES} are recurrent concerns in the work of Sherley Anne Williams and Toni Morrison, particularly in the novels which are the focus of the conclusion to this study, *Dessa Rose* and *Beloved*. This study fundamentally challenges Olney's image of the deracinated slave as mere scribbler in the margins of *real* autobiography/ literature. *Incidents* begins:

I was born a slave; but I never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away. My father was a carpenter, and considered so intelligent and skilful in his trade, that when buildings out of the common line were to be erected, he was sent for from long distances, to be head workman. On condition of paying his mistress two hundred dollars a year, and supporting himself, he was allowed to work at his trade, and manage his own affairs. His strongest wish was to purchase his children; but, though he several times offered his hard earnings for that purpose, he never succeeded. In complexion my parents were a light shade of brownish yellow, and were termed mulattoes. They lived together in comfortable home; and, though we

were all slaves, I was so fondly shielded that I never dreamed I was a piece of merchandise, trusted to them for safe keeping, and liable to be demanded of them at any moment. I had one brother, William, who was two years younger than myself-- a bright, affectionate child. I had also a great treasure in my maternal grandmother, who was a remarkable woman in many respects. She was the daughter of a planter in South Carolina, who, at his death, left her mother and his three children free, with money to go to St Augustine, where they had relatives. It was during the Revolutionary War; and they were captured on their passage, carried back, and sold to different purchasers. Such was the story my grandmother used to tell me; but I do not remember all the particulars. She was a little girl when she was captured and sold to the keeper of a large hotel. I have often heard her tell how hard she fared during childhood. But as she grew older she evinced so much intelligence, and was so faithful, that her master and mistress could not help seeing it was for their interest to take care of such a valuable piece of property (p. 5)

In making the case for the unconventional in *Incidents*, Yellin implies a sharp distinction between the conventional association in male slave narrative of freedom with literacy, as opposed to Jacobs' goal of secure domesticity, establishing a home for herself and her children in freedom:

In important ways, *Incidents* diverges from received notions about the slave narrative. The genre has been characterized as dramatizing 'the quest for freedom and literacy', but *Incidents*, perhaps the most comprehensive slave narrative by an Afro-American woman, presents a heroic slave mother struggling for freedom and a home. She runs away to save her children-- and particularly her daughter-- from slavery (27)

Chapters two and three of this study look in some detail at problems which arise from opposing experience on the basis of gender, particularly the figure of the picaro accepted by Yellin as representative of the male slave narrator, and the exclusive association of rootedness with female slave narrative, towards which Yellin tends. In the course of establishing unique qualities of female presence and voice in slave narrative, it would be wrong to neglect the importance which Jacobs places on literacy, or the special meaning of literacy for the female slave as portrayed in *Incidents*. Jacobs clearly values literacy and learning, explicit in the long passage quoted above describing her father's trained skills and rank of tradesman, holding a position of respect, and in the description of her grandmother as intelligent and valued for her organisational and other skills, such as storyteller.

It seems important to Jacobs to characterise her family and herself as educated and able, for example, in chapter twelve, "Fear of Insurrection". In this chapter, Jacobs' account of events at the time of the Nat Turner slave rebellion is a fascinating study of class division in slave-owning society: "It was a grand opportunity for the low whites, who had no negroes of their own to scourge. They exalt in such a chance ^{to exercise a little brief authority, and} to show their subserviency to the slaveholders; not reflecting that the power which trampled on the colored people also kept themselves in poverty, ignorance and moral degradation" (p. 64). In detailing preparations for the arrival of the "low whites" at her grandmother's home, Jacobs makes clear the good standing of her family, already established in the long passage above: "I knew the houses were to be searched; and I suspected it would be done by country bullies and the poor whites. I knew nothing annoyed them so much as to see colored people living in comfort and respectability; so I made arrangements for them with especial care. I arranged everything in my grandmother's house as neatly as possible. I put white quilts on the beds, and decorated some of the rooms with flowers" (p. 63). Jacobs further distinguishes her family from the degraded mob by showing off her articulate intelligence and literacy, in marked contrast to the characterisation of the mob as ignorant, particularly the use of 'white trash' vernacular such as the reference to Jacobs as "dis 'ere yaller gal". The group leader's speech is distinguished from the illiterate mob, who must have the contents of Jacobs' letter read to them. A battle of wits goes on between the leader and Jacobs, the latter appearing to triumph:

His remarks were interrupted by a chorus of voices shouting, "We's got'em! We's got'em! Dis 'ere yaller gal's got letters!"

There was a general rush for the supposed letter, which, upon examination, proved to be some verses written to me by a friend... When their captain informed them of their contents, they seemed much disappointed. He inquired of me who wrote them..."Can you read them?" When I told him I could, he swore and raved, and tore the paper into bits. "Bring me all your letters!" said he, in a commanding tone... I told him I had none. "Don't be afraid", he continued in an insinuating way. "Bring them all to me. Nobody shall do you any harm". Seeing I did not move to obey him, his pleasant tone changed to oaths and threats. "Who writes to you? half-free niggers?" I replied, "O, no; most of my letters are from white people (p. 65-6)

Part of Jacobs' rationalisation of the betrayal she suffered when her mother's mistress neglected to free Jacobs as promised, fully explored in chapter three of

this study, focuses on the gift of literacy: "As a child I loved my mistress... While I was with her, she taught me to read and spell; and for this privilege, which so rarely falls to the lot of a slave, I bless her memory" (p. 8). Like Jacobs, becoming literate binds Douglass in gratitude and love to others, but betrayal is presented and responded to differently. When Douglass' master Hugh Auld forbids his wife Sophia from further instructing their young domestic slave, Douglass defies the attempt to deny him literacy and makes "friends of all the little white boys whom I met in the streets. As many of these as I could, I converted into teachers" (p. 82/1845). Douglass eventually succeeds in learning to read by quickly running errands in order to create free time for "lessons", and by bribing his young teachers, the "Baltimore boys" with bread, "enough of which was always in the house, and to which I was always welcome; for I was much better off in this regard than many of the poor white children" (p. 82/1845). The association of freedom with maturity made below by Douglass is an interesting feature to be discussed in chapter three:

This bread I used to bestow upon the hungry little urchins, who, in return, would give me that more valuable bread of knowledge. I am strongly tempted to give the name of two or three of those little boys, as a testimonial of the gratitude and affection I bear them; but prudence forbids;-- not that it would injure me, but it might embarrass them; for it is almost an unpardonable offence to teach slaves to read in this Christian country. It is enough to say of the dear little fellows, that they lived on Philpot Street, very near Durgin and Bailey's ship-yard. I used to talk this matter of slavery over with them. I would sometimes say to them... "You will be free as soon as you are twenty-one, *but I am a slave for life!* Have not I as good a right to be free as you have?" These words used to trouble them; they would express for me the liveliest sympathy, and console me with the hope that something would occur by which I might be free (p. 83/1845)

Equiano's formal education in London, and both formal and informal learning aboard ships, illustrates aspects of eighteenth century slavery, as well as strong bonds of affection forged in achieving literacy, which will be treated later in this chapter.

In chapter four of *Incidents* Jacobs demonstrates an understanding of the link between knowledge and power from a female perspective, in this case the denial of book learning which Equiano and Douglass can and do attain, as opposed to "special" worldly knowledge which Jacobs states elsewhere makes slave girls "prematurely knowing, concerning evil things" (p. 28). Jacobs writes: "Two

years had passed since I entered Dr Flint's family, and those years had brought much of the knowledge that comes from experience, though they had afforded little opportunity for any other kinds of knowledge" (p. 17). In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass chastises his ex-master Thomas Auld for denying Douglass' sisters the "right and privilege" of an education: "through your unrighteous conduct, they have been entirely deprived of the power to read and write" (p. 270/1855). Douglass also recognises that his mother's ability to read was rare, a fact in which he took great pride: "That a 'field hand' should learn to read, in any slave state, is remarkable; but the achievement of my mother... was very extraordinary; and, in view of the fact, I am quite willing, and even happy, to attribute any love of letters I possess... to the native genius of my sable, unprotected, and uncultivated *mother*" (p. 42/1855). Like Douglass under the supervision of Mr and Mrs Hugh Auld in Baltimore, Jacobs was a domestic slave in the household of Dr and Mrs James Norcom, the Flint family in *Incidents*. Douglass wrote in 1845 that going to live "at Baltimore...laid the foundation, and opened the gateway to all my subsequent prosperity" (p. 75/1845), but Jacobs "would rather drudge out my life on a cotton plantation, till the grave opened to give me rest, than to live with an unprincipled master and a jealous mistress" (p. 31). It is difficult to imagine a more repugnant or telling example of the white patriarchal power of the written word than Dr Flint's obscene, threatening notes. They spell out his demand to have sex with Jacobs' pseudonym^{or} Linda Brent, and they are written and passed secretly to keep Mrs. Flint ignorant of his adulterous intentions: "She watched her husband with unceasing vigilance; but he was well practiced in means to evade it" (p. 31). Lessons in sexual harassment and oppression began for Jacobs when she was about the age of Equiano when he started to achieve nautical and literacy skills aboard ship, and of Douglass, discovering the link between literacy and freedom. Experience teaches Jacobs to play the fool and conceal her literacy. When Dr Flint catches Jacobs teaching herself to write,

he frowned, as if he were not well pleased; but I suppose he came to the conclusion that such an accomplishment might help to advance his favorite scheme. Before long, notes were often slipped into my hand. I would return them, saying, "I can't read them, sir". "Can't you?", he replied; "then I must read them to you". He always finished the reading by asking, "do you understand?" (p. 31)

The frequent passing of notes, sometimes using a go-between such as Jacobs' brother, suggests the vulnerability of Jacobs as a female slave, whose experiences

of literacy were complicated by her position in the Flint household, where Jacobs was isolated and subject to sexual harassment and the threat of rape. And yet Jacobs' relative powerlessness contrasts with other images of black women in *Incidents* as literate people who value and achieve education. Literacy functions as grounds for the cat-and-mouse game of pursuit, a war of nerves between Jacobs and Dr Flint. For Jacobs the written word is, as Audre Lorde puts it, "the master's tool", but *Incidents* also substantiates Melvin Dixon's observation that in the written and spoken word, the ex-slave had "an arsenal of pointed darts, a storehouse of images, a means of making shrewd observations"(28). No such possibilities of expression, or complex relationships inform Olney's "Master Plan", not least of all because it does not acknowledge female experience or point of view in slave narrative. The self-determining, even dangerous female presence is problematic for many critics, as subsequent chapters will show.

While Yellin acknowledges that *Incidents* can be seen to "follow patterns standard to the genre", it is unique in relation to male slave narrative because of the female point of view, powerfully figured in the note-sending above, and as recognised by Minrose C. Gwin:

When black women did write or tell of their experiences, they were meant to be, and often *were*, particularly vivid testimonials of sexual exploitation and disruption of family ties, the two great evils of slavery in the American Victorian mind. These emphases in the women's narratives set them apart, not because they gave more accounts of sexual coercion and family disruption, than the men's narratives did, but because they rendered these accounts from the female viewpoint of the rape victim, the bereft mother, the grieving mother (29)

Of course, to acknowledge female point of view raises more questions than it answers. If this were not the case, then the range and intensity of debate about defining and placing 'women's writing' would not be as compelling as it is. We might make the same observation about any other 'voice' peripheral to the "hegemony, the mainstream society", to return to Joyce's words. Briefly to mention critical debate currently shaping the definition and placement of such writing indicates the extent to which Olney's gender-blind approach to slave narrative leads the reader to a dead-end. For example, in "New Directions For Black Feminist Criticism", Deborah McDowell identifies problems in Barbara Smith's pioneering essay, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism". McDowell

wants clear, precise definitions of concepts such as tradition, women's writing and female language, as well as careful attention given to the text, not just in terms of context and dominant themes, but also at the level of language (30). In "Who Owns Zora Neale Hurston? Critics Carve Up the Legend", Michele Wallace questions segregation of black texts on the basis of gender in the isolated and paradoxical positioning of Zora Neale Hurston by teachers and critics: "How peculiar that Hurston should be taught, read, and written about as though the context of Afro-American cultural and intellectual history did not exist... If you don't know the boys, how do you know what she was signifying on?" (31). In recognising special qualities of difference signifying a black female creative tradition, critics such as McDowell and Wallace engage the value system which silenced that creative tradition in the first place. The priorities of these critics would push ideas of black women's writing along different paths which simply could not be explored by Olney's "dazed" reader: if it is not the white man's world of the transcendent 'I', then it is not worthy of attention, let alone intellectual engagement, or so Olney leaves us to assume. The "irresolvably tight bind" in which Olney traps the slave narrator binds the reader to a narrow, biased perspective of literature: after all, how can questions about the substance of a creative tradition, the relationship between critic and text, or the significance of gender, be applied to "painting by numbers"?

The comic-book version of Equiano's narrative is especially true to its source by drawing in a number of ways on the unique eighteenth century geography of Equiano's journey from slavery to freedom. Item number ten of Olney's "Master Plan for Slave Narrative" describes attempts to escape to freedom guided by the North Star. The North Star might have helped Equiano and his "new countrymen" navigate the infamous triangular slave route between Africa, the Caribbean, the Americas and Britain, or guided the Phipps North Pole expedition in which Equiano participated, but it played no part in guiding Equiano's journey to freedom. Similarly, Yellin points out that *Incidents* "is also different from most slave narratives in that its protagonist does not escape and quickly run North"; as we shall see in more detail in chapter three, "almost a quarter of [*Incidents*] chronicles Jacobs' years in hiding in the South" (32). In *Dessa Rose*, the North Star is reinterpreted in African terms: "Cully, the mulatto, talked to [Dessa Rose] about the stars... She knew the drinking gourd, the North Star in its handle". When Cully, Dessa, and other slaves escape from the coffle, they "argued about which direction to take, some wanting to go north,

following the drinking gourd to freedom" (33). The help of a kind Quaker is cited by Olney in conjunction with "attempts to escape... guided by the North Star", but Equiano's experience with just such a person is not so straight forward, as Paul Edwards shows, asking:

how, for instance, are we to understand this comment on yet another 'kind' master, the Quaker, Robert Farmer: [Equiano writes:] 'I have often seen slaves, particularly those who were meagre, in different islands, put into scales and weighed; and then sold, from three pence to six pence or nine pence a pound. My master, whose humanity was shocked by this mode, used to sell such by the lump' (I. 73)

Edwards notes that "out of context, this has all the appearance of Swiftian ironic savagery, but read as part of a long section on the treatment of slaves, it may well rather show a recurrent dilemma in Equiano's mind about the idea of a 'good master' " (34). Central to understanding Equiano's portrayals of 'good masters' must be an appreciation of consciously crafted irony, as well as unconscious ironic effect in the narrative, explored in detail by Edwards, and in chapter four of this study. But no such literary possibility is allowed forⁿ Olney's systematisation, which entirely neglects eighteenth century slave narrative.

For Equiano, becoming literate and, ultimately, writing his autobiography, was less of a political act than it was a dramatisation of the ironies of his age. Equiano met with considerably fewer barriers than Douglass to achieving literacy, but Olney does not account for slave narrative that is not cast in the nineteenth century American mold, so nothing is said of Equiano. Therefore, nothing can be made of the special differences which may emerge in comparing eighteenth century Anglo-African voices of slavery with those of nineteenth century American slave narrators, such as Douglass or Jacobs. Ignatius Sancho, born on a slave ship and eventually a successful shopkeeper in eighteenth century London, taught himself to read and write, despite the vehement opposition of the spinster sisters who thought they owned him. In a strict sense, Sancho was not a slave; his three mistresses threatened to *return* him to slavery. While Sancho was not encouraged by these women, he did have the powerful support of the Duke of Montagu who loaned him books and whose wife ultimately took him into her service. Many literate blacks in eighteenth century Britain were positively encouraged to develop their minds, as Sancho's relationship with the Duke of Montagu, and his friendship and written correspondence with Lawrence Sterne, establishes (35). Montagu also sent

Francis Smith to study Maths at Cambridge, and Dr Johnson sent Francis Barber to Bishop's Stortford Grammar School. Child-prodigy Phillis Wheatley was bought on the local Boston slave market in 1761 at the age of seven. Taught to read and write, she rapidly mastered Latin and became "one of the most highly educated young women of Boston " (36). Wheatley's *Poems on various subjects religious and moral* was the first book ever published by a black woman. In 1773 Wheatley and her *Poems* arrived in London and were both greeted with acclaim (37). Equiano's education offers yet another variation of experience for eighteenth century blacks confronting the power of the written word. Sandiford's study of eighteenth century black British writing focuses on Ottobah Cugoano and Sancho as well as Equiano, and calls attention to the opportunities for further study in relation to Cugoano in particular. Sandiford's study, as well as Peter Fryer's excellent history of black people in Britain, and the forthcoming book ^{on}early Black writing in Britain, edited by Paul Edwards and David Dabydeen, reveal the unique circumstances of life for black people in Britain prior to and during the eighteenth century (38).

Equiano had access to a variety of formal and informal 'schools', to which he was sent ^{by} his 'owners' and helpful friends, beginning when he was a young slave boy . Learning his ABC did not break a law or threaten his life, a grim reality for others enslaved in the nineteenth century American south. Unlike the often claustrophobic domestic world of *Incidents* where ^{the realities and dilemmas of} reading, writing and personal threat are telescoped in the figure of foul notes, the more Equiano learns, the less threatening is the white man's world. But initially, "white men with horrible looks, red faces and loose hair" (I. 70), are a nightmarish vision for the young African boy handed over as ships' cargo bound for the West Indies and colonial America. Equiano is

filled... with astonishment, which was soon converted to terror when I was carried on board [the slave ship]. I was immediately handled and tossed up to see if I were sound by some of the crew; and I thwas now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits, and ththey were going to kill me (I. 70)

In *Steal Away: The World the Slaves Made*, a whole section is devoted to predominantly eighteenth century accounts of the horrors of slave ships (39). In her 1782 petition for freedom to the Massachusetts State legislature , the enslaved African woman, Belinda writes of "scenes which her imagination had never conceived of, a floating world... [where] three hundred Africans in chains

suffered the most excruciating torment" (40). Equiano writes: "Indeed such were the horrors of my views and fears at the moment that, if ten thousand worlds had been my own, I would have freely parted with them all to have exchanged my condition with the meanest slave in my own country" (I. 75). Unusually, a nineteenth century dictated account contains a section in which the slave narrator, Mahommah G. Baquaqua, describes his Atlantic crossing through an amanuensis, the image of memory seated in the brain *taken* from *Hamlet*: "the loathsomeness and filth of that horrible [ship] will never be effaced from my memory; nay as long as memory holds her seat in this distracted brain, will I remember that. My heart even at this day, sickens at the thought of it" (41).

Equiano's quest for literacy eventually becomes a yearning to purchase his freedom with money he seeks to earn as a petty trader, but initially, gaining an education helps ensure Equiano's survival in the white man's world. Like Jacobs and Douglass, learning to read and write involves Equiano in relationships crucial to his self esteem, understanding of, and adjustment to, slavery. Equiano was about twelve years old when the Guerin sisters sent him to school in London, and as a free man, Equiano returned to England to visit these women whom he always remembers with gratitude and affection. Formal education in London was a continuation of his education aboard ship whilst working for Captain Pascal (nephew to the Guerin sisters), and later, working for other captain-masters. Continuing to learn the language, keen on reading and writing, fascinated by navigation instruments and numbers in general, his education at sea-- largely through 'hands-on' experience and 'learning by doing'-- was an initiation into the male community of the ships' crew where Equiano made close friends, particularly other youngsters, to be fully explored in subsequent chapters. The passage below describes Equiano's life a year or two before Pascal suddenly re-sold him. It contrasts with Equiano's initial impressions aboard the slave ship, indicating the kind of adjustment taking place in his perspective of himself and of dominant white society. As Equiano masters literacy and other skills, he is able to see himself as "almost an Englishman". Equiano writes that he has settled into his new position as a slave, "so that I became inured to that service and began to consider myself happily situated" (I. 132). This adjustment is accounted for both at an intellectual level, as ignorance is gradually supplanted by budding understanding through knowledge, and at an emotional level, through affection for Captain Pascal, of whom Equiano recalls that "my master treated me always

extremely well, and my attachment and gratitude to him were very great" (I. 132):

From the various scenes I had beheld on ship-board, I soon grew a stranger to terror of every kind, and was, in that respect at least, almost an Englishman. I have often reflected with surprise that I never felt half the alarm at any of the numerous dangers I have been in, than I was filled with at the first sight of the Europeans, and at every act of theirs, even the most trifling, when I first came among them, and for some time afterwards. That fear, however, which was the effect of my ignorance, wore away as I began to know them. I could now speak English tolerably well, and I perfectly understood everything that was said. I now not only felt myself quite easy with ^{these} new countrymen, but relished their society and manners. I no longer looked upon them as spirits, but as men superior to us; and therefore I had the stronger desire to resemble them; to imbibe their spirit and imitate their manners; I therefore embraced every occasion of improvement; and every new thing that I observed I treasured up in my memory. I had long wished to be able to read and write; and for this purpose I took every opportunity to gain instruction (I. 131-3)

While Equiano's quest for literacy dramatises the contradictions and often implicit ironies of eighteenth century slavery, Douglass presents his quest for literacy as more confrontational in the 1845 *Narrative*, illustrating the power struggle inherent in the achievement of literacy. When Douglass' master Hugh Auld forbids Mrs. Auld from further instructing young Douglass, Douglass "suddenly" understands the "power of the white man to enslave the black man", a revelation which presents to Douglass "the pathway from slavery to freedom" (p. 78/1845). With determination reminiscent of Equiano, "who took every opportunity to gain instruction", Douglass "set out with high hope and a fixed purpose at whatever cost to learn how to read" (p. 79/1845). While Equiano's account emphasises that striving to learn helped him feel "happily situated", "almost an Englishman", with "new countrymen" whom he had a "strong desire to resemble", initially in the 1845 *Narrative* Douglass emphasises that the pathway from slavery to freedom places him in opposition to Auld. But it would be wrong to present the experiences of Equiano and Douglass as simply opposed, or to interpret literally Equiano's long passage above, ignoring its ironic potential, a focus of chapter four of this study. Equiano's name means 'a particular favourite of heaven', but his good fortune and intelligence do not prevent Pascal, to whom Equiano's "attachment and gratitude" were "very great", from suddenly selling him to captain Doran, who says his new slave "talked too much English" (I. 77). The same kind of thinking leads Hugh Auld

to stop Douglass' reading lessons because "learning would spoil the best nigger in the world", and "would forever unfit him to be a slave" (p. 78/1845). Equiano's experiences differ from those of Sancho, but Sancho's mistresses, like Auld and Doran, were wary of articulate slaves. They "judged ignorance the best and only security for obedience, believing that to enlarge the mind of their slave would go near to emancipate his person" (42). The quest for literacy inevitably engaged slaves and masters in a power struggle which Equiano, Sancho and other eighteenth century blacks were able to overcome by good luck and hard application. Olney may seem to be substantiated in Equiano's self-identification as happily subservient to "men superior to us", but, as I have already indicated and demonstrate in subsequent chapters, the ironic potential of this and other passages must be accounted for in any treatment of the relationships brought into play by the achievement of literacy.

Wilfred Samuels argues that Equiano's choice of one of the most liberal publishers in eighteenth century London, Joseph Johnson "suggests the latitude and power that [Equiano] wielded in publishing and marketing his narrative, the breadth of his abolitionist circle, and the depth of the impact that he wished to achieve with its publication and dissemination" (43). Having been a Maritime Empire slave of the eighteenth century who became the first political leader of Britain's black community, and an activist in the British Abolition movement, Equiano's human identity did not need to be validated or guaranteed through testimonials, prefaces or introductions, though it was so validated by the many letters, and subscription list, published with the 1789 edition (44). There is no reason to think that Equiano's narrative was written with any extensive editorial assistance. In his article, " '...Written by Himself': A Manuscript Letter of Olaudah Equiano", Edwards identifies evidence which makes possible the conclusion that "Equiano's English was fluent enough for him to have written the autobiography without any assistance" (45). Samuels' detailed reading of the frontispiece to Equiano's narrative substantiates my placement of the slave narrator quite outside the bounds of Olney's article. Samuels takes little for granted in the type-face, punctuation and numerous other choices through which Equiano shaped features (A) through (C) of Olney's "Master Plan for Slave Narrative". Samuels insists, quite rightly, that "although Equiano dons for his portrait the most conventional clothing of British aristocracy, it is clear that he does not do so solely to reflect that social order or the formulaic role which he, a former barber and domestic, plays in his Georgian

milieu" (46). I agree with Samuels that this visual identification with white society, apparently confirming Olney's reading of the triangular relationship, does not overshadow the importance of Equiano's Igbo identity, or determine Equiano's position as powerless to control his own story of slavery and freedom. Samuels is right to identify that Equiano

remained 'OLAUDAH EQUIANO, THE AFRICAN'. Centered on the page, this self identification symbolises, for [Samuels], his rites of naming. It appears in script, whereas the name given him by Pascal [Gustavas Vassa] was typographically differentiated. This specific layout will remain in place no matter how many editions appeared during his life time. It is only after his death and with the appearance of the Halifax edition (1813) and the second American edition (1837) that his given traditional name, and later the label "African" disappeared (47)

Any reader with basic understanding of bibliographical detail knows that this apparent 'trivia' tells a story of 'book-building' and may communicate a great deal about the relationship between writer, editor/publisher and audience. Robert Burns Stepto reads slave narrative form and content as constructing "race rituals" across a color line (48). Stepto renders in much more complex terms the deterministic "triangular relationship" put forward by Olney. Stepto explores the possible levels of interest inherent in superficially straight-forward aspects of slave narrative, such as those attended to by Samuels in Equiano's narrative. Stepto identifies four modes of narration which take account of the shaping relationships between slave narrator, audience and the 'voices' of editors and others in the appended prefaces, letters and documents commonly found in slave narrative. I would argue Equiano's narrative is an 'integrated' or 'phase two' narrative, "wherein most of the literary and rhetorical functions previously ^{per}formed by several texts and voices are now rendered by a loosely unified single text and voice... The former slave... carries much of the burden of introducing and authenticating his own tale" (49). While Olney ignores bibliographical clues, Samuels follows their subtle story line and is rewarded for doing so, for example in his reading of the significance of iconographic distinctions on Equiano's title page:

Even when one considers that it was not uncommon to vary types for aesthetic purposes during the eighteenth century, Equiano... must have been well aware of the inherent distinction of this particular layout. To be sure, it is in part his work because, as the last printed line on the page tells us, Equiano, one of the earliest slave narrative authors, was totally responsible for the publication of his

autobiography... He had authorial licence to order and structure the final product according to his own wishes. More importantly, it also suggests that, although he paid to have the work printed, he had final control over the project, from beginning to end (50)

Douglass' 1845 *Narrative* can be seen to illustrate the intrusive role editors could play in the narratives of ex-slaves. William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips, prominent members of the American Abolition Society, provide preface and introduction to the *Narrative*. Shortly after Douglass' arrival in the north as a fugitive slave, he was 'discovered' and employed by Garrison on the abolitionist lecture circuit. There is debate about the extent to which the young fugitive was exploited emotionally as a fugitive lecturer, as well as debate about the extent to which the movement prompted the writing of Douglass' first autobiography; critics have commented that Garrisonian abolitionist philosophy and values undermine the subversive potential of the 1845 *Narrative*. Olney briefly explores the nature of the relationship between the ex-slave and his sponsors in the figure of Othello, hinting at a wider understanding of this crucial dynamic of slave narrative than the article, or my reading of it, puts forward. Olney points out instances of "plain, unvarnished tale" being used consistently by different white editors as a catch-phrase to describe individual slave narratives: "it was a Shakespearian hero that they were unconsciously evoking, and not just any Shakespearian hero but always Othello, the noble Moor" (51), who, the Oxford English Dictionary informs us, first used the word 'unvarnished'-- "I will a round, unvarnished tale deliver/ of my whole course of love". Olney writes:

it says much about the psychological relationship of white patron to black narrator that the former should invariably see the latter not as Hamlet, not as Lear, not as Antony, or any other Shakespearean hero but always and only as Othello... (51)

We might assume that the Shakespearean identification would be normally with Othello, because the noble Moor was black, but as I have pointed out, Baquaqua is made by his amanuensis to see himself as a Hamlet, and Douglass consistently quotes lines from Hamlet in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855). Indeed, quotations from *Hamlet* occur three times in this text, and once in the collection of Douglass' speeches which he appended to the second autobiography. Each quotation occurs at a crucial point in Douglass' life. The first *Hamlet* reference is placed to convey Douglass' sense of destiny when he is sent to Baltimore to work as a domestic slave. Douglass quotes Act 5,

Scene 2, lines 10-11: "I have ever regarded it [going to Baltimore] as the first plain manifestation of that 'Divinity ^{that} shapes our ends,/ Rough hew them as we will' " (p. 88-9/1855). As I have pointed out, Douglass' education begins in Baltimore, an opportunity less easily come by as a plantation slave. As we shall see in chapter six of this study, in the second autobiography Douglass takes some care in characterising his time in Baltimore as providential, where he grows to love Sophia Auld as a mother figure, and where he meets a surrogate black father figure, "Uncle Lawson", as well as black friends with whom he furthers his education. The next two *Hamlet* references occur when Douglass is working at Freeland's farm, an experience of benign slavery that is important to Douglass who develops friendships with other male slaves. Douglass describes himself as bound to his brother slaves "with 'hooks of steel' " (p. 167/1855), ^{probably a reference to} *Hamlet*, ^{in which} Polonius advises his son: "those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,/ Grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of steel" (Act 1, Scene 3, line 36). As Douglass and his brother slaves plan their escape from Freeland's farm, Douglass quotes from *Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 1, lines 81-82, to convey their apprehension about the possible consequences of their actions: "The reader can have little idea of the phantoms of trouble which flit, in such circumstances, before the uneducated mind of the slave... This dark picture, drawn by ignorance and fear, at times greatly shook our determination, and not unfrequently caused us to 'Rather bear those ills we had / Than fly to others which we knew not of' " (p. 173/1855). The importance of Douglass' experiences at Freeland's farm can hardly be underestimated as chapter six will make clear, particularly when his treatment of this period of his life is examined by comparing the two autobiographies. Finally, in the extract from his speech, "Slavery and the Slave Power", Douglass invites his audience to "contemplate the slave as a moral and intellectual being... I have said that the slave was a man. 'What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculties! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a God! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!' " (p. 2732-4/1855, quoting Act 2, Scene 2, lines 303-307). It is the image of Douglass addressing an audience, no doubt stunning them with skills of oratory and surprising them with literary allusions, that reveals the inadequacy of Olney's attempt to read the psychology of the triangular relationship, an effort which ultimately confirms the narrowness of his approach. Despite Olney's superficially interesting remarks about Othello, they are subsumed by the fierce deterministic undertow

of the article as a whole. Appropriately, it is an ex-slave's Shakespearean references, in a "plain, unvarnished tale", which demonstrates this.

Not surprisingly, Olney focuses his attention on Douglass' relationship with Garrison, the breakdown of which was widely reported and speculated upon during and after Douglass' lifetime. After nearly ten years working under Garrison for the American Abolition Society, and two years abroad in Britain, Douglass established a sense of independence as a black American whose analysis of slavery, and effective responses to it, put him at odds with Garrison. Different meanings of slavery and freedom for white and black abolitionists, described by Jane and William Pease in *They Who Would Be Free: Blacks' Search For Freedom*, highlights the complex relationships often brought into play by the achievement of literacy:

For each group, slavery and freedom had very different meanings. Whites, especially those reared in the moral environment of New England, understood slavery and freedom as polar opposites... Blacks, however, defined the terms more complexly. Both experience and history told them that slavery and freedom were not mutually exclusive, separated from each other as righteousness from sin. Rather, they were terminal points on a continuous spectrum... Whites, conceiving of their own freedom as absolute and never having experienced its opposite extreme, embraced a simple duality. For blacks the alternative was not between slavery and freedom, but between more or less freedom and more or less slavery (53)

The contrasting conceptualisations of slavery and freedom is well observed, and, as we shall see in chapters four and six of this study, *My Bondage and My Freedom* dramatises Douglass' realisation that "the simple duality" embraced by his sponsors did not fully address or convey his experience of "more or less freedom and more or less slavery". Benjamin Quarles' view of Garrison's introduction to Douglass' 1845 *Narrative* as a sign of friendship between the abolitionist and his fugitive star may be naive (54), but attention to details of the very real and close relationship between Douglass and Garrison in an analysis of its break-down should not be overlooked. Such detail suggests complex ties between white sponsors and fugitive slaves which cannot be accounted for simply as exploitative, particularly if we accept the Pease reading of contrasting views of slavery and freedom informing black and white abolitionists. Misunderstandings at a stressful time of vulnerability not only illustrate the trouble Garrison and Douglass had *expressing* mutual affection, but also the importance of the friendship to both men. For example, early in 1847, Garrison

was taken ill after a lecture tour to Ohio. Garrison would not allow Douglass to stay with him while he was ill, though Douglass suggested he should remain with his friend. "Douglass was upset when he received word later in the week that Garrison's condition was critical.. But he remained in central New York and the two men never met again as friends" (55). Five weeks later, "Garrison's fevered condition led him to charge Douglass with an indifference of which he was obviously guiltless. Evidently Garrison had forgotten a letter from [a friend] describing Douglass' sorrow and suspense over the illness of the Boston editor" (56). Garrison was furious about Douglass' apparent lack of solicitude as well as the ex-slave's intention to start up his own anti-slavery weekly, as Quarles points out: "Douglass knew that this step would expose him to the charge of being ungrateful in view of his debt to New England abolitionists and presumptuous in view of the limitations of his formal education" (57). By the time he wrote *My Bondage and My Freedom* in 1855, Douglass had set up his own newspaper, and severed his ties-- of friendship as well as campaign aims and political analysis-- with Garrison. At the time that Douglass established his independence as an abolitionist and writer, Garrison wrote to a friend that Douglass was "destitute of every principle of honor ungrateful to the last and malevolent in spirit". In another correspondence Garrison wrote that *My Bondage and My Freedom*, "reeks with the virus of personal malignity towards Wendell Phillips, myself, and the old organisationalists generally, and is full of ingratitude and baseness towards as true and disinterested friends as any man ever yet had on earth". As Olney quite rightly points out in quoting these passages, "that this simply is not true of *My Bondage and My Freedom* is almost of secondary interest to... Garrison's attitude toward his ex-slave and the unconscious psychology of betrayed, outraged proprietorship lying behind it"(58). But Douglass' "ingratitude and baseness", and Garrison's "outraged proprietorship", do not encourage Olney to re-think the "triangular relationship" and provide a more subtle reading of its dynamic; instead, the split between Douglass and Garrison is presented as characteristic of a relationship that was not, in fact, always antagonistic, and is used to 'prove' that sponsors exploited slave narrators for the good of a political cause. Douglass presents the relationship differently in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, looking back to his early days as a fugitive on the lecture circuit:

"Let us have the facts," said the people. So also said Friend George Foster, who always wished to pin me down to my simple narrative. "Give us the facts," said Collins, "we will take care of the philosophy."

Just here arose some embarrassment. It was impossible for me to repeat the same old story month after month, and to keep up my interest in it. It was new to the people, it is true, but it was an old story to me; and to go through with it night after night, was a task altogether too mechanical for my nature. "Tell your story, Frederick," would whisper my then revered friend, William Lloyd Garrison, as I stepped upon the platform. I could not always obey, for I was now reading and thinking. New views of the subject were presented to my mind. It did not entirely satisfy me to *narrate* wrongs; I felt like *denouncing* them. I could not always curb my moral indignation for the perpetrators of slaveholding villainy, long enough for a circumstantial statement of the facts which I felt almost everybody must know. Besides, I was growing, and needed room (p. 220/1855)

Some critics have tended to accept that both Equiano and Douglass became fully accommodated within the societies which initially enslaved them, their roles in abolitionist movements apparently proving what their narratives, as Olney would have it, illustrate. Edwards' and Samuels' work clearly show this is not so in the case of Equiano; while it may be seen to describe a *temporary state of affairs* when Douglass was young and vulnerable, that situation changed radically as evidenced in *My Bondage and My Freedom*: they "wished to pin me down to my simple narrative... [but] I was growing, and needed room". Olney's systematisation of slave narrative does not allow for the significance of Douglass choosing the free-born American black, Dr James McClune Smith, ardently anti-Garrison, to write the introduction to *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Olney's attention remains firmly fixed on the 1845 *Narrative*, despite observations in relation to *My Bondage and My Freedom* which might have liberated his analysis of slave narrative, and of the crucial relationships which bring slave narrative into being in the public domain. For Olney, "*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*" (1845), which paradoxically transcends the slave narrative mode, [is] at the same time its fullest, most exact representative" (59). In other words, Douglass is the exception which proves the rule. As chapter six of this study argues, it is time the position of the 1845 *Narrative* as representative of the slave narrative tradition was questioned and reassessed. Preface letters in *Incidents* also challenge Olney's argument. *Incidents* is not endorsed by prominent white men. As Jacobs' letters reveal, she arranged for her personal friends, white feminist abolitionist Amy Post, and a black man, George Lowther, to write preface letters. As I show in chapter four, Jacobs' brief encounter with Harriet Beecher Stowe reveals much about the psychological relationship between white sponsor and black author, when Jacobs refuses to fall into line with Stowe, an incident

which Yellin reads as "decisive in the genesis" of Jacobs' narrative. Baker comes closer to identifying the complex dynamic which occurs during the process of becoming "sharers in the general^{public} discourse about slavery":

Once literacy has been achieved, the black self... begins to distance itself from the domain of experience constituted by the oral-aural community of the slave quarters... The voice of the unwritten self, once it is subjected to the linguistic codes, literary conventions, and audience expectations of a literate population, is perhaps never again the authentic voice of black American slavery. It is, rather, the voice of a self transformed by an autobiographical act into a sharer in the general public discourse about slavery... How much of the lived (as opposed to the represented) slave experience is lost in this transformation depends on the keenness of the narrator's skill in confronting both the freedom and the limitations resulting from his literacy (60)

CONCLUSION

While critics such as Stepto and Laura Tanner recognise that the slave narrator faced unique constraints in exercising his or her literacy skills, these two critics are concerned to show that such constraints shape literary strategy, the subject of chapter four of this study. Stepto's article begins with the observation: "The strident, moral voice of the former slave recounting, exposing, appealing, apostrophizing, and above all *remembering* his ordeal in bondage is the single most impressive feature of ^aslave narrative. This voice is striking because of what it relates, but even more so because the slave's acquisition of that voice is quite possibly his only permanent achievement once he escapes and casts himself upon a new and larger landscape" (61). Stepto's critical approach is particularly important because it allows distinctions to be made between situations and skill-levels of slave narrators. By focussing predominantly on Jacobs' narrative, Tanner explicitly addresses gender issues which neither Olney, nor Stepto, mention (62). While Stepto seeks to identify "the finer shades of narration" by distinguishing skill levels in slave narrative, from the eclectic to the generic slave narrative, Tanner turns Stepto's basic premise upside down. She argues, against Stepto, that the harmonious integration of abolitionist and ex-slave voices which would indicate the highly skilled, generic slave narrative, does not in fact indicate a slave narrator who is master of his or her own tale, but rather a slave narrator who is not true to him- or herself (63). Tanner might then read the "purely, merely episodic" not as a

sign of "an irresolvably tight bind" as does Olney, but rather as a sign of independence from, even subversion of, the "triangular relationship". Stepto and Tanner explore from opposed perspectives what Baker describes as the "keenness of the narrator's skill in confronting both the freedom and the limitations resulting from his literacy". *These critics* recognise the possibilities of slave narrative form and content. The link between slave narrative and the black literary tradition is not, as Olney describes it, "paradoxical" (64), but rather, inevitable, inviting the reader to explore with interest a rich and compelling creative tradition. The greatest limitation of Olney's article is that it does not allow us to see the ex-slave's "plain, unvarnished tale" as "a form of communication" rooted in spoken, sung and written creative traditions. *Naming* slave narrative must inherently acknowledge the existence and integrity of the ex-slaves' "moral and intellectual universe", where the triumph of freedom and its expression, "I was born", is no less human in its complexities because of the practical necessities and limitations shaping "plain, unvarnished tales" of slavery and freedom. Below, Melvin Dixon is able to see in slave narrative the possibilities which invite detailed textual study:

The spirituals and narratives constitute a literature in that they are deliberate creations of the slaves themselves to express their moral and intellectual universe. These forms of communication, what W.E.B. DuBois called 'the sorrow songs', what Benjamin Mays referred to as 'mass' literature, and what Saunders Redding has identified as a 'literature of necessity', remind us that they were created out of the practical need to adjust to the American environment with a burning passion to be free (65)

This chapter has tried to open the door to the slave narrative tradition by presenting tensions at the heart of *the tradition which* ^{require} more than superficial attention. It has established that the experience of slavery as recorded by slaves is not predictable or homogenous, and has argued that significance must be accorded to gender as well as context, so that "I was born" can be read and appreciated as both the ex-slave's individual declaration of unique identity, and as a group declaration of black presence in history. Chapters two and three carry the argument forward by questioning the image of slave -as-victim in the figure of the male 'picaro-slave' and the images and associations of the female slave in domestic slavery and fiction.

There had been nothing in the darky's halting speech and hesitant manner to suggest the slave revolt leader she was convicted of being

--Dessa Rose

They sang it out and beat it up, garbling the words so they could not be understood; tricking the words so their syllables yielded up other meanings

--Beloved

CHAPTER II. SLAVE NARRATIVE AND THE PICARESQUE

It is not difficult to see why critics have associated slave narrative and the European picaresque literary tradition. At one level, it seems to be an attempt to place in a literary context the victim/survivor, just as Stanley Elkins found in the perverse relationships of German World War Two concentration camps a now discredited analogy with the master-slave relationship of the nineteenth-century American south (1). The deracinated condition of the slave-- uprooted from normal social and cultural contexts, denied even human identity, and forced by this condition into a solitary struggle for psychological and physical survival-- can be seen as a basis for the characterisation of the slave as picaro. The 'picaro' is roguish, crafty, crooked and sly, a trickster who will use any means, fair or, more often, foul, to survive in a hostile world. The verb, 'picardear' conveys the same sense of an unprincipled, possibly even evil, trouble-maker-- to corrupt, to play up, to get into mischief-- while 'picaresca' is directly linked to Spanish literature: "la picaresca es una creacion literaria espanola-- the picaresque novel is a Spanish creation"(2). As a literary type, slave narrative is identified with the European picaresque convention because of the journey motif basic to the ex-slave's story of escape from bondage, what Raymond Hedin identifies as "road narrative" activated in nineteenth century male slave narrative.(3). Both the trickster-rogue of sixteenth century Spanish picaresque fiction and, as we have seen in chapter one of this study, the conventionally-imagined slave, are usually taken for granted as isolated male figures in a male world. Charles Nichols draws a parallel between classic

picaresque tales such as *Lazarillo de Tormes*, *Guzman de Alfarache* and slave narrative, in order to make clear an understanding of black autobiography and fiction, in particular Richard Wright's *Black Boy* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, and Wright's existential novel, *The Outsider*. The result of Nichols' use of the picaresque is to pigeonhole slave narrative and black literature in general within the harsh, brutal realities of protest literature:

Like the Spanish picaresque, the slave narrators tell their life story in retrospect, after having triumphed over the brutalizing circumstances of their youth... In each account the writer presents a welter of realistic detail to drive home the brutality and inhumanity of his experience as a victim, a commodity, a rootless, alienated soul without hope or future. His origin is obscure, his masters heartless and treacherous... With bitter irony the picaro-slave underlines his contempt for... the master class... The desperate jeopardy of his condition forces upon the servant-slave-picaro the urgency of his search for an identity, for survival (4)

This chapter seeks to place the picaresque in a context broader than Nichols' focus on the European tradition manifest in black male writing. As I hope to show, even Douglass' 1845 *Narrative*, the classic picaresque slave narrative, hints at rootedness in black community, a reality fully explored in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855). Like Nichols, feminist theologian Susan Thistlethwaite accepts social protest fiction as the dominant mode of contemporary black writing and experience, though unlike Nichols her interest is in black women's writing. 'The Black' as archetypal victim/survivor is a powerful metaphor which shaped Thistlethwaite's *Race, Sex and God*. Thistlethwaite explains that "this book began as another project entirely... In conversations I had while working on that [project], however, I began to get an inkling that there were directions I had not explored" (5). While Thistlethwaite seems willing to accept her black friends' gross generalisation about "you white people", more importantly, her friend's reminder of black presence directs Thistlethwaite's attention to black women's writing as testimony to the art of survival:

When I mentioned to black colleagues that my approach so far had been to read the memoirs and biographies of Holocaust survivors, their replies were instructive and went something like this: "That's typical of you white people. Whenever you want to know anything, the only place you look is Germany". I decided this was quite true. In looking for additional source material I began reading the novels and essays that black women in the United States have written, figuring they too knew something about survival. They do (6)

I will return to both Nichols and Thistlethwaite later in this chapter to examine the limits imposed on black, particularly women's, writing when it is read as sociology, a mirror reflecting harsh black life. A writer such as Thistlethwaite reminds us that black women can be and often are viewed as the ultimate victims, suffering not only the economic exploitation and legal restrictions of their men folk, but also the sexual and domestic exploitation of their bodies and labour. Prevailing social attitudes about female passivity, and the narrow range of women's domestic world, are compounded by images of slave women as defenceless sex objects which permeate anti-slavery propaganda, resulting in an image of a powerless female victim. Is the picaresque an appropriate context for black female experience? Is European picaresque convention appropriate for female slave narrators? This chapter seeks to answer these questions. In "The *Picaras*: The Modal Approach to Picaresque Literature" (7), Julio Rodriguez-Luis acknowledges a female presence, the *picara*, in picaresque European fiction. Rodriguez-Luis argues that, because of the position of most women in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, particularly domestic and maternal constraints, the asocial behaviour and adventurous wanderings of a literary *picara* are unconvincing and implausible before Defoe. As I hope to show, Roderiguez-Luis acknowledges picaresque female characters in European literature, and in so doing raises questions about the limitations of picaresque female slave narrative, but he is blind to female experience, writing and gender issues in literature. Like Olney, such peripheral matters do not impinge upon Roderiguez-Luis' 'right ideas' of literature.

Frances Smith Foster sees the image of the defenceless female slave rooted in actual circumstances slave women endured, particularly sexual exploitation and the threat of rape. Foster also identifies nineteenth century male slave narrative as a major source of images of defenceless female slaves (8). In chapter one of the 1845 *Narrative*, Douglass exploits just such an image to drive home the gross inhumanity and brutality of slavery. Virtually every cruel act of a master or mistress is illustrated by images of half-naked female slaves brutally abused. For example, Douglass presents a lurid portrayal of his Aunt Hester being whipped-- she had defied her master and continued to see her black lover-- the witnessing of which unveils to Douglass "the blood stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery" (p. 52/1845):

Before he commenced whipping Aunt Hester, he took her to the kitchen, and stripped her from neck to waist, leaving her neck,

shoulders, and back, entirely naked. He then told her to cross her hands, calling her at the same time a d----d b----h. After crossing her hands, he tied them with a strong rope, and led her to a stool under a large hook... (p. 52/1845)

And so it goes until "the warm red blood (amid heart-rendering shrieks) came dripping to the floor" (p. 52/1845). As Foster argues, images such as these are able to stand for black female presence in slave narrative largely because of critical neglect of works such as *Incidents* which provide alternative images of black women. As this study will show, Foster's identification of nineteenth century male slave narrative as a major source of stereotyped images of black women must be questioned in light of an expanded understanding of the slave narrative tradition. Not only does a text such as *Incidents* challenge the image of the slave woman as defenceless female sex object, Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*, and Douglass' *My Bondage and My Freedom* can be seen to challenge the image of Aunt Hester as representative of black female presence in slave narrative. This chapter will explore Hedin's analysis of slave narrative as broader and more useful than Olney's treatment, but the limits of Hedin's approach will be shown in his neglect of the empowering context of slave culture. Rooted in specific African cultural practice, the picaresque in slave narrative can be seen as testimony to the survival, not only of individual black men and women in slavery, but of a sustaining black community in slavery which helped ensure psychological and emotional well-being threatened by enslavement, providing a context for images of black heroism that challenge the victim image. This is particularly important in assessing female slave narrative, as I hope to show.

The slave narrators' use of convention can be seen as a kind of mask donned by the slave narrator in order to facilitate communication of a predominantly political, public message directed at a white audience. In this context, an image of the slave as victim was essential to 'proving' the abolitionist case against slavery. As we shall see in this and subsequent chapters, a more complex image of the slave is encoded in the narratives of Equiano, Jacobs, and Douglass. While survival in a hostile world was a reality for the slave, as well as for the "more or less free" ex-slave, the urgency of survival is not such a narrowly defined or essentially male experience. One might want to question the attempt to expound the fearsome realities of black experience in slavery in terms of a literary and social convention of the free-roaming male life. Nor will it do to identify the challenge of survival with merely negative and brutalised existence.

As a valuable if problematic tool for the slave narrator, European picaresque convention can be seen disguising a deeper subversion, the presence in slave narrative of an African-rooted black reality, its very existence testifying to the failure of a system which denied the humanity of black people, and sought to define them as property. Furthermore, the invisibility of this realm of experience, so crucial to surviving whole the experience of victimisation in slavery, suggests that slave narrative speaks to its own 'private' audience within slave culture, as well as to a 'public' mainstream audience. This is a radical departure from Olney's critical perspective of "non-memorial description fitted to a pre-formed mold, a mold with regular depressions here and equally regular prominences there..." (9). A number of critics read deep significance in the African identity of picaresque slave narrative which pushes to the fore black reality and experience made central to understanding slave narrative, as in Dixon's definition of slave narrative at the end of chapter one: "the spirituals and narratives constitute a literature in that they are deliberate creations of the slaves themselves to express their moral and intellectual universe". The picaro-trickster can be seen rooted in West African belief and cultural practice, particularly folk lore which travelled with black people throughout the African diaspora set in motion by the European slave trade. Lawrence Levine reads deep significance in the survival and transmission of trickster tales during slavery, particularly as a source of psychological sustenance strengthening individuals against the shattering effect of slavery. Not only do the trickster folk tales encode triumph of the weak over the strong via cunning, they also help ensure psychological survival against the pressures of victimisation: "They [the tales] encouraged trickery and guile; they stimulated the search for ways out of the system; they inbred a contempt for the powerful and an admiration for the perseverance and even the wisdom of the underman; they constituted an intragroup lore which must have intensified feelings of distance from the world of the slaveholder" (10). Like Levine, Keith Byerman privileges black folk material as "essential parts of the thematic and stylistic fabric of the narratives":

The use of deceit and the trickster motif as thematic, stylistic and structural elements in many of the narratives [is a key aspect of them]. In most cases, the narrative can only exist because the narrator has managed, through masking, forgery, and lying, to reach a place of relative security from the power of slaveholders. While several of the narrators expressly denounce their own deception as immoral, it can be shown that the denunciations are themselves masks adopted to suit the audience. Moreover, the publication of such authenticating documents as letters to and from former masters

serves to validate the truth of the narrative, and also echoes the taunts of Brer Rabbit when he has triumphed over his foes. This aspect of the narratives, then, far from being a secondary motif, is central to the design of the stories; the selves created by the narrators and the ultimate meanings of the narratives are dictated by such material (11)

While the association of the European picaresque literary convention with male slave narrative is, at one level, an attempt to locate the slave's experience of deracination within a literary convention, the African roots of the picaresque suggest a realm of community explored as a 'female' reality and convention in chapter three of this study, where I will look at the tension between community and isolation in relation to a stereotyped idea of female experience. Black women are crucial to the survival and transmission of slave culture (12), and black women use the picaresque in their writing. Byerman calls attention to the "elaborate patterns of deception" in *Incidents*, and refers to Jacobs' self-incarceration and eventual escape as a "drama of pretence" (13). Lucinda McKethan analyses subversive humour in black women's autobiography, including Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents*, and works by Zora Neale Hurston and Maya Angelou:

Mother wit is the verbal weapon of survival that informs the experience in these works and makes them, finally, celebrations of "getting ova", assertions of identity, proclamations of the beauty and mastery of circumstance that simply being black and a woman can affirm. The humor of mother wit in... versions of black female experience is the humor of the word as it has been deviously employed since slavery times by people denied access to all forms of power, but most particularly to the power of language: it was the skilful wielding of the word in spiritual, folklore and even harmless-seeming everyday conversation that gave slaves means to control their masters (14)

Hedin questions implicit assumptions and valuations of black experience which can be seen to frame positive and negative approaches to the discussion of picaresque slave narrative. The possibilities of the picaresque, rooted in both European literary tradition and West African cultural practice, are specially suited to signify the realities of slave experience as both deracinated and rooted for the slave narrator who is simultaneously in and against dominant white society. Hedin asks:

Did black culture begin in slavery's negation of African culture, so that the black American can only be understood by reference to an identity he has lost and no longer has? Or did it begin in some

creative interplay between cultures, so that the black American is truly Afro-American, not deprived of culture, but endowed through his painful experience with a rich amalgam of his old and new worlds? The relatively negative explanation of these origins, from Ulrich Phillips to Stanley Elkins and beyond, have grown out of a relatively bleak sense of the black American's current state, just as the more positive interpretations of the 1960's and 1970's-- Genovese's, Gutman's, Levine's to name just a few-- owe a good deal to a different view of black Americans today (15)

Can picaresque slave narrative be accounted for so that "the creative interplay of cultures", "a rich amalgam of old and new worlds", informs an understanding of it? A "modal approach" to picaresque literature makes it possible to recognise that the roots of picaresque slave narrative are not exclusively European, and may include race and class dimensions, as well as emerge from a wide range of cultures, from indigenous North American and Afro-American, to a variety of African as well as Australian, Canadian and Indian traditions. (16). As Ulrich Wicks points out, a modal approach can "account both for a specific kind of narrative whose exclusive preoccupation is an exploration of the fictional world of the picaresque and for a primitive fictional possibility which may be present in varying degrees of mixture in much fiction" (17). Roderiguez-Luis sums up the modal approach:

The contemporary tendency (at least in Anglo-American criticism) is to treat picaresque fiction as a *mode*, that is, as one of several fictional types within a broad spectrum of the development of the novel. This tendency stems from Claudio Guillen's definition of the picaresque in terms of a set of eight characteristics present in varying degrees in all picaresque novels, from those that follow the sixteenth-century Spanish picaresque model, to modern novels which participate in what Guillen calls a picaresque "myth"... Ulrich Wicks searches for an even more flexible approach to a live genre, one which will be capable of identifying not only a picaresque genre but what is picaresque in any work (18)

Wicks rejects both classification for the sake of classification-- "inclusion or exclusion according to rigid rules"-- and "that tiring old game of pigeon holing", in pursuit of literary definition and generic placement. Wicks writes "in all this our aim is to see and understand a genre, a tradition, and to generate appropriate responses to a specific work (say, Ellison's *Invisible Man*)-- in other words, to be useful in our experience of fiction, which is what a literary term or idea should be first of all" (19). It is not difficult to see how Wicks' description of the first-person point-of-view in picaresque fiction 'fits' slave narrative, or to recognise

themes and motifs common to both. Narrative distance and the resulting irony, the "gap between the social non-status of the protagonist and the presumptuous act of writing his autobiography", the act of story-telling as a "trick", a "picaresque gesture of self assertion by a lowly, insignificant outsider" (20), rings equally true for both slave narrative and picaresque fiction. Commenting on another point of comparison between 'High Fiction' and slave narrative, Edwards sees that "the situation of Equiano has a touch of both Robinson Crusoe and Gulliver", and he makes a distinction between the intentional and the unintentional creative writer: "Crusoe, Gulliver and their creators' imaginations... have the distinctive marks of conscious creative artistry about them, whereas Equiano is apparently doing no more than trying to tell the direct truth about his own experience" (21). Edwards now believes this to be an oversimplification, and has developed an increasingly complex reading of Equiano's narrative over twenty-five years as Equiano's contemporary editor, from one in which inconsistencies are 'explained', to a critical appreciation which embraces the complexity of Equiano's narrative. This development is clear if Edwards' introductions to the different editions of Equiano's narrative are compared, and made explicit in Edwards' paper, "Narrative Strategies in Equiano's Autobiography: Irony and Ambivalence"(22). Edwards' distinction between Equiano and authors of consciously crafted fictional works is an important reminder that Rodriguez-Luis and Wicks deal with the development of the European novel, using terms and methods for understanding fiction. Themes and motifs identified by Wicks emphasise a consciously crafted, artificial world of fiction which cannot adequately account for the *situation* of slavey. Nor can the themes and motifs identified by Wicks assist us in coming to terms with gender difference in slave narrative, or elements such as rootedness in slave culture, as these dimensions of the slave's text of slavery work against a reading of the slave as victim. The picaresque in slave narrative must be seen rooted in the realities of slavery and slave community informing the slave narrator's use of established literary convention. Thistlethwaite turns to the social sciences where "solid, unromantic data" balances what she identifies as her own tendency toward introspection, rooted in being a white middle class American who cannot easily comprehend black women's realities (23). Barbara Christian's comparison of motherhood in Buchi Emecheta's *Joys of Motherhood* and Alice Walker's *Meridian* is rooted in an exploration of motherhood as a cultural construct (24). Both of these women, who make slavery essential to their quite different analyses of black women's writing, establish context as essential. The

dangers of reading literature as sociology notwithstanding, a contextual approach in terms of the specific nature of slavery seems indispensable to entering the text of slavery. As a mode, the picaresque tradition can be seen as shaped by both West African and European traditions in slave narrative. This chapter argues that the full possibilities inherent in the picaresque need to be acknowledged if the tensions at the heart of slave narrative are to be kept alive, vivid and powerful, communicating the complexity of apparently "plain, unvarnished tales".

Like Olney, Hedin recognises that the black American literary tradition began "enclosed" in some ways "by literary forms bequeathed to it by whites" (25), and, like Olney, Hedin emphasises the outward, public orientation of slave narrative's message: in slave narrative "form does not organise in order to please so much as it pleases or displeases in order to persuade" (26). But, unlike Olney's rigid approach to external influences shaping the form and content of slave narrative, Hedin recognises that "to be influenced is not necessarily to be usurped... To use arguments suitable to one's audience is the mark of a skilful writer, not a toady" (27). And, in contrast to Olney, Hedin emphasises that "the power inherent in literary form can flow both ways":

In the slave narrator's cunning, strategic manipulation of already existing arguments and narrative modes, the slave narrator demonstrated that, far from being deprived of his old trickster skills, he had simply found new territory in which to use them... The slave narrator's relationship to and use of the picaresque tradition... suggests that he was able to find ways to use the written word and existing literary traditions not to imitate 'ole massa' but to subvert him (28)

Hedin's approach clearly widens the perspective on slave narrative. He shows awareness of a sustaining black culture in slavery by referring to the narrator's "old trickster skills", though, as I will show, such awareness does not significantly influence his analysis of the narratives. Hedin focuses on nineteenth century male and female slave narrator's use of established convention suggesting a more complex relationship between slave narrator and white sponsors, as well as greater skill and ability as a writer, than Olney's argument demonstrates. Distinguishing between slave narrator as author and as character, acknowledging female slave narrative, and difference between eighteenth and nineteenth century slave narrative, Hedin's articles explore wider literary possibilities of slave narrative than Olney allows for. But Hedin's

predominant concern with the slave narrator's relationship to and use of the *European* picaresque tradition is as problematic as it is insightful. I believe Hedin merely skims the surface of slave narrative, lifting the veil to reveal a game played with European literary convention, while a deeper level of subversion at work in the narratives remains invisible. Hedin remains on the surface of slave narrative because his analysis does not treat as complex the "interplay between cultures" which picaresque slave narrative signifies. I hope to show in examples from Equiano's and Douglass' narratives that Hedin's analysis does not penetrate slave experience beyond picaresque as simply asocial and brutalised, despite his recognition that the slave narrator used "existing literary traditions not to imitate 'ole massa' but to subvert him"(29). The veiled presence of slave community linked to West African cultural practices does not inform Hedin's analysis of slave narrative. Hedin's predominant interest in the picaresque as European literary convention inevitably leaves us with an image of the slave as victim. This is particularly obvious in his reading of female slave narrative which implicitly denies Jacobs' positive self-awareness as a black woman, and her participation in slave community. Differences which Hedin identifies between eighteenth and nineteenth century narratives, and his approach to male and female use of literary convention, ultimately isolate the voice of the ex-slave from its context. Hedin does not hear the life-affirming stories of survival and triumph which the slaves shared among themselves in folktales, song and slave narrative because his analyses do not bring to life the black art of picaresque in slave narrative.

Hedin's treatment of eighteenth century narrative, in particular the immediacy of an African past, and the geographic mobility and socially ambiguous position of black people in the eighteenth century, can be seen to redress conventional ideas of slave narrative based on the nineteenth-century slave narrative tradition. Hedin recognises in eighteenth century slave narrative the picaresque as a way of life more than as a necessary convention facilitating communication. For the eighteenth century slave narrator such as Equiano, Hedin sees that "in short, their narratives were picaresque because their lives were picaresque" (30). Hedin recognises that "a higher percentage of narrators in this early period came directly from Africa and had not yet modified their style to fit their new status [so] the eighteenth century narratives varied in voice and emphasis":

Briton Hammon (1760), who survives pirates and cannibals, shipwrecks and incarcerations in a series of adventures after he

escapes from his master; Arthur (1768), an unrepentant criminal who began his career at age 14 and was executed at age 21; John Marrant (1786) who makes no mention of race and very little of slavery as he wanders in the wilderness converting Indians; Gustavas Vassa (1789) as much an adventurer, traveller and proto-capitalist as he was an anti-slavery agitator; and Venture (1789) who became a Bunyanesque legend among both black and white more for his reputed six-foot girth and feats of strength than for anything he said or did about slavery (31)

Hedin's examples above emphasise adventure and anti-social behaviour in eighteenth century narrative, and are meant to indicate that the experience of slavery in the eighteenth-century was less rigidly systematised and overtly racist than in the nineteenth century. Hedin views eighteenth century narrators as able to lead semi-autonomous lives and he views their narratives as free from pressures of outside influence; slavery is not necessarily the main subject of the early narratives: "the [eighteenth century] narrators seem to feel free to follow their interests or observations wherever they lead... perhaps because slavery had not defined them either in their rather mobile lives nor in their own minds" (32). In 1787, the slave woman Belinda petitioned the Massachusetts State Legislature "claiming her rights to some of the fruits of her long years of toil and servitude", after the death of her master, Colonel Royall (33). Belinda's petition suggests the ambiguous position of the status 'slave' in the eighteenth century, before laws were put into place which made it impossible for 'property' to claim rights to property. That a female slave would petition "a body of men, formed for the extirpation of vassalage, for the reward of virtue, and the just returns of honest industry" (34), believing she had a *right* to part of her deceased master's estate would have been an unthinkable public declaration for a slave, male or female, by the nineteenth century. Sancho's life and *Letters*, (35) referred to in chapter one, also testify to the ambiguous position of black people in eighteenth century Britain too, a position which probably benefitted some slaves. Hedin stresses that, unlike nineteenth century narrators, the early narrators did not need to be solely concerned to address the evils of slavery as spokesmen for anti-slavery societies. Hedin then shifts his attention to focus on the use of the picaresque as a literary convention by nineteenth century narrators. As a literary convention to which a white audience could respond with familiarity, the European picaresque convention can be seen to enable 'public' communication of a morally sound message in line with abolitionist expectations, one which appropriately 'packaged' the ex-slave and sent correct signals, as Hedin argues. While the male slave narrator had in the picaresque an appropriate convention

to convey his experiences of slavery, Hedin associates female slave narrative with sentimental convention. I have problems with Hedin's treatment of conventions along gender lines which can be seen to stem from ignoring the West African roots of the picaresque. Features of eighteenth century narrative discussed by Hedin may bring to mind the West African trickster tradition, not least of all because African cultural practice, even if only dimly remembered from childhood experiences, remained real and vivid for those unwitting travellers who pioneered the African diaspora. But the African trickster tradition is not explored by Hedin, and I believe this can account for his rather simplistic treatment of the eighteenth century slave narrator's experiences of and writing about slavery.

The immediacy of Africa for Equiano is clear throughout Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*. Equiano's West African origin and the Igbo values assimilated in childhood, of which he gives a prideful account in the first chapter of the narrative, is a source of community he draws on all his life. Significantly, Equiano's mother figures prominently in chapter one of his narrative, and is strategically present at points in the narrative where Equiano seems concerned to evoke precisely a context of black community rooted in his memories of his boyhood village, Essaka. His memories of Igbo boyhood can be seen as mother-focused and happy, a characterisation which I take up in detail in chapter five of this study. Equiano's narrative is more complex than Hedin's account of the eighteenth century slave allows for, particularly if Equiano's friendships and religious experiences are considered. I suspect Equiano was more at home in the male 'community of commerce' on the high seas, than he was in any of Britain's towns and cities which he toured selling the narrative. He was well read in the economic thinking of his day and, as any man to whom commerce and the sea were so important, Equiano believed in positive mutual benefits of trade between Africa and Europe. Life aboard ship is crucial to Equiano's self discovery. He acts out the freedom he earns by assuming the role of captain and bringing to port his ex-master's ship in chapter seven of his narrative, to be fully treated later in this study. Two important friendships develop at sea for Equiano with young Dick Baker and with Daniel Queen, an older sailor whom Equiano loves "with the affection of a son" (I. 172). Equiano's friendship with Dick Baker, "a kind interpreter, an agreeable companion and a faithful friend" (I. 99) is dear to Equiano, who is devastated by the death "of my friend, whom I loved and grieved for as for a brother" (I. 139). The familial associations of son, brother

and father are significant. Queen, who helps Equiano explicate the Bible and teaches the young slave useful skills, is a surrogate father. "Many a time", Equiano writes, he and Queen "sat up the whole night together", (I. 172) discussing the echoes of his Igbo home Equiano distinctly heard in the Bible. The familial overtones of a search for a father and a brother, and the association of Queen's Biblical instruction with Equiano's homeland, make these relationships more complex than simple fraternity or paternalism. Hedin's emphasis on the asocial, criminal character of eighteenth century slave narrators would seem to preclude the possibility of such relationships, so vital to Equiano, and clearly apparent as such in the narrative, as a number of critics have recognised. Below, Angelo Costanzo wants to place Equiano within Leslie Fiedler's discussion of strong male friendships in American literature:

To Fiedler's now classic examples we may add that of Equiano... In his years at sea Equiano clearly achieved a full humanity in ways that would not have been possible ashore where the racial tensions and biases would have precluded the growth of the reciprocal love and support that characterises his relationships with Dick Baker and Daniel Queen (36)

In " 'Master' and 'Father' in Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*", Edwards provides a more detailed rendering of the complex relationships figured in Equiano's narrative, expanding Professor Donatus Nwoga's observation that "the Igbo *nna n ukwu* translates as 'master' and one knows that whereas the Igbo expression carries implications of fatherhood, the English equivalent speaks of the slave and owner situation "(37). Edwards points out that

'Master' has many associations in English other than slavery, notably with schoolteaching (the schoolmaster) and with seafaring (the ships' master). In Equiano's remarkable and often paradoxical account of his life, from an Igbo childhood, followed by enslavement, and a struggle for education throughout a life largely spent at sea, all three of these associations of the word 'master' with 'father' can be found(38)

Edwards' article brings to the fore the complicated, contradictory, and very human character of Equiano's search for a surrogate father in owners, captains and friends such as Queen, and, as he grows from a vulnerable boy to a young man, his need to assert an independent self, obviously but not only through the act of gaining his freedom. Hedin's description of "individualistic, self-concerned, partly asocial adventurers who glided rather lightly through some of the eighteenth century narratives" (39), hardly does justice to Equiano's

friendships or to his journey of emotional and psychological growth, made more complex by slavery.

Hedin's statement that "some [eighteenth century narrators] converted to Christianity [while] most of them hardened themselves and acted individualistically and asocially" (40) may convey the socially ambiguous status of the eighteenth century slave-as-rogue, but it ignores the secret riches which Christianity held in store for the slave. Dixon's article, "Singing Swords: The Literary Legacy of Slavery", is a brilliant reading of nineteenth century American slave culture and its appropriation and transformation of Christianity:

It is precisely in the slave's pattern of aculturation that the student of black history and culture finds specific ideologies for survival. That Christianity is easily recognizable in the language of the narratives and songs has led many critics to emphasize the spiritual docility and otherworldliness of slave thought. However, a deeper study of the dual aspects of culture contact and aculturation between European and African belief structures reveals that slaves needed a language and flexible vocabulary more for communication than for belief. Thus it is more realistic to examine how Christianity was the nearest available, least suspect and most stimulative system for expressing their concepts of freedom, justice, right and aspiration. In the literature, that Christian imagery becomes an arsenal of pointed darts, a storehouse of images, a means of making shrewd observations (41)

As Equiano's relationship with Daniel Queen suggests, religion plays an important part in the young slave's adjustments to a new world. Equiano is sustained by a Christianity in which he hears an echo of his Igbo homeland; he discovers in the Bible "the laws and rules of my own country written almost exactly" (I. 172), demonstrating what Dixon terms "religious syncretism" in a nineteenth century context: "using the Bible as a storehouse of myth and history that could be appropriated for religious syncretism and a practical philosophy based on historical immediacy, the slave community identified with the children of Israel, but they did not stop there. Slaves knew that deliverance would come, as proven by their African assurance of intimacy and immortality with the Supreme Being, and by the wider implications of the biblical past" (42). In "The Invisible *Chi* in Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*", Edwards and Rosalind Shaw set out to explore Igbo religious belief informing the narrative "as an integral part of the conceptual framework through which he gave meaning to his later experiences" (43). Edwards and Shaw focus on the link

between Equiano's "sense of a personal place in a scheme of divine providence" and the Igbo conception of *Chi*:

As among many other West African peoples who speak Central Niger-Congo languages, *Chi* is a spiritual entity which personifies the words spoken to the creator deity by the individual before birth when choosing his or her life-course... Among the Igbo, it is a concept which unites the three interconnected principles of individuality, destiny and achievement in Igbo culture, and links these to the creator deity whose very name-- *Chineke* or *Chukwu*-- is derived from *Chi*. For these reasons, it is sometimes described as the "personal god" of each individual. The destiny selected by each person before birth cannot be fought, as affirmed by the Igbo proverb, "No-one can wrestle with his *Chi*". Yet it can be negotiated with: "If a person says yes, his *Chi* says yes"...

Equiano's exegesis of his name as signifying "having a loud voice and well-spoken" as well as "vicissitude or fortune also " (I. 31) makes perfect sense in terms of this interdependence of personal destiny and achievement through verbal skill (44)

Equiano's narrative demonstrates a complex process in which friendships and the skills of reading and writing eventually dispose Equiano more favourably to the white man's world, while, ironically, one of the most powerful tools of cultural conversion, the Bible, "tended to impress" African "manners and customs more deeply" on his memory (I. 172). Edwards and Shaw do not "suggest that Equiano did not embrace a Christian message. Rather he recognised in that message something he had always known, drawing as he repeatedly does on the Igbo roots of his religious thinking and his moral principles... This is very different from the message signalled by Christian commentators on the slave trade, that by way of slavery a great boon was being granted to the slaves, that of the light of Christianity" (45). Equiano's use of irony, and the unintentional ironic effects in the narrative, examined in chapter four, is linked to the complex relationships and experiences of religion in his life.

In *Slavery: A Comparative Perspective*, the historian Robin Winks discusses "the American tendency toward exceptionalism, toward assuming that most and perhaps all aspects of the American story were unique rather than a modification of the general or even European record... Slavery and racism have been treated as though they were the same when patently they are not although they are interrelated" (46). In a figure of the eighteenth century narrator such as Equiano, Hedin implicitly recognises that slavery and racism were not the

same problem, though Hedin's analysis obscures the complex relationships which could be formed as a result of a more fluid, ambiguous experience of slavery. Hedin's treatment of eighteenth and nineteenth century narrative is sensitive to changes in the institution of slavery which made imperative the use of literary convention for the nineteenth century slave narrator. Slavery became increasingly systematised and explicitly racist, with corresponding changes in the message and language of abolitionists, so that by the 1830's, "the absolutism of the anti-slavery cause began to demand that the victims of slavery be as righteous as the cause of freedom itself" (47). Hedin continues:

morality became a crucial factor in the slavery debate during the 1830's when that debate became the dominant issue. Pro-slavery advocates argued publicly that slavery was 'a positive social and moral good'...At the same time, the anti-slavery forces were making it abundantly clear that righteousness was on their side... In the 1830's and 1840's slavery became not just a crime but a sin... Any argument that blurred the distinction between the forces of light and the forces of darkness stood outside the pale (48)

But having left out of his analysis as a whole the African context of the picaresque, Hedin's treatment can be seen to proscribe the possibilities of nineteenth century narrative and reinforce an image of slave as victim, despite the proper attention he gives to the skilful and subversive use of literary convention as a vehicle to assert humanity and achieve strategic social ends. Hedin refers to the nineteenth century slave as victim, and suggests that as slavery became entrenched in legal code and practice, "this intensified [the slaves'] sense of being victims in a pervasive system" (49). I am not denying that the systematisation of oppression and cruelty, the further restriction or denial of basic rights to marry, travel, earn a living or be educated, did not victimise nineteenth century American slaves, for it surely did, and this is evident in the narratives of this period. But without critical recourse to the slave's own system of belief and cultural practice, so essential to surviving increasingly harsh and rigid slave practice, the slave as victim becomes dominant image and metaphor of slave experience. In *The Signifying Monkey*, Gates notes:

Common sense, in retrospect, argues that these retained elements of culture should have survived, that their complete annihilation would have been far more remarkable than their preservation. The African, after all, was a traveler, albeit an abrupt, ironic traveler, through space and time; and like every traveler, the African "read" a new environment within a received framework of meaning and belief. The notion that the Middle Passage was so traumatic that it

functioned to create in the African a tabula rasa of consciousness is as odd as it is a fiction, a fiction that has served several economic orders and their attendant ideologies. The full erasure of traces of cultures as splendid, as ancient, and as shared by the slave traveler as the classic cultures of traditional West Africa would have been extraordinarily difficult. Slavery in the New World, a veritable seething cauldron of cross-cultural contact, however, did serve to create a dynamic of exchange and revision among ^{numerous} previously isolated Black African cultures on a scale unprecedented in African history. Inadvertently, African slavery in the New World satisfied the preconditions for the emergence of a new African culture, a truly Pan-African culture fashioned as a colorful weave of linguistic, institutional, metaphysical, and formal threads (50)

Martha Cobb is unusual in drawing on a selection of slave writing representative of the geographical realities of the African diaspora, including eighteenth century figures such as Equiano, two French-speaking/writing Haitians, and nineteenth century Cuban writers of poetry as well as prose (51). Because Hedin neglects the significance of West African connection for eighteenth century narrators, the continuity of African-rooted slave culture, clearly evident in Cobb's discussion, does not inform his reading of nineteenth century narrative. Despite the attention Hedin gives to the immediacy of the African past for the early narrators, neither they nor the nineteenth century narrators are seen to be in touch with the black cultural realities established by Gates above, and so vivid in Equiano's narrative. For Hedin, the picaresque in slave narrative is a strategy linked to the pressures of the abolitionist movement, and felt most keenly by nineteenth century narrators. But even in Douglass' 1845 *Narrative*, the picaresque slave narrative by which all others are judged, glimpses of a human context can be seen, as can an experience of rootedness in the sustaining presence of black slave culture. Douglass' account of the Baltimore boys is an important experience of solidarity and affection in the 1845 autobiography, significantly between black and white children. The significance of childhood for the slave narrator is made apparent throughout this study, particularly in chapter six where *My Bondage and My Freedom* is the focus of close textual analysis. It is not until much later in the 1845 *Narrative* that Douglass presents himself again as loving and loved by others, at Freeland's farm among fellow slaves. Douglass' account of the intense fraternal bonds between himself and his fellow slaves at Freeland's farm, creates some tension within the picaresque situation of Douglass' first autobiography. In *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), rootedness in black community is established from its first page, and permeates the entire account. As we shall see in chapter six, if *My*

Bondage and My Freedom is given the recognition it surely deserves but has been denied, the glimpses of human connection in the 1845 *Narrative* can be viewed as significant. When the loneliness and isolation of Douglass' first autobiography is mediated through the re-visioned context of *My Bondage and My Freedom*, then the autobiographical act can be seen as the fullest expression of the black picaresque tradition. This is nowhere more apparent than in Douglass' treatment of slave song.

As Byerman recognises, "stylistic duplicity can also be found in the recurring use of irony in virtually all slave narratives, for irony is the linguistic equivalent of trickster behaviour" (52). Douglass' 1845 account of slave song is intriguing in this regard, its presence in the narrative clear testimony to the existence of a concealed slave community, and "stylistic duplicity" in slave narrative:

They would make the dense old woods, for miles around, reverberate with their wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness. They would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune. The thought that came up, came out-- if not in the word, in the sound; -- and as frequently in the one as in the other. They would sometimes sing the most pathetic sentiment in the most rapturous tone, and the most rapturous sentiment in the most pathetic tone....

They would sing as a chorus, to words which to many would seem unmeaning jargon, but which, nevertheless, were full of meaning to themselves. I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do.

I did not, when a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs. I was myself within the circle; so that I neither saw nor heard as those without might see and hear (p. 57/1845)

The carefully set scene suggests the magic of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As the slave enters the woods on his way to "The Great House Farm", he is between white and black worlds. Douglass does not interpret the "wild songs", rather, he evokes their mysteriousness: Douglass' sentences balance competing readings of slave expression against each other: "highest joy" and "deepest sadness"; "compose and sing" and "time nor tune". In the sentence, "the thought that came up, came out-- if not in word, in sound;-- and as frequently in the one as in the other", suggests an unfamiliar, foreign language not sensible to all listeners

("unmeaning jargon... apparently incoherent"). Multiple possibilities are suggested by reference to the "deep meaning" of slave song. The balanced sentences contrasting opposed readings of slave expression draws attention to the act of interpretation, and to the 'space' or silence between oppositional terms inscribed by slaves with their own meaning. As a young slave boy, Douglass was "within the circle", and we might see this as the world unheard and unseen by dominant white society where Douglass was aware of, but mystified by "songs full of meaning to themselves".

Douglass' account of the slave's "wild songs" ends with a less ambiguous, more strident 'voice' which leaves the woods, as it were, consciously aware of a white audience and of the need to 'explain' the songs: he writes, "every note was a testimony against slavery". Emotive descriptions play with the sentimental feelings of the audience, otherwise possibly untouched and even mystified by Douglass' initial description: "The hearing of those wild notes always depressed my spirit and filled me with ineffable sadness. I have frequently found myself in tears while hearing them. The mere recurrence of those songs, even now, afflicts me; and while I am writing these lines, an expression of feeling has already found its way down my cheek..." (p. 58/1845). The image of "a man cast away on a desolate island" overshadows Douglass' earlier, ambiguous self image "within the circle". A sad, lonely outcast, remembered from afar by the wet-eyed adult narrator closes the memory of the woods "reverberating with song":

I have often been utterly astonished, since I came to the north, to find persons who could speak of the singing, among slaves, as evidence of their contentment and happiness. It is impossible to conceive of a greater mistake. Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy. The songs of slaves represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears... The singing of a man cast away upon a desolate island might be as appropriately considered as evidence of contentment and happiness, as the singing of a slave; the songs of the one and of the other are prompted by the same emotion (p. 58/1845)

We need to recognise that, while Douglass' 1845 *Narrative* offers only shadows and glimpses of the black culture which sustained slaves, this context disturbs and disrupts what otherwise seems an unambiguous example of the loneliness, despair and isolation of slavery, reinforcing an image of the slave as victim. In chapter seven, we shall see that slave song in *Dessa Rose* functions in precisely the same way, providing Dessa with a means of communication, connection and ultimately liberation. As such, slave song acts as a counterdiscourse,

disrupting and undermining the text of slavery dominated by the white male narrator of part one of Williams' novel. It is significant that Douglass' 1845 description of "the slaves' wild songs" is an epigraph to *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, where it speaks to possibilities of meaning and interpretation addressed by that book. As we shall see in chapter six, William Andrews encourages the reader of Douglass' autobiographies to examine the 1845 *Narrative* "as the precursor of *My Bondage and My Freedom*" (53); the treatment of slave song in *My Bondage and My Freedom* suggests the essential correctness of doing so.

Hedin recognises that the nineteenth century male slave narrator manipulated his white audience to achieve social ends which were as real and important to him as they were to abolitionists. Emphasising escape episodes in the narratives, Hedin sees that the male narrators' "road narratives" manipulate convention and in so doing liberate the protagonist from the "irresolvably tight bind" in which Olney traps the slave author:

The road narrative... first activated the audience's conventional literary expectation that the road protagonist would act conventionally and become a picaro... and then undercut those expectations. For the slave narrators consistently circumscribe the description of their road behaviour to keep it resolutely rational and moral and to emphasize the reluctance with which they are driven to necessary survival acts of theft, cunning and violence... In short, the slave on the road is never "at large", never *simply fleeing*, certainly never on the prowl. The narrators complained often that slavery was ^{calculated} to keep them childish; but as soon as they escape, the road activates instant, responsible adulthood rather than adolescent release or amoral self-seeking. The escaping slave became heroic precisely by refusing to assimilate to his literary landscape (54)

But, as we have seen, other critics go much further, placing the heroic slave in a context of black culture which defines and recognises that heroic status. The 'picaro trickster' or 'good Christian slave' are role-plays or masks disguising a deeper subversion than that described by Hedin. Use of convention as described by Hedin disguises another story, explicit in Equiano's narrative and in *Incidents*, and dimly perceived in Douglass' 1845 *Narrative*, of autonomous black people whose sense of self is not determined by white standards or expectations, but is whole and liberated in and through African-rooted cultural practice and religious syncretism. As we shall see in chapter seven, *Dessa Rose*

and *Beloved* privilege this dimension of slave experience, particularly for black women.

It is not a conventional critical assumption that a black *woman* is or has the potential to be self-determining and dangerous, characteristics of the picarotrickster given deep meaning in slave culture. It is significant that in Sherley Anne Williams' novel, her protagonist Dessa Rose kills a white man in order to ensure a coffle of slaves she is among are not returned to slavery and, in *Beloved*, Toni Morrison's protagonist Sethe sets out to kill her four children, when imminent re-enslavement threatens, managing to take the life of a baby daughter, before she is, like Dessa, imprisoned for her actions. What is perhaps most remarkable about Dessa is her ordinariness: she is not given the mythic stature of an Amazon warrior battling the oppressor:

in the novel's immediate past, Dessa was an ordinary field hand, unremarkable in education, background or condition, precisely the Southern plantation's least fathomable and most mysterious figure. Despite her leadership in a slave uprising, Dessa never stops being ordinary... The desire to be free, the novel makes clear, is as natural and inevitable to a slave as breathing (55)

Toni Morrison has called Sethe's murderous behaviour the ultimate act of motherhood, a point of view which is not as outrageous as it may first appear, shattering as it does the conventional stereotype of woman as passive/mother, and exposing with brutal honesty the realities of life for black women in slavery. Morrison has said about the slave mother's act of infanticide:

it was absolutely the right thing to do, but she had no right to do it. I think if I had seen what she had seen, and knew what was in store, and I felt there was an afterlife-- or even if I felt there wasn't-- I think I would have done the same thing. But its also the thing you have no right to do (56)

It is virtually impossible to comprehend Jacobs' life in *Incidents* without performing the act of seeing which Morrison's quote demonstrates, wherein we enter the text of slavery on the black woman's terms, and must try to see through her eyes "the Southern plantation's least fathomable and most mysterious figure". When Hedin turns his attention to female slave narrative, he reinforces the stereotype of the passive, housebound woman and denies not only the realities of black female experience in slavery, but also the female slave narrators' self-awareness as a black woman who is self-determining and can be dangerous.



Like Hedin's treatment of the female slave narrator's use of sentimental convention, Roderiguez-Luis makes assumptions about women's place in society and in literature which do not recognise empowered female presence. Roderiguez-Luis focuses on the female picaro to "reach some conclusions about the picaresque novel in general" (57). For Roderiguez-Luis, picaresque characteristics do not add up to any kind of artistically moving structure in *picara* novels before Defoe; in a number of ways the female picaro inhabits a different fictional world. Roderiguez-Luis' observations resonate with the same moral tone as Olney's remarks comparing slave narrative to 'real literature'. Of the *picara* characteristics which Roderiguez-Luis explores, some can be seen to betray his own and possibly authorial limitations as male observers and creators of female experience: is it useful to 'blame' a literary character, on the basis of gender, as in the statement that "*picaras*... show themselves equally incapable of attaining any level of serious moral thinking"? Is it other than subjective evaluation to observe that "even in the best of these novels", the *picara* lacks the "heightened presence" of male protagonists? (58). It is beyond the scope of this study to suggest alternative readings of the European *picara*, but as a 'failed' character the *picara* reminds us of the possible misrepresentation of women in literature-- usually figured in terms of invisible or silenced presence-- and, in signifying female experience in society, the *picara* points to the inevitability of difference in women's writing: global sisterhood is as much a literary myth as it is a political and social fiction, as chapter three of this study argues in some detail. The failed *picara* points us to Jacobs' narrative and to the limitations of Hedin's analysis of female slave narrative. In contrast to Hedin's reading of female slave narrator's use of sentimental fiction, premised on the assumption that all women are the same, I agree with Thistlethwaite that "affirmation of femaleness should not gloss over difference:"what life is like uniquely for black-American women, I believe, must be allowed to stand on its own. It must count for the survival of these women and their people and not someone else's survival" (59).

Hedin does not, indeed cannot, recognise the potential of female slave narrative because he sees the female slave in conventional sentimental terms. Stereotypes of male and female experience are borne out in Hedin's assumptions about the 'true nature' of the free-spirited male slave, opposed to the house-bound female slave. Hedin evokes a universal female reality when he assumes that "the problems of Linda Brent and Mattie Griffiths become the problems of

everywoman in the nineteenth century". The 'natural fit' of eighteenth century narrator's lives and the picaresque, becomes a perfect fit of literary convention and gender stereotype. And, while the nineteenth century male narrator is given presence and authority largely because he is seen to manipulate and convention and "get ovah" the white man, Hedin's female slave narrator is too passive for such rough literary play; inexplicably, she "had less reason to undercut the genre she worked in":

The female slave narrator had a similarly appropriate genre at hand, though narrators like Linda Brent and Mattie Griffiths had less reason to undercut the genre they worked in, the sentimental novel. If men reveal their true nature when free, by the same conventional schema women reveal themselves at home. As a result, slavery itself, rather than the act of escape, offered the most fitting test of the female slave: how she coped with the pressures and duties of her master's house would show just what kind of woman she was. Thus depicting the slave woman as vulnerable servant and the owner as abusive aristocrat enabled Brent and Griffiths to draw on the literary associations of sentimental fiction to elicit the emotional responses befitting its recognizable cast of characters. In addition, the notion of woman as slave tapped the incipient feminist indignation that was already linking the women's rights movement and the anti-slavery movement. Hence political fervour and literary convention combined; the problems of Linda Brent and Mattie Griffiths became the problems of everywoman in the nineteenth century, appealing to the basic fears and sympathies of their avowedly female audience. (60)

I am not suggesting that Hedin should have linked female slave narrative with the European picaresque literary tradition rather than sentimental fiction. As I have shown and will continue to develop, female slave narrative cannot be read as if it were the same as male slave narrative. Furthermore, the link made by Nichols, referred to earlier, between picaresque slave narrative and social protest fiction is especially problematic for black women. In her sociological reading of black women's fiction, Thistlethwaite treats Ann Petry's *The Street* as representative of black women's experience. Thistlethwaite focuses on conflict, alienation, and the "pain-stained years" that "permeate the landscape" of black female life (61). I am uneasy with Thistlethwaite's use of fiction in chapter three of *Race, Sex and God*, just as I am uneasy with Nichols' treatment of picaresque black writing described earlier. As Hortense Spillers puts it, "an agent endowed with the possibilities of action, or who can *make* her world, just as she is *made* by it, is the crucial dialectical motion that is missing in deterministic fiction"

(62). Mary Helen Washington discusses how Petry has been locked into just the sort of literary pigeon-hole in which Thistlethwaite locates black women writers:

Even though Ann Petry is still writing today [mid 1980's], most of the criticism of her work has locked her into the 1940's tradition of social protest and the Richard Wright School of environmental determinism. But since her 1946 novel, *The Street*, and a 1947 novella, "In Darkness and Confusion", which clearly fit the mold of social protest fiction, Petry has written two novels, a book of short stories, and two biographies for young people. As Petry's work moves away from the hostile environment of Harlem, the setting of her early work, her characters gain strength and stature. Her women and her men, especially in the stories set in New England... are more firmly rooted in a sustaining community and are therefore less isolated and less likely to be defeated by external forces (63)

Thistlethwaite is aware of the dangers of approaching fiction as a mirror reflecting reality: "fiction is a central resource for this work [*Race, Sex and God*], but it is well to remember, and I must continually remind myself of this, that fiction is fiction. Fiction can evoke truths that are obscured by social analysis, but sociology, anthropology and economics are becoming, for me, key resources for a white feminist theory seeking ways to grapple with the cloying hands of class and race privilege" (64). Despite Thistlethwaite's commendable effort to ground feminist theory in an analysis of difference, her use of fiction as 'data' ultimately limits the complexity and life-affirming qualities of black women's writing, not least of all because Thistlethwaite, a theologian who recently discovered black women's fiction, seems unaware of black literary history and issues. Mary Helen Washington points out that "...social protest fiction, while it diminishes the effectiveness of all human energy, threatens to marginalise and repress women in particular" (65). Mary Helen Washington sees potential dangers in rejecting protest fiction simply on the grounds that it's bleak world of hardship is uncomfortable for the reader to enter, but she also identifies the dangers of the "circumscribed possibilities of the text itself, its lack of subtlety and flexibility, its manipulation of characters to serve an ideological function, its refusal to give women a powerful point of view" (66). Mary Helen Washington is concerned about deep rooted sexism in protest fiction as well as disengaged, ahistorical readings of texts such as *The Street*:

What is hidden beneath the surface of deterministic fiction is an ideology that is mainly concerned with men... The revolt in this fiction is against racism, not sexism; its deep ideological conflict is between black men and white men. With its emphasis on a hostile ^{physical} environment, on crime, on suppressed aggression, on white

exploitation of black life, deterministic fiction ignores many of the deeply felt realities of women's lives: their relationships with their families, their own suppressed creativity, and their conflicts with black men and with patriarchy. This form of social protest is so inimical to women that they are often depicted in this fiction as victimizers (67)

Barbara Christian sees black women's protest fiction as a response *against* the inappropriate images and damaging assumptions embedded in the white female world of domestic fiction. Christian notes that in the development of black women's writing, from approximately 1900 to 1950, novels by black women can be seen to embody tension between the writers' "apparent acceptance of an ideal woman derived from white upper class society, and the reality with which their protagonists had to contend... [This resulted] in a series of contradictions... until in the 1940's the destruction it created becomes clear in fiction written by black women" (68). Hedin's use of sentimental convention to explore female slave narrative does not observe the black woman writer's self-image conflict identified by Christian and made explicit in *Incidents*. Hedin denies Jacobs' self-awareness as a black woman and the special position of black women in slavery and black slave culture. Jacobs states in her narrative that conventional ideas of woman (embedded in sentimental convention) just do not embrace black female reality : "Still in looking back, calmly, on the events of my life, I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standards as others" (p. 56). The ending of *Incidents* seems to consciously reject the limited scope of female options portrayed in sentimental fiction: "Reader, my story ends with freedom; not in the usual way, with marriage. I and my children are now free!" (p. 201). While I do not agree with Yellin's reading of Jacobs' narrative in relation to sentimental convention, to be explored later in this study, I do agree with her observation that "Jacobs does not characterise herself as a passive female victim but asserts that... she was an effective moral agent. She takes full responsibility for her actions" (69). The action to which Yellin refers is the affair into which Jacobs enters with a white man, hoping it will prompt Dr Flint to free her. It does not, and the affair results in Jacobs' two children. As Jacobs writes: "I will not try to screen myself behind the plea of compulsion from a master; for it was not so. Neither can I plead ignorance or thoughtlessness... I knew what I did and I did it with deliberate calculation" (p. 54). Despite Jacobs' vulnerability facing severe patriarchal oppression, Jacobs' words clearly are not the utterance of a "vulnerable servant", nor Jacobs' voice that of a nineteenth century "everywoman".

In a letter to her friend, feminist/abolitionist Amy Post, Jacobs registers understandable reservations about making public an account of her life which, if it is honest, will have to treat a sexual history which Victorian America will not sanction. But there is evidence in this and other letters that the possibility of moral censure does not press Jacobs' back to the wall as a writer; she does not seem willing to simply use a literary convention which devalues her own experience just because to do so might relieve the discomfort of an up-tight audience:

And you my dear friend must not expect much where there has been so little given Yes dear Amy there has been more than a bountiful share of suffering given enough to crush the inner feelings of stouter hearts than this poor timid one of mine but I will try and not send you a portraiture of feelings just now the poor Book is in its Chrysalis-state and though I can never make it a butterfly I am satisfied to have it creep meekly among some of the humbler bugs I sometimes wish that I could fall into a Rip Van Winkle sleep and awake with the blest belief of that little witch Topsy that I never was born but you will say it is too late in the day I have outgrown the belief oh yes and outlived it too (letter no. 8, p. 238)

Reference to Rip Van Winkle and "that little witch Topsy" is significant. I read Jacobs as both inscribing her familiarity with 'real literature' and rejecting it, not on the grounds that her narrative can only "creep meekly among some of the humbler bugs" (as Olney would no doubt have it), but, rather, in her avoidance of convention ("a portraiture of feelings"), and of conventional literary judgement. In other words, Jacobs rejects the moral censure of her experience as a black woman implicit in sentimental convention, and she rejects as a standard for the judgement of her narrative the exclusive terms of the white male literary establishment. Rip Van Winkle and Topsy represent naive, unreal parameters for Jacobs' "chrysalis". Jacobs' desire to record an honest account of lived experience, "I must write just what I have lived and witnessed myself", is repeated throughout her letters to trusted friends such as Amy Post. Jacobs' images of women in slavery suggest determination to avoid the sort of excesses in which Douglass indulged, the bloody, half-naked slave women in such abundance in the 1845 *Narrative*. As we shall see in chapter four, Jacobs' brief involvement with Mrs Stowe not only suggests the complexity of maternalism in *Incidents*, it also calls into question the association made by Hedin (and other critics) between *Incidents* and sentimental fiction. As I hope to show here and throughout this study, Jacobs' use of convention is mediated through her self-

awareness as a black woman, so that she is able to write what she has lived and witnessed without calling into question her own integrity.

While male slave narrative may conform to aspects of the picaresque, we have seen in the narratives of Equiano and Douglass the shortcomings of employing a literary type to expound the realities of slavery. Similarly, female experience may be expressed in sentimental convention, but this literary convention excludes as significant race, class and other factors such as nationality, religion and culture. MacKethan analysis of motherwit in black women's writing, alluded to earlier, roots aspects of Jacobs' narrative in a black picaresque tradition. MacKethan views women's use of motherwit as "tied to... the capacities of language as an enabling power", and focuses on Jacobs' use of "caricature and exaggeration as tools of invective... Her own master and mistress are frequently lampooned and in that way effectively dehumanised" (70). Dr Flint is characterised as "a villain figure of sentimental novel vintage", bestial and inhuman in Jacobs' narrative, but he fails in his attempts to seduce/rape Jacobs and is shown as a blustering, ineffective fool as MacKethan points out: "For all his ranting and raving, Dr Flint never won any contest with his female slave; as Jacobs remarks, 'my master had power and law on his side; I had determined will. There is might in each'" (71). In *Incidents*, Jacobs avoids sensationalism and titillation. The content of Dr Flint's notes are never made explicit though it is made clear they describe perverse intentions which sexually threaten a young girl. The "foul secrets" which Dr Flint "whispers" in Jacobs' ear are not divulged. Jacobs silences her ex-master but makes plain the evil which he and his notes represent for her. Dr Flint is characterised as heartless and cruel, a "depraved character" "whose speeches are nearly all of a piece", an exaggerated caricature effectively dehumanised, as MacKethan points out. William Andrews' reading of Dr. Flint in *Incidents* also focuses on the power which Jacobs assumes as narrator. Andrews argues that "the function of the man is as a signifier of patriarchal power at its most dehumanised extreme" (72). Jacobs' treatment of sexual harassment challenges stereotypes of the female slave and by extension nineteenth century moral standards which condemn Jacobs' sexual activity outside of marriage. As Andrew argues: "Jacobs concentrated on the psychological source, not the physical manifestation of, the obscenity of slavery. That is, she grew eloquent in denouncing the lust for and corruption of power in the 'patriarchal institution' as she scornfully referred to slavery" (73).

When Jacobs characterises Linda Brent's mistress, Mrs Flint, she uses simple contrasts to point to glaring hypocrisy, as in the quote below. Jacobs' use of a domestic setting and imagery, drawing on conventional ideas of cosy, domestic bliss provide fine ironic contrast with the neurotic, obsessive behaviour of Mrs. Flint. Jacobs' domestic scene is thus set, as we move from the Lord's supper to Sunday lunch preparations in the Flint kitchen:

she was a member of the church; but partaking of the Lord's supper did not seem to put her in a Christian frame of mind. If dinner was not served at the exact time on that particular Sunday, she would station herself in the kitchen, and wait till it was dished, and then spit in all the kettles and pans that had been used for cooking. She did this to prevent the cook and her children from eking out their meagre fare with the remains of the gravy and other scrapings. The slaves could get nothing to eat except what she chose to give them. Provisions were weighed out by the pound and ounce, three times a day. I can assure you she gave them no chance to eat wheat bread from her flour barrel. She knew how many biscuits a quart of flour would make, and exactly what size they ought to be (p. 12).

As chapters three and five of this study will show, the world of women in Jacobs' narrative is considerably more complex than sentimental convention would lead us to believe. The characterisation of black and white women in relation to each other does not predictably conform to sentimental convention, any more than relationships with masters and friends, so important to Equiano and Douglass, are simple and predictable in male slave narrative.

CONCLUSION

There is a danger inherent in the modern black quest for African roots. Hazel Carby is suspicious of the mystification of the past, in this case of the American South, about which a mythology has grown up that is undoubtedly linked to sentimental views of Africa: this "mythology of the rural South conflates the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and two very distinct modes of production, slavery and sharecropping, into one mythical rural folk existence". Carby is rightly concerned that mythologising a rural past results in a loss of detail and lack of critical precision: "Consequently, not only are the specificities of a slave existence as opposed to a sharecropping existence negated, but the urban imagination and urban histories are also repressed" (74). Carby's suspicions about the mystification of the past, particularly black history rooted in African cultural practice, is well founded and should be heeded. In her

dissertation, "Sisters of the Light: The Importance of Spirituality in the Afro-American Novel", Josephine Adams seems to make a similar observation, recognising the danger of over-simplifying an idea of African rootedness which she refers to as an Afro-centric spirituality:

It is important to note that the inclusiveness of [Afrocentric] spirituality cannot be dismissed as primitivism, naturalism or animism. Certainly these "-isms" are aspects of Afrocentric spirituality, but Eurocentric concepts of these genres have... distorted or over-simplified the values or ideas incorporated in them (75)

Of course, Europeans are not solely guilty of putting over "distorted or over-simplified" views of Africa as Adams fails to recognise. Catherine Acholonu strains any credible conception of continuity when she suggests that in the present-day Nigerian village she claims to be Equiano's home, there are people who *remember* Equiano and his family over two hundred years later ! (76). Adams also distorts and over-simplifies throughout her dissertation, making no attempt to specifically locate "the African", consistently referred to through out the dissertation. Gross generalisation persists, since Adams argues that 'black humanism' is a *female* domain. The black male becomes a kind of picaresque caricature, not governed by "the soul ideology" and no longer anchored by spirituality as defined by Adams: he has "submitted to Western ordering principles that equate manhood with forming an individual identity based primarily on individual efforts for external gains" (77). There is no room here for the eighteenth century slave/traveller/writer/political activist Equiano, or for the possibilities of Frederick Douglass' 1845 *Narrative* encoded in slave song. Neither a sentimental image of Africa's lost son, nor of a picaro who has sold his black soul for the white man's way, accurately describes the male slave narrator. Equiano, in the passage below, can be seen as deeply in touch with his African origins and sensitive to the possibility of misreading the past :

I hope the reader will not think I have trespassed on his patience in introducing myself to him with some account of the manners and customs of my country. They had been implanted in me with great care, and made an impression on my mind, which time could not erase, and which all the adversity and variety of fortune I have since experienced served only to rivet and record; for, whether the love of one's country be real or imaginary, or a lesson of reason, or an instinct of nature, I still look back with pleasure on the first scenes of my life, though that pleasure has been for the most part mingled with sorrow (I. 45-46)

I have already suggested the dangers inherent in ignoring the African roots of picaresque slave narrative. We need only recall *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to be reminded that slavery is a compelling source from which to cull images of brutalised victims. James Baldwin is clear about the dangers of Stowe's "very bad novel... its self-righteous, virtuous sentimentality" wearing a "mask of cruelty":

Uncle Tom's Cabin--like its multitudinous, hard-boiled descendants--is a catalogue of violence. This is explained by the nature of Mrs Stowe's subject matter, her laudable determination to flinch from nothing in presenting the complete picture; an explanation which falters only when we pause to ask whether or not her picture is indeed complete; and what constriction or failure of perception forced her to so depend on the description of brutality--unmotivated, senseless--and to leave unanswered and unnoticed the only important question: what it ^{was}, after all, that motivated her people to do such deeds (78)

Similarly, Edwards recognises the link between sentimentality and cruelty in the 'sinister side' of Edward W. Blyden, the nineteenth-century black man "hailed as the great Pan-Negro patriot, the founder of the concept of African personality, the spiritual father of Negritude, the first great black spokesman for Africa" (79). Like Acholonu, Blyden's African identity and good intentions in relation to African heritage are not enough to ensure that the observation is sound or takes account of the complexities of experience. Hollis Lynch describes Blyden "in a West African context as brilliant but self-righteous, intolerant, dilettantish, suspicious and paranoid"(80). Neither Lynch nor Edwards sets out to attack or demean the achievements of Blyden which are recognised by both critics. But Edwards' point in revealing the darker side of Blyden, articulated below, is precisely Baldwin's point about the dehumanising nature of social protest fiction:

The visionary, unsustained, lapses easily into the merely irrational and rhetorical, degenerating from the inspirational myth of national or racial identity, which at best can bind together men of different nations or races, to the cruelties of local or personal prejudice. Nor need it be surprising that cruelty and sentimentality should go together. It is in the nature of sentimentality that the feeling should be self-indulgent, not directed outwards: and it would be sentimental of the reader of Blyden to see only the Pan-Negro Patriot, and not this darker side to his nature (81)

Carol Iannone sees in the early plot of *Beloved* "the pattern of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*", and wants us accept that Morrison, like some "hard-boiled descendant" of Stowe, cannot or will not render nuances of slave experience other than "miseries" and "humiliation":

[*Beloved*] grows massive and heavy with the cumulative and oft-repeated miseries, with new miseries and new dimensions of miseries added in each telling and retelling long after the point has been made and the reader has grown numb. The graphic descriptions of physical humiliation begin to grow sensationalistic, and the gradual unfolding of secret horror has an unmistakable Gothic dimension which soon comes to seem merely lurid, designed to arouse and entertain (82)

Beloved is the subject of chapter seven of this study and will be treated there, but I must state now that I disagree with Iannone's reading of Morrison's novel. "The only important question" posed by Baldwin prompts us to "make a further journey than that made by Stowe, to discover and reveal something a little closer to the truth" (83) and this is, I think, what Morrison achieves, not least of all because *Beloved* explores behind and beyond the sentimental "mask of cruelty" disguising dimensions of slave experience. The creative expressions of slaves and their artistic descendants, offer more than bleak portrayals of helpless, deracinated victims. Works such as *Beloved* and *Dessa Rose*, the insight of Baldwin's prose, as well as the slave narratives central to this study, bear witness to the miracle of survival and creativity under slavery.

In Nichols' treatment of the picaresque alluded to earlier, slave narrative is read as presenting protagonists who are tragic picaros in the sense which Baldwin uses the term to describe the tragedy of the protagonist of Wright's *Native Son*: "below the surface of this novel there lies, ^{as} it seems to me, a continuation, a complement of that monstrous legend it was written to destroy. Bigger [Wright's protagonist] is Uncle Tom's descendant... Bigger's tragedy is not that he is cold or black or hungry, not even that he is an American, black; but that he has accepted a theology that denies him life, that he admits the possibility of being sub-human and feels constrained, therefore, to battle for his humanity" (84). Like Baldwin's essay, in *Beloved*, Toni Morrison penetrates into the experience of categorisation with special skill, revealing a dynamic of black experience which eludes the reader who skims the surface of black creative expression rooted in the slave narrative tradition. The "life-denying theology"

which Baldwin describes becomes a deep, tangled jungle in the passage below from *Beloved*. An elder of the black community, Stamp Paid, reflects that

Whitepeople believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle. Swift unnavigable waters, swinging screaming baboons, sleeping snakes, red gums ready for their sweet white blood. In a way, he thought, they were right. The more coloredpeople spent their strength trying to convince them how gentle they were, how clever and loving, how human, the more they used themselves up to persuade whites of something Negroes believed could not be questioned, the deeper and more tangled the jungle grew inside. But it wasn't the jungle blacks brought with them to this place from the other (livable) place. It was the jungle whitefolks planted in them. And it grew. It spread. In, through and after life, it spread, until it invaded the whites who had made it. Touched them every one. Changed and altered them. Made them bloody, silly, worse than even they wanted to be, so scared were they of the jungle they had made. The screaming baboon lived under their own white skin; the red gums were their own (85)

Nichols' argument also takes for granted that the picaresque--and black writing since slave narrative-- portrays *male* experience in a *man's* world: women are invisible. It would be difficult to account for writers such as Toni Morrison or Sherley Anne Williams, and their explicit interest in slavery dramatised through female protagonists in *Dessa Rose* and *Beloved*, if we accept the idea of black literature put forward by Nichols. Because Nichols needs to claim that slave narrative established a picaresque tradition continued in black male autobiography and fiction, implications of the observation below-- clearly refuted in the experiences and narratives of Equiano, Douglass and Jacobs-- are not addressed:

The slave narrators are neglected (often abandoned) children constantly subject to physical punishment and hounded by fear... The isolation and deprivation of these slaves gave rise to an instability of personality which manifests itself in aggression, violence and superstition. They lose the capacity for love; the soul in them virtually dies (86)

Nichols traps slave narrative, denying its subtle messages, silencing its full voice, and so does Hedin, despite his attempt to identify clever skill in picaresque slave narrative. In Baldwin's words, "this is a more hidden phenomena now than it was in the days of serfdom, but it is no less implacable. Now, as then, we find ourselves bound, first without, then within, by the nature

of our categorization" (87). Chapter three explores "the nature of our categorization" in relation to gender and slave narrative.

CHAPTER III GENDER AND SLAVE NARRATIVE

Thompson's *Life of Josiah* is the 1850s version by Fanny Jacobs of Josiah's autobiographical narrative. It is possible for Jean Hagan Villa to directly establish the authorship and authenticity of Josiah's narrative. Villa indicates a reliance on these letters in her 1987 edition of *Autobiography*, making it a particularly useful volume of a unique first-hand testimony of nineteenth-century black life. A significant element of Josiah's letter to Elizabeth Dow Cheney and of her reply is a number of references to the faith and participation of Josiah's mother, and of the chapter. In a rare quiet interlude, Josiah writes from the post-Civil War South, where, along with her daughter Louisa, she had returned to work with many emancipated slaves, teaching domestic and factory skills. The journal letter is a moving appeal from the Reconstruction South to the newly freed for all slaves from Josiah's letters quoted in this study. The narrative has been used to Josiah's lack of participation in the writing of his own life. Josiah's speaking between numerous instances where participation is not possible by Josiah.

I will I would like you a line from my old people. I am sitting under the old roof, and I feel for from the spot where I suffered all the suffering of my life. Thank God the other day it seemed as if the Lord, there is no more need of killing people in combat since we have, and it was able to purchase the freedom of freedom. I could have seen this poor old man have to save my children from the chains and degradation of slavery.

Risky thought Paul D, very risky. For a used-to-be slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially when it was her children she had settled on
--Beloved

We have paid for our children's place in the world again, and again...
--Dessa Rose

CHAPTER III.

GENDER AND SLAVE NARRATIVE

The discovery of a cache of letters early in the 1980's written by Harriet Jacobs to female and other friends made it possible for Jean Fagan Yellin to firmly establish the authorship and authenticity of Jacobs' narrative. Yellin includes a selection of these letters in her 1987 edition of *Incidents*, making it a particularly useful edition of a unique first-hand testimony of nineteenth century black female experience in slavery. Jacobs' letter to Ednah Dow Cheney quoted below, serves in a number of ways to point to the main preoccupations of Jacobs' writing, and of this chapter. In a rare quiet interlude, Jacobs writes from the post-Civil War South where, along with her daughter Louisa, she had volunteered to work with newly emancipated blacks, teaching domestic and literacy skills. The extract below is a moving scene from the extraordinary life of an 'ordinary' woman [in all extracts from Jacobs' letters quoted in this study, no corrections have been made to Jacobs' (lack of) punctuation, spelling or grammar. Double spacing between sentences indicates where punctuation is not provided by Jacobs]:

I felt I would^{like to} write you a line from my old home. I am sitting under the old roof twelve feet from the spot where I suffered all the crushing weight of slavery. thank God the bitter cup is drained of its last dreg. there is no more need of hiding places to conceal slave Mothers. yet it was little to purchase the blessings of freedom. I could have worn this poor life out there to save my Children from the misery and degradation of Slavery.

I had long thought I had no attachment to my old home. as I often sit here and think of those I loved of their hard struggle in life--their unfaltering love and devotion toward myself and Children. I love to sit here and think of them. They have made the few sunny spots in that dark life sacred to me.

I cannot tell you how I feel in this place. the change is so great I can hardly take it all in I was born here, and amid all these new born blessings, the old dark cloud comes over me, and I find it hard to have faith in rebels... (letter no. 15, p. 249) (1)

While the letter opens with Jacobs focussing on herself--'I' occurs four times in the first two sentences--^{and} with specific reference to Jacobs' seven year self-incarceration --"there is no more need of hiding places to conceal slave Mothers"-- neither the letters nor the narrative can be characterised as self-centred or preoccupied with personal suffering and accomplishments. Jacobs makes explicit a sense of self-as-a-part-of-others in emphasising the home, her role as mother, and "the unfaltering love and devotion" of her family; indeed, throughout her narrative Jacobs repeatedly declares her gratification at having "worn this poor life out" to give her children a life free from slavery. Isolation, asocial behaviour and deracination emphasised in the European picaresque convention clearly will not do to describe Jacobs' reality in slavery or *Incidents*: "there is no history of women which does not take account of how women are placed relative to men and children, how middle class experience relates to that of the upper and working classes, how employer and employee, master/mistress and servant, are historically related" (2). As I indicated in the preceding chapter and shall develop, female slave narrative is best read on the margin of the literary type designated sentimental/domestic writing. While the question of whether or not the protagonist of this or any other slave narrative can be read as a conventional literary type is best explored through close textual scrutiny, it seems necessary to identify and characterise in this chapter what Yellin calls Jacobs' "social matrix", since it will bear directly on chapters four and five where *Incidents* is the subject of such close textual study.

As Hedin's mis-reading of Jacobs as a nineteenth century "everywoman" demonstrates, the easy identification of *Incidents* as archetypally female in its focus and themes may lead to a naive caricature of female experience and writing. As I stated in chapter two, the precise nature of the picaresque potential of black women's writing is insufficiently examined. I return to and examine the danger of stereotyping female experience throughout this chapter. The

second paragraph of Jacobs' letter suggests the complex process of what Morrison refers to in *Beloved* as 'rememory', the painful, possibly enlightening process of remembering long suppressed experiences in slavery. Jacobs conveys a sense of surprise that her "old home" stirs in her feelings of "attachment"; the revelation triggers thoughts of her family, as she stresses with repetition, "I love to sit here and think of them", calling attention as much to the act of remembering as she does to the quiet bravery of her family. As in the first paragraph of the letter, Jacobs' memories of slavery, "that dark life", are inextricably linked to a reality of rootedness in a bright realm of family. Multiple contexts of rootedness in the final paragraph of the letter expands the boundaries of Jacobs' family to include the black community's struggle in post-Civil War American society. It seems likely that the changes which amaze Jacobs-- "I cannot tell you how I feel in this place. the change is so great"-- are repercussions of the Civil War, and though she can "hardly take it all in", Jacobs again specifically locates herself, "I was born here", and renders the bleak possibility of a better life for emancipated blacks in terms that are both maternal and echo strongly the closing lines of *Incidents*: "amid all these new born blessings, the old dark cloud ^{come} over me, and I find it hard to have faith in rebels...". *Incidents* ends: "with ^{those} gloomy recollections come tender memories of my good old grandmother, like light, fleecy clouds floating over a dark and troubled sea" (p. 201). Jacobs' self-conscious shifting between light and dark memories of her past, her surprised response to this post-Emancipation journey home, suggest that it will be far from easy to locate and name female experience in, and writing about, slavery.

Just as the association of the picaresque with male slave narrative is, at one level, an attempt to name the slave's experience of deracination in a literary convention, so the association made with female slave narrative and rootedness in community/family attempts to identify a different, apparently opposed experience of slavery. Despite the cautionary message of the preceding chapter which argued for an understanding of slave narrative which is not fixed exclusively on the (male) slave-as-victim, it is ironic to locate the slave in a context of community and family. In the context of dominant white society, the slaves' legal status as property precluded participation in the Christian marriage ceremony, thus denying black women and men any socially acceptable moral context for sexual activity and parenthood, an aspect of slavery which both Williams and Morrison treat in their fictional narratives of slavery (3). An idea of rootedness is mocked by the extreme vulnerability of children who, born to

female slaves, followed the condition of the mother, and were therefore the property of their mother's master or mistress. Jacobs' commitment to her beloved children, her determination that they would not have to bear "the crushing weight of slavery", is clear in her letters and throughout the narrative:

When [Jacobs' son] was a year old, they called him beautiful. The little vine was taking deep root in my existence, though its clinging fondness excited a mixture of love and pain. When I was most sorely oppressed I found a solace in his smiles. I loved to watch his infant slumbers; but always there was a dark cloud over my enjoyment. I could never forget he was a slave. Sometimes I wished ^{myself} he might die in infancy (p. 62)

Following the birth of her daughter, Jacobs writes: "My children grew finely; and Dr Flint would often say to me, with an exulting smile, 'these brats will bring me a handsome sum of money one of these days' " (p. 80). This "mixture of love and pain"; Jacobs' frequent admission that she would, like Morrison's Sethe in *Beloved*, rather see her children dead than enslaved; Jacobs' use of black/white imagery in the letter above and throughout the narrative, all point to a paradox of the experience of slavery as 'picaresque' by necessity, not by the deliberate selection of literary convention, but also, particularly through the act of naming and narrating the experience, paradoxically life-affirming, a celebration of 'the group', contrary to picaresque rootlessness. While this paradox of slavery can be thought of as a public/private dichotomy, called on by social scientists to 'explain' and conceptualise gender difference, this chapter is not a sociological survey of women's traditional place in western or other societies, nor is it an anthropological overview of women in, and as creators of, culture. While I will in the course of this chapter draw on writing other than that by black women, my object is not to provide a comparative survey of women's writing across distinctions of time, nation, culture or race. As in the preceding chapter, here I hope to elaborate an aspect of the definition of slave narrative and thus facilitate perceptive close readings of texts in part two of this study.

At one level the journey motif basic to slave narrative can be read as archetypal-- a passage from childhood to adulthood, from the domestic (female) to the civic (male) sphere, from innocence to experience. We might see in Equiano's learning/enculturation process, largely aboard ships, and in Douglass' clever scheme bartering bread for knowledge, the beginning of a journey to freedom which will result in, among other things, participation in the public realm.

Jacobs' journey to womanhood, away from childhood security at grandmother's home, ultimately leads to the public domain where, in Baker's words, the ex-slave becomes "a sharer in the general public discourse about slavery". But we have seen that the slave's journey "from the domain of experience constituted by the oral-aural community of the slave quarters", to the public arena, is not 'neutral' or the same for all. Enslavement fundamentally shapes this archetypal human voyage. The Baltimore boys are astonished and dismayed that their mate Fred, with whom they share the 'enslavement' of childhood, will not be free at twenty-one:

I would sometimes say to them, I wished I could be as free as they would be when they got to be men. 'You will be free as soon as you are twenty-one, but I am a slave for life! Have not^x as good a right to be free as you^{have}?' These words used to trouble them; they would express for me the liveliest sympathy, and console me (p. 83/1845)

Douglass also reflects that Tommy Auld, the son of his Baltimore master Hugh Auld, "could grow, and become a MAN; I could grow, though I could *not* become a man, but must remain, all my life, a minor-- a mere boy" (p. 187/1855). The emphasis on silence, vulnerability and loneliness in chapter three of Equiano's narrative is in striking contrast to the abolitionist rhetoric which immediately precedes it in chapter two. The rhetorical contrast suggests that the road to sharing in "general public discourse about slavery" will be long and difficult. The happy boy in Essaka, destined to inherit his father's high-ranking position is, by chapter three, a bewildered outsider, initially unable to communicate in, or comprehend, the white man's world. Jacobs' journey to maturity is distorted before it begins: "The influences of slavery had^{had} the same effect on me that they had on other^{young} girls; they had made me prematurely knowing, concerning the evil ways of the world" (p. 54). Baker characterises the (male) slaves' journey in such a way that he by-passes completely that other domestic realm--the master's or mistress's home-- and goes straight from the slave quarters to the 'real world'. Nor does Baker acknowledge the unusual terrain and circumstances of the eighteenth century slave narrator. In the case of Jacobs, the world of *Incidents* is domestic and this accounts for a unique experience of, and perspective on, slavery. Jacobs grows up in her parents' home, in her grandmother's home and in the Flint household; she escapes slavery by hiding for seven years in her grandmother's attic; in freedom, she works as a domestic and remains dependent upon her employer, Mrs Willis (Mrs. Bruce in the narrative), at the end of the narrative: "The dream of my life

is not yet realized. I do not sit with my children in a home of my own... But God so orders circumstances as to keep me with my friend Mrs Bruce. Love, duty, gratitude, also bind me to her side..." (p. 201). The bond between Jacobs and Mrs Bruce will be shown in chapter five to be crucial to understanding the domestic world of *Incidents*.

Those experiences which make the young slave girl "prematurely knowing" are for the most part house-bound experiences. The "evil ways of the world" are omnipresent though veiled throughout Jacobs' writing. In *Incidents* the experience of 'private' or domestic slavery may be expressed in terms of comparisons which acknowledge the hardships of physically demanding labour that the house slave is spared, but presents this 'easy life' as a nightmare for the female slave and, in the case of Jacobs' narrative, a threat to her beloved children:

I would ten thousand times rather that my children should be the half-starved paupers of Ireland than to be the most pampered among the slaves of America. I would rather drudge out my life on a cotton plantation, till the grave opened to give me rest, than to live with an unprincipled master and a jealous mistress. The felon's home in a penitentiary is preferable. He may repent, and turn from the error of his ways, and so find peace; but it is not so with a favorite slave. She is not allowed to have any pride of character. It is deemed a crime in her to wish to be virtuous (p. 31)

The reality of sexual exploitation for the female slave drives Jacobs to protect her daughter in particular from slavery, and to comment, as she does in the letter quoted at the beginning of this chapter, that the personal price she paid was worth the gift of freedom she could bestow on both her children. While sexual exploitation may be thought of as a 'female' experience and theme, it should be pointed out that in *Beloved* Morrison extends abuse of power to include white male sexual exploitation of black men (4), and, in the amazing as-told-to narrative of the nineteenth century Cuban slave, Esteban Montejo, he recalls instances, not of sexual exploitation, but of male homosexuality. Martha Cobb quotes Montejo's reflections on loneliness and sex in a slave's life:

Life tended to be solitary because there were none too many women around. To have one of your own you had either to be over twenty five or catch yourself one in the fields. The old men did not want the youths to have women... Some men did not suffer much, being used to this life. Others had sex between themselves and did not want to know anything of women... I don't think it came from Africa,

because the old men hated it... To tell the truth it never bothered me.
I am of the opinion that a man can stick his arse where he wants (5).

Cobb notes that "Montejo's truth may not have been Olaudah Equiano's or Frederick Douglass', but it flows into the common stream of this early literary tradition, adding to the Afro-Hispanic experience as [Montejo] spoke with a frank dignity of the long past he recalled" (6). In *Dessa Rose*, passionate, loving sexual experience, as a dimension of black life in slavery, is treated explicitly, providing a degree of realism that never emerges in slave narrative. Williams not only characterises her protagonist, Dessa Rose, through Dessa's emotional and physical love for Kaine, her lover who is killed, and, later, for Harker, who becomes Dessa's husband, Williams also develops a loving sexual relationship between the white woman Rufel, and the black man Nathan, one of the fugitives living at Rufel's farm, Sutton Glen. The importance of choice as a means of control in black and white women's lives is an important sub-theme in *Dessa Rose*.

This is particularly clear in Nathan's sexual experiences with his former mistress, "Miz Lorraine", a woman who takes young black male slaves as lovers, as a means of establishing her right to choose, control, and enjoy sex. (7). Williams, Morrison, and Montejo are cogent reminders that the scope of slave experience can easily be diminished by critical expectations of what the text of slavery 'should be', particularly when sexual experience is made the subject.

What relationships can pertain between the terms of this apparently simple, self-explanatory dichotomy, 'public/private'? Indeed, is it a dichotomous division of ideas into two classes, positive and negative? It is neither useful nor appropriate to present male and female experience in slave narrative in the way that 'public' and 'private' are defined as opposed, mutually exclusive. Hedin demonstrates this tendency in what he interprets as the use of different literary conventions according to gender. As I pointed out, according to Hedin, the 'perfect fit' of the European picaresque and eighteenth century slave experience becomes a 'natural fit' between convention and gender in the nineteenth century. This exacerbates the tendency to universalise 'female experience' and 'male experience' -- in Wicks' words, "that tiring old game of pigeon-holing"-- which has been and continues to be played out in both intellectual and active feminism. The range of critical theory exploring gender is quite extensive, and it is not my intention to survey it. However, previously cited criticism, and other relevant work, might be reflected upon, before looking in detail at *Incidents*.

I have noted that Roderiguez-Luis' observations of female picaros in sixteenth and seventeenth century European fiction, convey a limited subjectivity, rooted in the assumption that a female protagonist *should* achieve a "heightened presence" and a "serious level of moral thinking"; the *picara* is *blamed* for this 'failure' to live up to the critics' expectations. As a male observer of male-created female presence in literature, Roderiguez-Luis betrays allegiance to ideas of what literature 'should be' which devalues female experience. Similarly, Olney's systematisation of slave narrative devalues the ex-slave's presence and voice by privileging as 'real literature' the voices of the revered (white Euro-American) fathers of autobiography. By contrast, in *Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing 1649-88* Elaine Hobby does not 'should' the wide range of writing she surveys, or assume what 'public/private' should mean for women. *Virtue of Necessity* begins like a breath of fresh air: Hobby names forgotten, unrecognised writers, and states the range of topics, themes and styles of the writing she surveys; the question which closes the statement^{below} implicitly challenges the partial vision of the critical establishment:

Between 1649^{and} ¹⁶⁸⁸ writings by more than two hundred women were published on every conceivable topic, from Katherine Philips' joyful celebration of women's friendship, to Hester Biddle's furious desire to burn the two university towns to the ground. Women wrote religio-political propaganda and poetry, autobiography and mid-wifery manuals, novels, poetry and plays: a constant source of surprises. Who today would have imagined that they could have been so funny or so angry or so clear? (8)

The strength of Hobby's book is breadth, allowing a great variety of women's voices to be heard. *Virtue of Necessity* may also be distinguished on the basis of critical precision, which helps the reader contextualise and appreciate the actual presence, as well as issues at the heart of, women's writing. Despite Hobby's focus on white English women, she is able to acknowledge the limitations of her analysis, for example when she treats Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*:

Her most well-known ^{story}, *Oroonoko*, sits uneasily in my account of female romance... Its central characters, Oroonoko and Imoinda, are Black slaves, and Behn's presentation of a slave rebellion and white racism introduces a further set of issues which cannot be fitted into my argument. Both I and others need to rethink our work on white women's writing to take account of these concerns (9)

Hobby's intellectual honesty and her enthusiasm about what is yet to be fully explored in women's writing is commendable. *Virtue of Necessity* may seem a

paradoxical text from which to quote in a chapter devoted to gender and slave narrative, but it is at home in this chapter because Hobby's survey of seventeenth century English women's writing, like *Incidents*, participates in the restoration of female presence in history and literature, and challenges the grounds upon which 'history' and 'literature' have been constructed.

In her survey, *The Poetry of American Women from 1632 to 1945*, Emily Stipes Watts questions the relevance to women's poetry of precisely those qualities which are so fundamental to Olney's and to Roderiguez-Luis' concepts of what literature 'should be'. Watts correctly identifies positions such as these as "largely opposed to a culture with a scientific and economic system that [would give] the woman poet time to write, freedom from unwanted children, and the prosperity to have a 'room of one's own' " (10). Also, Watts surveys mid-nineteenth century American anthologies of women's poetry in order to define and chart the rise of the literary type designated, 'Female Poetry'. Watts shows how Caroline May's *The American Female Poets* (1848) "assertively associated female poetry with the affections..." May selected poems which "concern happy homes, pure and noble motherhood, protestant Christian morality and the nation". In a second anthology published at the same time, *The Female Poets of America* (1849), the editor Mr. Griswold's selections "parallel and generally repeat those of May, but Griswold divides the poetry of men and women more severely than May did" (11). This selection process for anthologies and general survey collections can be seen to create and perpetuate partial, stereotyped ideas of 'women's writing', and is exacerbated by the privileging of poetry above other forms of expression. Deborah McDowell points to feminist research which reveals the inappropriateness to black women's experience and writing of the 'cult of true womanhood', advanced in the concept 'Female Poetry'. McDowell draws on recent work of other feminist critics and observes that "critical categories of women, based on analyses of white women characters, are... inappropriate to a consideration of Black women characters". These categories include "the submissive wife, the mother angel, and the woman on the pedestal [which] cannot be applied to Black women's characters whose cultural imperatives are different from white women's" (12). As we shall see, Watts ultimately constructs her own restrictive designation "American women's poetry" which neglects other forms of writing, and which does not, despite Watts' attention to black writers, explore in depth the possible meanings of 'American' and 'woman'.

In chapter two I observed that Adams mythologises the African past. This is a foundation stone of her argument,^{and} the basis for unsupportable generalisations about the way in which gender constructs personal and social identity. Adams begins from a black female point of view, both as critic and in the literature she studies, to arrive at a limited position regarding the importance of spirituality in black American women's writing. Much like Hedin, who accepts the 'natural' correlation between black male and wandering picaro, Adams accepts as representative of the black man a kind of "road narrative" persona, a lone, egocentric male^{figure} like the protagonist of Douglass' first autobiography. Most important to Adams' argument, the black man is seen as disconnected from his heritage in black history and community. Adams privileges "spirituality" in all black American *women's* writing, on the premise that black American acceptance of an "Afrocentric world view" (13) differs between genders. Much is taken for granted about experience and literature in Adams' thesis. The image of the black woman rooted (and stuck?) in the domestic sphere-- a kind of haven where 'Mother Africa' flourishes-- and the negative of this image, a picaresque caricature of the black American man, outside of,^{and} cut off from, this realm, who has "submitted to western ordering principles" (14), simply will not do. Watts, Roderiguez-Luis and Adams, all limit the potential of the expressive voice because of the conceptualisation and privileging of gender difference embedded in their arguments. Difference, variety, tension, conflict, growth *within* the terms opposed as dichotomous,^{are} thus lost.

It is necessary to Adams' argument that gender identity is constructed along similar lines to those which can be seen to limit^{some} Afro-American cultural criticism. Michele Wallace is not only concerned with the construction of gender identity and its images, but also with representations of Afro-American culture. In the introduction to her *Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory*, Wallace is "convinced that the binary opposition of 'negative' versus 'positive' images [of black American experience] too often sets^{the} limits of Afro-American cultural criticism... [A] temporary reversal of terms not only does not challenge racism but may in fact incorporate it" (15). The short-comings of such a reversal are, I think, implicit in Baldwin's criticism of social protest fiction, be it *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or *Native Son* (16). Wallace makes astute observations that reject and go well beyond the simplistic division of experience into tidy binary opposites. Writers such as those listed below by Wallace insist upon a more

complex rendering of black female presence, and implicitly challenge the 'essentialism' dogging much commentary on black America:

It seems to me particularly instructive that cultural production by black women, particularly black women who identify their views as "feminist" or "womanist", has often been denounced for promulgating "negative images". Perhaps the most notable cases have been the controversies over Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide*, my own *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and *Sula*, and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Although it is possible to be critical of the failure of such work to challenge fundamentally mainstream or racist conceptions of black humanity or agency, it is important to observe that so-called "negative images" will probably be necessary to any kind of reformulation or restructuring of prevailing conceptions of "race" and "ethnicity". They seem particularly necessary to the inauguration of a public black female subjectivity. Lurking behind the issue of black feminist "negative images" is an essentialist notion of the truly black or the truly natural woman who would intrinsically know the "correct" position. Unfortunately, ^{such} essentialism is not only a temptation for male or white critiques of black feminism, but for black feminist critiques as well (17)

Wallace could include *Beloved*, along with *Song of Solomon* and *Sula*, as works by Morrison in which negative images of Afro-American culture could be misunderstood and judged on the basis of wrong assumptions. For example, the violence and suffering in *Beloved* are not fanciful, imaginative creation, present because of some arbitrary, perverse choice on the part of Morrison, as implied by Iannone, quoted in chapter two, who views "the gradual unfolding of secret horror [in *Beloved* as] merely lurid, designed to arouse and entertain" (18). As I shall argue in chapter seven, it is Morrison's crafting of language and narrative style that are significant. It is the "gradual unfolding" of the *emotional and psychological impact* of loss, separation, betrayal, loneliness, lynching, whipping and death, and not these "secret horrors", which ultimately distinguishes this novel, and establish^{es} its relationship to slave narrative. Linda Opyr describes Morrison's technique as a 'spiralling': "key events are described several times in each novel, until eventually the reader is able to envisage events in all their complexity" (19). In *Beloved*, the spiral technique "reflects the character's coping mechanisms for stifling [painful] memories. We gradually understand that this isn't tricky story-telling, but the intricate exploration of trauma" (20). Morrison constructs *Beloved* so that the reader, like the ex-slaves of the Sweet Home plantation, must piece together rememory fragments in order to

construct the story of the past and the possibilities of the present. *Beloved* is the untold story implicit in all slave narrative-- the stories of emotional response^s to loss, separation, and other forms of violence which are only partially revealed through 'silent spaces' in slave narrative, as I hope to demonstrate in chapter four of this study.

Neither Morrison nor Williams can be seen to lock black experience into restrictive categories. Both Morrison and Williams have expressed interest not only in the historical period of slavery, but also in its documentation-- how, why and by whom the experience of slavery was recorded, a process by which some aspects of this experience were privileged while others were suppressed. McDowell recognises the challenge posed by "neo-slave narratives" (21) such as *Dessa Rose* and *Beloved*:

It is significant that the majority of contemporary novels about slavery have been written by^{black} women. Moreover, it might be argued that these novels posit a female-gendered subjectivity, more complex in dimension, that dramatises not what was *done* to slave women, but what they *did* with what was done to them.

Narratives by and about slave women that shift the points of stress from sexual victimization to creative resistance effect an alteration of what can be called a sacred text...

The concerns that *Dessa Rose* foregrounds-- the who, what, when and how of telling slavery-- are richly suggestive and resonate far beyond the imagined scene of that institution which ended in the nineteenth century. This is, to be sure, not a surprising observation considering that what we call the past is merely a function and production of a continuous present and its discourses (22)

While "patriarchal authority is decentered" (23) in *Dessa Rose*, this novel does not simply 'turn the tables' as it were,^{or,} in Wallaces' words, effect "a temporary reversal of terms". It is true that women are the at the centre of *Dessa Rose*, but this novel has far reaching implications that do not allow the reader to seize upon *Dessa Rose* as a simple re-vision^{ing} of slavery from the female point of view. McDowell clearly recognises the complexity of Williams' novel:

Dessa Rose stages multiple and often contradictory versions of Dessa's enslavement and subsequent escape, versions that underscore well-rehearsed and commonplace assumptions about the difficulty if not the impossibility of ascertaining the "Truth". And yet the novel resists the pull of post-modern orthodoxy of undecidability and relativism. In other words, while there might not be one "truth" about Dessa (or about slavery more generally),

there are "certainties" that the text stubbornly claims and validates and those it tries to subvert. *Dessa Rose* bears the proud mark of a resolutely propositional and polemical novel, which confronts unabashedly the inescapably ideological contingencies of all discourse, itself included (24)

Williams goes much deeper than simple revisionism to challenge the processes through which the text of slavery is constructed, and the processes through which female presence in that text is constructed. Dessa's battle of wits with the white man Adam Nehemiah is only one level of her struggle to claim the text of slavery; Dessa also must confront, and is confronted by, the white woman Rufel, as oppressor and as potential sister in oppression. Morrison has said of *Beloved* that "the novel suggests what the conflicts are, what the problems are. But it needn't solve these problems because it is not a case study, it is not a recipe" (25), an assertion well observed in relation to *Incidents*. I believe Jacobs creates a far more complex world in her narrative than either slave narrative, or women's writing generally, tends to be credited as able to convey. I hope to reveal in *Incidents* a domestic world which predominantly shapes, but does not solely define, Jacobs' protagonist, Linda Brent, and her domestic dramas in slavery. In exploring *Dessa Rose* and *Beloved* in chapter seven, we shall see that these novels are, in a sense, versions of Jacobs' own story. If Harriet Jacobs could return from the other side, just as Sethe's dead daughter does in *Beloved*, Jacobs would inherently know and understand Morrison's novel: *Beloved* is Jacobs' untold story, not in its details, but in what is revealed by Morrison's fearless excavation of a black slave mother's internal world, exposing layer upon layer of emotional pain, and strength of will. And, we may see in Jacobs' rejection of sentimental convention, and in her seizing of the authority to represent her own realities, the struggle to claim and control the text of slavery which drives *Dessa Rose*.

After the sea-faring and commercial adventures of Equiano, and the bold and brutal loner's world of Douglass' 1845 autobiography, the world Jacobs' conveys in her narrative seems small and intimate. We might imagine its dimensions mapped out by the lonely distance she walks, at night, between the house where she endures her master's incessant sexual harassment, and her beloved grandmother's house six miles away. "Again and again I^{had} traversed those dreary twelve miles... meditating upon some means of escape for myself and my children' (p. 89). Her grandmother's home signifies the peace and security of Jacobs' childhood-- "I was born a slave; but I never knew it till six years of

happy childhood had passed away" (p. 5)-- and now that of Jacobs' own children, whom she visits and vows will not be plantation slaves. Even dangerous nocturnal walks seem heady freedom compared to the seven years Jacobs chooses to spend hiding in a small, dark, attic over her grandmother's store-room, so startlingly different from both the panoramic feel of Equiano's sea-experiences as a slave, and Douglass' relatively independent status when Hugh Auld allows him to hire out his labour at the ship yards. Examples from the narratives in chapters one and two of this study have shown mobility to be quintessentially male, especially if we recall Hedin's reading of road narrative activated in nineteenth century male slave narrative, or what Hedin identifies as the peculiarly loose, easy-going, picaresque quality of eighteenth-century slave narratives. Writers such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Paule Marshall and others have recently begun to focus on the freedom of self-determined movement in their fiction focussed on black female experience: "mobility of black women is a new quality in these books of the early eighties, for black women, in much of the previous literature, were restricted in space by their condition" (26). But, as I think *Incidents* clearly demonstrates, the modified space of *action* in Jacobs' narrative does not diminish imaginative perception.

What more powerful evocation of restriction than Jacobs' "small cell", an image of enslavement *and* of female confinement conveying dis-empowerment and limitation? The "dismal den" is too small for sitting up straight and nearly cripples Jacobs; chronic rheumatism will be a legacy of those seven dark, liminal years. In a chapter entitled "Still in Prison", Jacobs' memories of seasonal suffering are immediate and painful (27):

During the long nights I was restless for want of air, and I had no room to toss and turn. There was but one compensation; the atmosphere was so stifled that even mosquitos would not condescend to buzz in it. With all my detestation of Dr Flint, I could hardly wish him a worse punishment... than to suffer what I suffered in one single summer... I don't know what kept life within me. Again and again, I thought I should die before long; but I saw the leaves of another autumn whirl through the air, and felt the touch of another winter...

I suffered much more during the second winter than I did during the first. My limbs were benumbed by inaction, and the cold filled them with cramp. I had a very painful sensation of coldness in my head; even my face and tongue stiffened, and I lost the power of speech... My brother William came and did all he could for me. Uncle Philip also watched tenderly over me; and poor grandmother crept up and

down to inquire whether there *were* any signs of returning life... Dark thoughts passed through my mind as I lay there day after day. I tried to be thankful for my little cell, dismal as it was, and even to love it, as part of the price I had paid for the redemption of my children (p. 121-3)

The pale hope in signs of "another autumn" and the "touch of another winter" fades, and the archetypal associations of stasis, degeneration, and death with the cold, dark seasons pervades Jacobs' "gloomy recollections". Hedin focuses exclusively on Jacobs' limitations and relative powerlessness "as a metaphor for the position of women in general". He views Jacobs in her dismal den as enjoying "the passively aggressive satisfaction of frustrating Dr Flint's lust", and sees Jacobs able to "act in *small* ways to help her children, but only by manipulating behind the scenes; she is basically *helpless, immobilised, a passive observer* looking through her window, removed from the field of action" (my italics) (28). However, lest we accept an image of Jacobs' protagonist as helpless, long-suffering victim, her self-imposed confinement also can be imagined in the same way that Jacobs describes her narrative-in-process: as a chrysalis, conveying the potential Dickinson celebrates in the "Stealthy Cocoon" which "Defies imprisonment!" (29). With associations of nurtured development and growth, safe repose and transformation, the chrysalis can be seen as a distinctly female image, bringing to mind again Morrison's careful exploration of rememory in *Beloved*, and Jacobs' focus on her own birth and the 're-birth' of the South in the letter quoted at the opening of this chapter. That letter conveys, I think, Jacobs' sense of *space* with which hard-earned freedom, and the Civil War, ultimately rewarded her. Also, Yellin's up-beat comment on this period of Jacobs' life discourages an assessment of Jacobs as passive and patient, awaiting deliverance, as her grandmother so often counselled, and as Hedin would have us believe of Jacobs' Linda Brent. Yellin writes: "Linda Brent chooses the space above her grandmother's storeroom in preference to her master's bed; and her grandmother, the apparently conforming woman in the kitchen below, supports her in insurgency" (30). Keith Byerman focuses on the "elaborate patterns of deception" which mark Jacobs' escape, in line with this critics' reading of deceit as theme and style in male and female slave narrative:

The escape of Harriet Jacobs is effected not by running a thousand miles in disguise, but rather by staying where she is and only seeming to be safely in the North. By writing letters that are carried to and posted from New York and Boston, she convinces her master that she has escaped and thus is in a position to negotiate for her own

and her children's freedom. Moreover, her apparent situation ameliorates her actual one by focusing the search for her elsewhere. Her actual escape is secondary to this initial drama of pretence (31)

Byerman offers a more perceptive appreciation of Jacobs' "passive aggression" than does Hedin, not least of all because Byerman directs his attention to black picaresque potential in Jacobs' narrative, despite the superficial association which can be made with *Incidents* and sentimental fiction.

In her "little cell", two small holes cut by Jacobs in the wall allow in light by which to read and sew-- tiny portals which also enable her to hear her children's sustaining voices at play. She will not complete her journey without her reason for beginning it: the freedom of her son and in particular her daughter. One quarter of *Incidents* is taken up by this seven year self-incarceration and so is not characterised by mobility or 'events' in the picaresque narrative sense, but rather by withdrawal from action into the self, sustained by the family group. Jacobs specifically names her brother, an uncle and her grandmother as sources of comfort and support when she "thought I would die before long". Like Byerman, Yellin emphasises Jacobs role, not as passive sufferer, but as proactive agent in fine picaresque form:

[Jacobs] is not solely occupied with reading and sewing. She uses her garret cell as a war room from which to spy on her enemy [Dr Flint] and wage psychological warfare against him. From her cramped hiding place, she manipulates the sale of her children to their father, arranges for her daughter to be taken north, tricks her master into believing she has left the south, and quite literally directs a performance in which Dr Flint plays the fool while she watches, unseen (32).

While Hedin sees Jacobs' actions as small and relatively unimportant, Byerman and Yellin come closer to capturing the remarkableness of Jacobs' "disguised escape". Through her "drama of pretence" and, eventually, actual escape, Jacobs is able to assert control over her destiny, ^{and} to make choices about her and her children's fate. I doubt Jacobs ever felt genuinely "thankful for [her] little cell" or learned to love it but, her self-incarceration, seen as affording "a greater freedom" is strongly reminiscent of, for example, An Collins' *Devine Songs and Meditacions* (1653). Hobby writes:

The overriding assertion of *Songs and Meditacions*... is that the poet, the Christian woman, having suffered greatly in the world from conflict and physical constraints, has found the wisdom to willingly abandon worldly concerns and fence herself into a narrow domain

which allows, in practice, a greater freedom. The final expression of this is the *Songs* themselves, "flowers of so rare a kind/which wither not by force of sun or wind"...The cottage garden of her mind can grow rare fruits indeed. (33)

Yet as a garden is my mind enclosed fast
Being to safety so confined from storm and blast
Apt to produce a fruit most rare,
That it is not common with every woman
That fruitful are (An Collins, *Songs and Meditations*)

Watts, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, points out that there were nineteenth century American women poets who wished to "write verse more truly expressive of their own beliefs, values and interests. For these women, paradoxically, that potentially (and eventually) restrictive critical categorisation 'Female Poetry' provided not only a shelter for experimentation, but even a galvanizing element in the development of poetry by women in America" (34). Of course, the manipulation of "strictures" by the 'marginal' writer, as "a disguise or safe haven", is not limited to poetry, as black women's writing, or a book such as *Virtue of Necessity*, demonstrate. An Collins and Harriet Jacobs are separated by more than a century, and by cultural, historical, class and racial differences. But both examples speak to the importance of choice in women's, particularly writers', lives, however limited we may, a century and more later, consider the freedom of the chosen "narrow domain". In Dickinson's words, "The Soul selects her own Society" (35). Part of the on-going process of discovering, interpreting and placing women's voices is a thorough critique of ideas of sisterhood, one which recognises an essential sameness, as well as ~~the~~ the gulf separating Harriet Jacobs and An Collins. The private/domestic realm associated with female experience is spacious if the reader brings an imaginative, informed mind to the text. The creative, psychological 'space' defined through the practice of picaresque-like deception, as survival and narrative strategy, makes an understanding of Jacobs' Linda Brent as sentimental heroine quite inadequate.

Below, Jacobs' vow to secure freedom for herself and her children-- temporarily committing her to the dismal den-- reveals a human context which enables her to do so. "The burying ground of the slaves" conjures up an image of a slave community which has paid dearly for such determined commitment to survive and triumph in freedom. Jacobs begins her journey rooted in black culture through love and responsibility to her family. The Biblical quotation

paraphrasing Job 3:17-19 also roots the action in an Old Testament world of ultimate judgement of oppressors, suggesting salvation for the oppressed and moral sanction for their determined efforts to resist and survive persecution in a hostile world:

I knew the doom that awaited my fair baby in slavery, and I determined to save her from it or perish in the attempt. I went to make this vow at the graves of my poor parents, in the burying ground of the slaves. "There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor; the servant is free from his master" (p. 90)

It would be wrong ^{to} only focus on the subversive aspects of black community in slave narrative, though some criticism has made the mistake of doing so. Both Equiano and Douglass have been diminished as writers by critics who misread their narratives in this way (36). In her Afterword to the 1964 edition of Pauline Hopkins' *Contending Forces* (1900), Gwendolyn Brooks observes:

No, it is not *Native Son*, *Invisible Man*, *Jubilee*, *Roots*. ^{Pauline} Hopkins is not Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Margaret Walker, Alex Haley. Unlike Margaret Walker, in the fire of *For My People*, Pauline Hopkins is not herein urging that "martial songs be written"; she is often indignant, but not indignant enough to desire Margaret's "bloody peace"(37)

Brooks, a creative writer herself who was the first black woman to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize for her novel, *Maud Martha*, is able to see that early black writing will not necessarily substantiate a progressive black critical agenda, and should not be made to fit it when and where it clearly does not. ^{This is} point well observed in relation to slave narrative, substantiating my view that the tensions at the heart of slave narrative are crucial to understanding the possibilities inherent in these texts. Were it not for the unique point of view of *Incidents* conveying details of small town life in the nineteenth century Southern USA, such details would probably be considered unremarkable; they certainly are not 'radical', but they needn't be in order to succeed in communicating details of domestic life which give a special texture to Jacobs' narrative. A number of chapters in *Incidents*, which at one level perform the abolitionists' cause, arming the reader with information about the 'evil institution', provide details which contribute to an overall picture in *Incidents* of a slave-holding community. Living in a small, close-knit community provides a measure of protection for Jacobs. In chapter six she observes: "How often did I rejoice that I

lived in a town where all the inhabitants knew each other! If I had been on a remote plantation, or lost among the multitude of a crowded city, I should not be a living woman at this day" (p. 35). The details which Jacobs provides range across a 'public/private' dichotomy, including religious, political and legal 'public' issues, but are substantially domestic: family life and rituals perverted by slavery in both black and white families; what is cooked in kitchens and by whom-- the crackers and cakes for which Jacobs' grandmother was renowned, the tormented life of the Flint's female slave-cook, half starved and often beaten; fresh flowers-- gathered for a loved mistress, or for grandmother's front room; the furniture, linen, books, beds and people in houses grand and modest, including her father's and her grandmother's homes; local gossip about new ministers, cruel mistresses, masters' travels North, births and funerals; old friendships that transcend race, attendance at birthday parties, Christmas and New Year celebrations for slaves. "What Slaves Are Taught to Think", "Sketches of Neighbouring Slave Holders", "Fear of Insurrection", "The Church and Slavery", "The Fugitive Slave Law", are chapters which flesh out the 'neighbourhoods' of Jacobs' domestic world, predominantly, but not exclusively, rooted in realities which critics such as Levine and Dixon, drawn in chapter two, focus on and bring to life in their critical work.

Jacobs' self-incarceration is a compelling metaphor of the paradoxical coupling of deracination/rootedness in the experience of slavery, itself embedded in multiple contexts of community. The early chapters of Jacobs' narrative begin to weave the stories of generations of her family history with that of their master's family history. Chapter one, "Childhood", is a life of Jacobs' grandmother with themes of love and betrayal running throughout, as I have pointed out in chapter one of this study. Jacobs' grandmother lends money-- saved up to purchase her children's freedom-- to her mistress, money which is never returned. At the mistress's death, Jacobs' grandmother is not freed, as she expects to be. In chapter two, Jacobs' grandmother is eventually bought and freed by her dead mistress's sister, who remains a steadfast friend of the family; Jacobs writes in chapter sixteen, "the old ladies had cosy times together" (p. 88). Even as a mature woman, reflecting on and writing about her life, Jacobs has difficulty coming to terms with another betrayal, this time by her mother's mistress. The passage below is a detailed account of this betrayal. Two shifts-- "there came that blight..." and "But alas! we all know..."-- suggest rhetorical distancing from the painful past, but the predominantly straight-forward

account is eloquent testimony to the bonds of love, faith and profound disappointment which link Jacobs to central maternal figures. Just as her journey home after the Civil War triggers emotional memories, so the act of recalling days "too happy to last" brings back what Jacobs "would give much to blot out from my memory":

Such were the unusually fortunate circumstances of my early childhood. When I was six years old, my mother died; and then, for the first time, I learned, by the talk around me, that I was a slave. My mother's mistress was the daughter of my grandmother's mistress. She was the foster sister of my mother; they were both nourished at my grandmother's breast. In fact, my mother had been weaned at three months old, so that the babe of the mistress might obtain sufficient food. They played together as children; and when they became women, my mother was the most faithful servant to her white foster sister. On her death-bed, her mistress promised her that her children should never suffer for anything; and during her lifetime she kept her word. They all spoke kindly of my dead mother, who had been a slave merely in name, but in nature was noble and womanly. I grieved for her, and my young mind was troubled with the thought of who would now take care of me and my little brother. I was told that my home was now to be with her mistress; and I found it a happy one. No toilsome or disagreeable duties were imposed upon me. My mistress was so kind to me that I was always glad to do her bidding, and proud to labor for her as much as my young years would permit. I would sit by her for hours, sewing diligently, with a heart as free from care as that of any free-born white child. When she thought I was tired, she would send me out to run and jump; and away I bounded, to gather berries or flowers to decorate her room. Those were happy days-- too happy to last. The slave child had no thought for the morrow; but there came that blight, which too surely waits on every human being born to be a chattel.

When I was nearly twelve years old, my kind mistress sickened and died... I loved her; for she ^{had} ^{been} almost like a mother to me... I felt sure I should never find another mistress as kind as the one who was gone. She had promised my dying mother that her children should never suffer for anything; and when I remembered that, and recalled her many proofs of attachment to me, I could not help having some hopes that she had left me free... on account of my mother's love and faithful service. But alas! we all know that the memory of a faithful slave does not avail much to save her children from the auction block.

After a brief period of suspense, the will of my mistress was read, and we learned that she had bequeathed me to her sister's daughter, a child of five years old. So vanished our hopes. My mistress had taught me the precepts of God's Word: "Thou shalt love thy

neighbor as thyself'. "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them". But I was her slave, and I suppose she did not recognise me as her neighbor. I would give much to blot out from my memory that one great wrong. As a child, I loved my mistress; and looking back on the happy days I spent with her, I try to think with less bitterness of this act of injustice. While I was with her, she taught me to read and spell; for this privilege, which so rarely falls to the lot of a slave, I bless her memory (p. 6-8)

Jacobs' grandmother's breast milk is a powerful female image of rootedness and deracination: "my mother had been weaned at three months old, so that the babe of the mistress might obtain ^{sufficient} food". In *Beloved* breast feeding is used to convey the powerful bond between mother and child, a bond which, when threatened, motivates Sethe to commit infanticide, rather than allow her children to be returned to slavery. In *Dessa Rose*, Williams has the white woman Rufel become wet nurse to the black woman Dessa's baby, a reversal which threatens Dessa's whole perception of slavery as it exploits women, and sets in motion the fraught but ultimately liberating friendship that develops between Rufel and Dessa Rose. In the passage above, the use of "foster sister", "mother" and the image of breast feeding, figure the emotional dilemma which the mistress's betrayal presents for Jacobs. Rhetorical shifts signal the on-going pain of remembering what Jacobs would prefer to "blot out from my memory". There can be no doubt about the genuine affection which binds Jacobs and her mother to the white woman who was, respectively, mother and foster sister to them. These affectionate relationships are established through the image of nursing, as I have pointed out. They are also established through shared childhood play-- "They played together as children"; "When she thought I was tired, she would send me out to run and jump"-- and through loyalty, both on the part of the mistress who "kept her word" until her death, and through the "faithful" service of Jacobs and her mother. "Foster sister" takes on ironic meaning only when the mistress's betrayal has been revealed, and even then, one cannot ignore the genuine maternal and sisterly bonds of affection established in the passage. But neither can the betrayal be reduced in its significance, as Jacobs' caustic use of Biblical reference demonstrates: "My mistress had taught me the precepts of God's word: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself'... but I was her slave, and I suppose she did not recognise me as her neighbor ". In the mistress's betrayal we have illustrated Byerman's observation that "masters and mistresses whose outward characters are flawless are shown to be capable of behavior inconsistent with their putative moral

values" (38). Such betrayals in the unpredictable context of slavery are at the root of the tragedy which descends upon the benign system of slavery at Sweet Home in *Beloved*. The tragic consequences of the slaves' escape plan are set in motion by the arrival of Schoolteacher after Mr Garner's death. Mr. and Mrs. Garner, who own Sweet Home and its slaves, including Sethe, are 'good' slaveholders; Schoolteacher is not: "Nobody counted on Garner dying. Nobody thought he could. How 'bout that? Everything rested on Garner being alive. Without his life each of theirs fell to pieces. Now ain't that slavery or what is^{it}?" (39). Another Sweet Home slave, Paul D, realises "they had been isolated in a wonderful lie... protected and convinced they were special". Mrs. Garner gives Sethe a pair of crystal earrings as a gift before she 'marries' another Sweet Home slave, Halle. In one of her many memories, Sethe latches on to the earrings as a relic of the girl she used to be, before her life "fell to pieces" and she stopped trusting anyone, burying her emotional needs very deeply indeed: "Once, long ago, she [Sethe] was soft, trusting. She trusted Mrs. Garner and her husband too. She knotted the earrings into her underskirt to take along, not so much to wear but to hold. Earrings that made her believe she could discriminate among them" (40). We might see Jacobs' focus on the gift of literacy at the end of the passage as similar to Sethe's attachment to the earrings. Jacobs cannot resolve the painful dilemma^{re} presented by her mistress's betrayal, without denying her love for the woman, so Jacobs shifts her attention to the gift a white woman gave her which allows Jacobs to believe "she could discriminate among them".

Yellin calls attention to Jacobs' social matrix as a central feature of *Incidents*. The recurrent struggle for freedom, the interrelationships between four generations of Jacobs' family and their masters, and the support of Jacobs' family result, in Yellin's view, in a "densely patterned" text. But all this rich detail pointed to in Yellin's introduction seems disconnected from her observations of a "sisterhood of all women" in the narrative. Yellin's sisterhood seems to have little or no bearing on the complex relationship between Jacobs and her mistress discussed above, or the layers of experience which set in motion Jacobs' survival strategy in slavery and her journey to freedom, or Jacobs' amazed and shifting perspective of the roots which sustain her, and forces which threaten her. Yellin observes:

In shaping *Incidents*, Jacobs combined [a] feminist consciousness with the black feminist consciousness she had absorbed as "grandmother's child". Given its close community split into two warring camps--blacks who oppose slavery and whites who support it--the narrative

is surprising. We expect to encounter the supportive black women, both slave and free, as well as the fiendish neighboring female slave holder and the jealous slave mistress. But how are we to explain the presence of the white women who defect from the slaveholder's ranks to help Linda Brent?... One explanation is that these women are responding to Linda Brent's oppression as a woman exploited sexually and as a mother trying to nurture her children. A central pattern in *Incidents* shows white women betraying allegiances of race and class to assert their stronger allegiance to the sisterhood of all women (41)

I flinch at Yellin's use of the word "combine" because it reduces the historical significance and enormity of needing to specify feminisms. I have called attention to nineteenth century British women's anti-slavery scrap-books, literally pieced together in order to 'narrate' themes and images as 'evidence' against slavery, to make a point about the structure of slave narrative. Illustrations emphasised "the brutal exploitation of slave women and children, including their semi-nakedness and exposure to the lash of over-seers";

Britannia was shown as "God^{dess}-like", given central importance by "intervening between the man with the lash and pleading female slaves, ultimately triumphing as the scourge fell from the man's bloody hands and pious female slaves prayed to the 'great massa' as their children were torn from their arms" (42). Such propaganda vividly illustrates that feminism has been a narrowly defined battle of the sexes between white, middle class women and men. The image of Britannia, towering and victorious above the overseer, visualises this, not a "sisterhood of all women"-- as the subservient slave women and children, cowering at Britannia's feet, and begging mercy from the overseer, vividly conveys. The disparity between images of white female power and black female powerlessness hardly communicates the kind of gender solidarity which Yellin has in mind, and yet the disparate images convey the troubled reality of divided sisterhood.

The 'Goddess-like [white] woman'⁴ Britannia is an appropriate (masculine/imperial) image of the failure of feminism to define and act on a 'battle plan' of liberation reflecting the range and depth of women's oppressions. Since its formal establishment in 1832 at Seneca Falls, New York, the American Women's Rights Movement has been presumptuous to say the least, assuming it represents more than a narrowly-defined group of well-to-do white ladies. The American Women's Rights Movement has never been able to simply "combine" women into a happy, unified, directed sisterhood. The issue of

women's rights tore apart the American Anti-Slavery Society, giving rise to the Women's Rights Movement, as well as detrimental fragmentation of the Abolitionist Movement. The question of black suffrage after the Civil War demolished tenuous links between black female (and some male, such as Douglass) activists, and white women's rights campaigners (43). Feminism today bears these scars and, many argue, continues to be unresponsive to issues of class, cultural and racial difference. A conflict-free women's movement, based on consensus or 'majority rule' may not be possible, or even desirable, but Yellin's weak characterisation of sisterhood enacted in Jacobs' narrative does not address these difficulties. Alternatively, Thistlethwaite realises that

white and black women are bound by the history of slavery... American society as a slave society has almost from its founding divided women by race for purposes of social control. Black women were designated the body and sexuality; white women were designated the 'angel of the home', the soul and spirituality. The history of slavery and the complex interrelationship of black and white women in the history of sexual exploitation is a critical interpretive starting point (44)

Wallace observes problems in a white, middle class dominated Women's Rights Movement related to the production of knowledge:

an exclusionary feminism need not take the form of an organised effort, since [American] culture takes for granted the lack of participation of women of color in the production of knowledge. So much so that hardly any one says a word when Afro-American literary critic Henry Louis Gates assumes the authority to define black feminist literary criticism for a mainstream *New York Times Book Review* audience (45)

Thistlethwaite's realisation of the importance of race in an analysis of female experience, and even her problematic reading of black women's contemporary fiction as a mirror of actual experience, is at least an attempt to push forward feminist debates which acknowledge a legacy of distrust, and limited recognition of common ground, but in a context of hopeful anticipation for a better future--perhaps the sort of tentative hope Jacobs feels "amid all the new born blessings", despite her faltering faith: "I find it hard to have faith in rebels...".

I am also unhappy with Yellin's identification of sisterhood in the narrative because it does not begin to come to terms with maternalism activated in *Incidents*, the focus of chapter five of this study. For example, I cannot agree with Yellin's characterisation of the relationship between Jacobs and her

grandmother as ultimately spoiled because the old matriarch refused to forgive her granddaughters' loss of virginity and subsequent pregnancies: Jacobs writes:

Had she [grandmother] utterly forsaken me? No... I knelt before her, and told her the things that had poisoned my life; how long I had been persecuted; that I saw no way of escape; and in an hour of extremity I had become desperate. She listened in silence. I told her I would bear any thing and do any thing, if in time I had hope of obtaining her forgiveness. I begged of her to pity me, for my dead mother's sake. And she did pity me. She did not say, 'I forgive you'; but she looked at me lovingly, with her eyes full of tears. She laid her old hand ^{gently} on my head, and murmured, 'Poor child! Poor child!' (p. 57)

I would argue that grandmother's knowing silence-- "she listened in silence... she did not say... she murmured..."-- speaks louder than words and makes irrelevant the ^{absence of the} literal utterance, 'I forgive you'. The scene is crucial in relation to maternal bonds and female betrayals, and yet Yellin reads the scene as if no such complexities pertained to relationships between women in the narrative. We shall see that Tanner similarly misreads Jacobs' representation of her affair with a white man, with the result that, like Yellin's view, Tanner seriously limits the possibilities of *Incidents*.

We will indeed be surprised by women's transracial allegiances if we "expect to encounter" nothing more than stock characters such as "supportive black women" and "fiendish", "jealous" white women, in Jacobs' narrative. The image of the jealous mistress-- "she had not strength to superintend her household affairs; but her nerves were so strong, that she could sit in her easy chair and see a woman whipped, till the blood trickled from every stroke of the lash" (p. 12)-- enacts a house-bound drama of slavery, behind closed doors, in kitchens, bedrooms, and family-rooms. Such dramas are powerful, enduring images haunting a dream of female solidarity. A stock scene of domestic slavery to be sure, but we have seen enough of Jacobs' world to confidently reject it as representative of *Incidents*. As we shall see in chapter seven, at one level, links can be established between *Incidents* and *Dessa Rose* precisely because of the complexity of sisterhood in both works. Mary Helen Washington's vision of reconstructing black women's literary history means "we reject the old male-dominated accounts of history, refusing to be cramped into the little spaces men have allotted women... The making of a literary history in which black women are fully ^{re}present^{ed} is a search for full vision, to create a circle where now we have but a segment" (46). *Incidents*, as well as *Beloved* and *Dessa Rose*, participates in

the reconstruction of black women's literary history, but we must be careful not to read the *presence* of black and white women in ideological terms which diminish the unique and complex circumstances of women bound through the paternalistic web of slavery, be they represented in slave narrative or fictionalised narratives of slavery. Yellin's identification of sisterhood is in danger of reifying "new mythologies" recognised and cautioned against by Patricia Jagentowicz Mills in *Woman, Psyche, and Nature*: "feminist theories of motherhood and sisterhood are only partial... As essential as this new naming is to the political project of liberation, it may become reified into new mythologies that themselves obscure aspects of woman's experience" (47). Washington is in no doubt that "new mythologies" have not embraced race as fundamental to reconstructing women's literary history and to feminism. Like Washington, Mills is aware that 'sisterhood' must be specified, and Mills implicitly recognises what is dominant and explicit in Thistlethwaite's *Race, Sex and God*:

All feminists are not of one mind; in their individual creativity they give off sparks of difference Audre Lorde so frequently addresses in her writing. As a white Christian feminist, seeking to understand the experience of black women, my thesis is that boundaries of difference must be respected. I must also extend this to feminists working in other paradigms. Yet as feminists we spark off of one another because we take each other's work seriously. These tensions are not easily reconcilable, nor are they completely resolvable (48)

CONCLUSION

Yellin evokes a commonality of female experience, the assumed foundation of 'women's writing', as does Hedin in seeing Jacobs as a nineteenth century American "everywoman". In her survey of American women's poetry, Watts subsumes difference in an uncritical idea of 'women' indeed, of 'American'. Watts writes: "I do not mean to imply that poetry by American men and poetry by American women are two separate kinds of poetry... Ultimately, our common problem is to understand that larger subject--American poetry" (49). While I applaud Watts inclusion of Phillis Wheatley, Frances E.W. Harper, Margaret Walker and Gwendolyn Brooks in her survey, these black writers remain curiously invisible, their poetry all but silent. Wheatley's writing is viewed, quite rightly I think, as typical of the derivative American (and it could also be said of English) eighteenth century poetry. Wheatley's poem "America", which twice draws on an image of Britannia, could not be described as radical (50),

though Douglass was apparently inspired by Wheatley's verse, as much by the fact of its *presence* as by its message. Douglass' newspaper was a personally significant public voice which he used to promote black literary voices within the broader aim of campaigning for black rights. Douglass consistently provided a platform in his newspaper for black writers such as Wheatley, and he may very well be the first black person to have promoted Phillis Wheatley as a black woman writer. As editor, Douglass "rendered his greatest service to budding black poets who needed an appreciative audience" (51). Beyond a common-sense approach to eighteenth century poetry, one which is able to see beyond the confines of 'Female Poetry', such a vision is partial, for Watts does not explore multiple meanings/ dimensions of 'American' or 'woman'. Watts simply does not see, let alone explore, the significance of Wheatley, an eighteenth century American slave, rendering the theme of liberty in her poetry, or 'speaking poetically of politics', so the poetry of Harper, Walker and Brooks is denied a more specific context.

When Watts writes "Harper was the first black woman to publish since Wheatley and the first of many black women who have contributed significantly to American verse in the last century" (52), one senses that something is missing from this acknowledgment. Treating the poetry of abolitionist Frances E.W. Harper, Watts does not acknowledge one of the most important dynamics of nineteenth century black writing in the figure of the abolitionist/editor's role as validator of the black, in this instance, female voice. Watts makes no reference to the significance of slavery, the Civil War or reconstruction which dominate American history from Wheatley's lifetime through Harper's. While Harper's *Poems* were published a decade or so before the Civil War, Harper's novel, *Iola Leroy* (1892) was published at a time in American life which Mary Helen Washington, in discussing *Iola Leroy*, sees as a context of race hatred and received stereotypes:

The literature of black women at the turn of the century is a literature frozen into self-consciousness by the need to defend black women and men against the ^{vicious and} prevailing stereotypes that mark nineteenth-century American cultural thought. Nearly a century later, it is difficult to imagine the universal acceptance of black inferiority in American life at the turn of the century (53)

While Margaret Walker's fiery *For My People* (1942) has been described as charting "new paths in Negro poetry" (54), Watts can only generalise about this

award-winning collection of poetry and suggest "[Walker's] heritage in the verse of earlier American women" (55). The significance of Walker's poetry recognised by Eugenia Collier is not acknowledged by Watts. Collier writes of Walker's poetry: "the source of its power is the reservoir of beliefs, values and archetypal characters yielded by our [Afro-American] collective historical experience. It is this area of our being which defines us, which makes us a people, which finds expression in *Black art and in no other*" (56)

The problematic way in which Watts silences the writing she surveys is reinforced by her exclusive, conventionally elitist, concern with poetry. Harper, Walker and Brooks are ^{just} not poets, they are creative writers, whose work includes poetry, fiction and prose. Like these black women, Morrison, who is a novelist, critic, university lecturer and editor, and Williams, who is a poet, novelist, critic and university lecturer, participate in a wide range of creative activities. Williams has a clear vision of the black woman writer, and her role in relation to both intellectual and active feminism, grounded in race. In an interview with Claudia Tate, Williams relates her sense of disappointment in the current "black movement", and expresses her belief that hope for it resides in black women writers:

As I travel across the country, I'm hearing more and more that ~~the~~ people who were directly involved in the black movement feel burnt out by the movement and its aftermath. I think the reason why so much attention is now being paid to black women writers is because as a group we are, in our individual ways, trying to say, "No, you can't stop now. Something was there, and you have to keep going on even in the face of the unknown".

[Black women writers] seem to be taking that will to survive outside of the framework of encounters with the white world. They've re-fashioned this will into an instrument for understanding ourselves among ourselves. In each of their works there is the white world as backdrop, its oppression, but the focus is on understanding the self, the family, and the community. The strength originates here. I think this has ^{been} generally true of black women writers over the years (57)

When Williams turns her attention to the teaching of Afro-American literature in universities, one observes a more complex relationship pertaining between black and white worlds than the passage above conveys. While black women writers such as Williams and Morrison are engaged in "understanding ourselves among ourselves", neither writer conveys in her creative or critical

writing the narrowness of perception confronted and rejected in this study. When asked, "From a teaching perspective, does Afro-American literature fit into American literature?", Williams responded in terms that can be seen to describe an ideal relationship between the marginalised voice, "having a vitality in and of itself", and existing literary traditions:

One of the things I would like to see is *real* American literature taught in this country [USA]... in such a way that you're teaching the literature of all the people in America, [and not excluding] everybody *else* except white men and a few white women from consideration...

I see Afro-American literature as being intricately related to Anglo-American literature. In some ways, you can't even understand one without having some knowledge of the other. At the same time I would like to see Afro-American [literature]... taught as a part of the vitality of the whole, and yet recognised as having a vitality in and of itself, a perspective and point of view in and of itself (58)

Morrison's comments below on "dishonest scholarship" are instructive, for in them we have presented the tendency to see difference as "exotic" and alien, an essentially racist perspective as Morrison recognises, and not one which can appreciate the kind of relationship between black and mainstream literatures described by Williams. As Morrison says, "insensitive white people cannot deal with black writing, but then they cannot deal with their own literature either". Like Williams' view of literature, Morrison's view of criticism suggests the necessity of entering the black text as both unique, and as a dimension of the human story, of "being human in the world". Such observations not only inform our understanding of literature, they also may be seen to comment on the dilemmas of sisterhood which I have pointed to in this chapter, which demand acknowledgement of difference *and* of an essential sameness grounded in gender. Morrison rejects the irrelevance of criticism which "reads very well" but is ultimately empty of the sort of content which "breaks new ground". Morrison stated in an interview with Claudia Tate:

A woman wrote a book on women writers, and she had an apology in the preface in which she explains why the book doesn't include any black women writers. She says she doesn't feel qualified to criticize their work. I think that's dishonest scholarship. I may be wrong but I think so, and I took the trouble to tell her that. I feel perfectly qualified to discuss Emily Dickinson, anybody for that matter ^{because} I assume what Jane Austen and all those other people have to say has something to do with life and being human in the world. Why she could not figure out that the preoccupation of black

characters is this as well startled me, as though our lives are so exotic that the differences are incomprehensible.

Insensitive white people cannot deal with black writing, but then they cannot deal with their own literature either. It's not a question of my not liking white criticism. I don't like most black criticism either. Most criticism by blacks only respond to the impetus of the criticism we were^{all} taught in college... I find such criticism dishonest because it never goes into the work on its own terms. It comes from some other place and finds content outside of the work and wholly irrelevant to it to support the work. You can hear them talking to Northrop Frye, and you can hear his response... The criticism may read well, in fact very well, but it's not about the book at hand. It's merely trying to place the book in^{to} an already established literary tradition. The critic is too frightened or too uninformed to break new ground (59)

When asked, "Do black men and women approach subjects differently in their work?", Morrison responded, "I think women probably do write out of a different place", but she directed the bulk of her response to differences between black and white women's writing, suggesting a specific project through which the dilemmas of sisterhood might be explored, described and better understood:

It seems to me there's an enormous difference in the writing of black and white women... Black women seem able to combine the nest and the adventure. They don't see conflicts in certain areas as do white women. They are both safe harbor and ship; they are both inn and trail. We, black women, do both. We don't find these places, these roles, mutually exclusive. That's one of the differences. White women often find if they leave their husbands and go out into the world, it's an extraordinary event. If they've settled for the benefits of housewifery that preclude a career, then it's marriage *or* a career for them, not both, not *and*.

It would be interesting to do a piece on the kinds of work women do in novels written by women. What kinds of jobs they do, not just the paying jobs, but how they perceive work. When white women characters get depressed about the dishes, what do they do? It's not just a question of being in the labor force and doing domestic kinds of things; it's about how one perceives work, how it fits into one's life (60)

In Williams' and Morrison's visions of literature, criticism and women's roles as creators and subjects of them, one perceives awareness of difference, not as "exotic" but as conveying "vitality in and of itself, a perspective and point of view in and of itself". It is at this level that *Incidents* must be appreciated as different from male slave narrative, and different from the sentimental novel,

but the uniqueness of Jacobs' experiences and narrative also "has something to do with life and being human in the world".

CHAPTER IV STRATEGIC VOICE IN SLAVE NARRATIVE

Like all our slaves, these men and women tell the truth about their deplorable slavery. When the door is open, they tell how and their own master's eye and how they killed him.

—Harriet Jacobs, aged 60 (18)

Unless Equiano, Douglass or Lewis, Harriet Jacobs, quoted above, did not publicly participate in the "general public discourse about slavery", so to speak, as a writer or anti-slavery activist. As one of hundreds of American ex-slave interviewees through the Federal Writers Project (FWP), 1936-38, her memories of slavery contribute to a composite oral autobiography of the American slave, collected in twenty volumes under the general editorship of George Y. Barrick, published in 1972. Her Harriet Jacobs is unique, and it is unique precisely which Gates refers to in *The Slave's Narrative*. "What is the history of human slavery does there arise another literature of this genre, that consisting of the thoughtless reconstruction of human bondage narrated by hundreds of former chattel slaves" (24). The FWP accounts for a voluminous number of oral narratives, which the eighteenth century and Joseph Conrad's — often neglected in considerations of slave narrative, but are acknowledged in instances, such as in *The Slave's Narrative*. In this collection, 19 of 70 narratives provide the best autobiographical written by "exceptional slaves" included in perspective alongside the average slave based through the FWP and, since less than 10 per cent of posted slave narratives are by former narrators, the oral testimonies collected from roughly equal numbers of men and women are an important counter-balance to the male bias of historical and

She answers questions in a random manner, a loquacious, roundabout fashion-- if, indeed, she can be brought to answer them at all

--Dessa Rose

She listened for the holes-- the things the fugitives did not say

--Beloved

CHAPTER IV. STRATEGIC VOICE IN SLAVE NARRATIVE

Lots of old slaves closes the door before they tell the truth about their days of slavery. When the door is open, they tell how kind their masters was and how rosy it all was.

Martin Jackson, aged 90 (1)

Unlike Equiano, Douglass or Jacobs, Martin Jackson, quoted above, did not publicly participate in the "general public discourse about slavery", to return to Baker's phrase, as a writer or anti-slavery activist. As one of hundreds of American ex-slaves interviewed through the Federal Writers Project (FWP), 1936-38, his memories of slavery contribute to a composite oral autobiography of the American slave, collected in twenty volumes under the general editorship of George W. Rawick, published in 1972. But Martin Jackson is unique, and it is unique presence which Gates seizes on in *The Slave's Narrative*: "Where in the history of human slavery does there exist another literature of this ironic sort, consisting of the imaginative reconstruction of human bondage narrated by hundreds of former chattel slaves?"(2). The FWP accounts are a substantial reminder of oral narrative, which^{are,} like eighteenth century and female narratives, often neglected in considerations of slave narrative, but are acknowledged in historical criticism in *The Slave's Narrative*. In this collection, John W. Blassingame points out that autobiography written by "exceptional slaves" is placed in perspective alongside the average slave heard through the FWP, and, since less than twelve percent of printed slave narrative^s are by female authors, the oral testimonies collected from roughly equal numbers of men and women are an important counter-balance to the male bias of historical and

literary accounts of slavery (3). In her PhD dissertation, Gloria Shepherd identifies consistent features in these oral accounts of black women, including "discussions on dress, diet, family structure, etc., from the black women's perspective", and indications that "acts of sexual exploitation were facts of life,... known but rarely discussed (4). Also, Shepherd highlights the persistent masking of, or 'closing the door' on, sexual experience in slavery, borne out by *Incidents* and other written female slave narrative: "most slave women who address questions about sexual exploitation are consistent in their reactions. They appear hesitant, reserved, and many times only supply hints" (5). This is perhaps most apparent in what Yellin and Tanner treat as the 'two voices' in *Incidents*, to be discussed in this chapter, but "hesitant and reserved... hints" may signal strategic voice in slave narrative by male as well as female narrators. In Equiano's narrative, conscious irony and possibly unintentional ironic effect can be seen to dramatise the limitations of strategic voice, as I hope to show. In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, I will focus on Douglass' self-conscious use of strategic voice.

C. Vann Woodward in *The Slave's Narrative* conveys the unique importance of the FWP oral accounts; in them we have the voice of the usually voiceless "whose silences historians are forever lamenting" (6), bringing to mind again Stepto's observation that

the strident, moral voice of the former slave recounting, exposing, appealing, apostrophizing, and above all *remembering* his ordeal in bondage is the single most impressive feature of slave narrative. This voice is striking because of what it relates, but even more so because the slave's acquisition of that voice is possibly his only permanent achievement once he escapes and casts himself upon a new and larger landscape (7)

Also in *The Slave's Narrative*, Gerald Jaynes turns to *My Bondage and My Freedom* to support his reading of "the slaves' ideal slave", a figure who achieves heroic stature within slave culture through the act and art of survival, conforming "to the images created ^{by the} slave songs, the poetry of slavery which tell us so much about slave _{culture}" (8). From this point of view, Martin Jackson, and the women upon whom Shepherd focuses, are heroic because for each individual, presence *is* voice. From this perspective, Dorothy Bass Spann also may be seen as heroic. Almost forty years after Martin Jackson was interviewed, and about ten years before either Toni Morrison or Sherley Anne Williams wrote their fictional narratives of slavery, *Beloved* and *Dessa Rose*, Spann

dictated to her friend, Inez Hunt, *Black Pioneers: A History of a Pioneer Family in Colorado Springs* (1978) (9). The introduction to *Black Pioneers*, reprinted in full below, is like a room full of voices, past and present, where the slave narrative tradition is very much alive and present in "the big Brown house". Spann's family history is passed from her grandparents, to whom the account is dedicated, ^{and} combined with her own recollections; furthermore, the stories are inspired by, and a gift of identity for, younger family members. The Epilogue to *Dessa Rose* echoes in Spann's method of telling and in the details of the account Spann gives, for in the Epilogue we learn that Dessa Rose, her son, and husband Harker have travelled West and settled, and that Dessa's story is being taken down by her son. *Dessa Rose* ends, "we have paid for our children's place in this world again, and again", and the novel is dedicated to children who are named by Williams, and to their future. As in *Incidents*, pushed to the fore from the first page explaining Jacobs' father's and grandmother's respected positions in black and white communities, in Spann's account, 'telling' family history affirms unique personal identity and family pride, asserting the value and indeed the right to claim the role of historian-scribe: "our family does have a story to tell". Memories which may "crumble into dust" convey a much less powerful ^{manifestation} of the past in the present than is evident in *Beloved*, but the significance of the link between the past and present, and the role of memory in sorting out "the rubble of the past" are dominant in both *Black Pioneers* and *Beloved*. Like Martin Jackson, Spann is a self-conscious story-teller, but not one who feels a need to 'close the door' before she can speak "the truth" or "take up her pen":

My name is Dorothy Bass Spann. I have spent most of my life in a big brown house in Colorado Springs, Colorado. So have my relatives, for it has been truly a family home. It has been the place where we have gathered to share our laughter and tears, our good times and bad. The walls seem steeped in our family history. Here, we have played a part in the history of this community.

Our family does have a story to tell. It is of incidents from slavery days, Civil War times, and covered wagon trains, bringing my people west. It tells of Indians and Spanish territorial days. Our story also has to do with life in the shadow of a castle growing up in Colorado Springs.

I am growing older. My children have not always listened to my stories, for they were young and time for them was forever forward with no need to look back. Now that days grow shorter, our children urge me to write it down.

So I have taken up my pen and sketched the memories of a lifetime before they crumble into dust. Some memories are half-buried in the rubble of the past. I remember many events only as my grandfather and grandmother told them to me (p. 1)

At one level, *Black Pioneers* can be seen as a bridge between slave narrative, variously represented by Equiano, Douglass and Jacobs, and fictional narratives of slavery such as *Beloved* and *Dessa Rose*. The scope of Spann's family history, from "Civil War times" to westward expansion and settlement in Colorado, is a dimension of the black American diaspora, particularly the link with indigenous American peoples, suggested in chapter two of this study, which Toni Morrison foregrounds in *Song of Solomon*, and features in *Beloved* (10). Margaret McDowell relates how Margaret Walker, Audre Lorde, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison ground their creative impulse in "a fascination with those who feel that they possess unexplainable or unidentifiable powers" (11). Evidently, to Margaret McDowell, Alice Walker is one of these people: "In Alice Walker's case, she speaks of visitations from a Cherokee man who offered her help as she sought to develop an 'Indian consciousness' to serve as a kind of sub-text to *Meridian*" (12). The relationship I am suggesting between Spann's family history and McDowell's identification of creative impulse in the four writers goes beyond simple continuity to embrace unique presence manifested in black creative expression. McDowell observes:

rather than apologising for the stereotypical notion that blacks and women are in deep accord with the primitive and intuitive rather than the rational, [these women] celebrate the mysterious and ineffable forces that may exist in their psyches, and they imply that the writer... may fortunately share with the black musician a sense of being possessed by 'spirit' that inspires innovative and spontaneous expression (13)

These four contemporary black women writers can be seen "in deep accord" with "mysterious, ineffable forces" first articulated in the songs and narratives of slaves, often obliquely but none-the-less consistently, through black picaresque and other characteristic signs of slave community and African-rooted cultural practice: religious syncretism, "the slave's wild songs", the magic root on which Douglass relies, Jacobs' prayers "in the burying ground of the slaves" and so on. Spann, Morrison and Williams do not write from first-hand, personal experience of slavery, as did hundreds of American and other ex-slaves, but for all these story-tellers-- past and present, free and unfree, speaking and writing-- *voice is presence*. Gates asserts: "we must understand this correlation of

language-use and *presence* if we are to begin to learn how to read the slave narrative within what Geoffrey H. Hartman calls its 'text-milieu'. The slave narrative represents the attempts of blacks to *write themselves into being*" (14). Spann's children, who grow up and "need to look back", who begin to *hear* and appreciate the value of the old woman's *voice*, her experience, her *remembering*, intuitively grasp "this correlation between language-use and *presence*". Younger family members want Spann's voice-- their own presence in history-- to survive: "now that days grow shorter, our children urge me to write it down".

Elizabeth Jo McDaniel implicitly acknowledges Gates' observation in a different context where strategic voice, as self-protection and as a means toward cathartic liberation, is the subject. In McDaniel's dissertation, "Revising the Past: A Performance-Centered Analysis of Personal Experience Narratives About Divorce", she focuses on the need of the divorced person to *control* his or her past by 'storying': "This ability to feel some sense of control over past selves indicates that particularly traumatic events would be experiences that would often call for 'storying' "(15). While McDaniel focuses on contemporary oral narrative, and Gates emphasises written accounts, both make essentially the same point about presence and voice. I do not mean to imply that the traumas of slavery and divorce are the same, since they clearly are not, but there seems to be a resonance between oral and written slave narrative, and McDaniel's careful analysis of the *situation* of the traumatised teller 'outside the community', whose act of 'storying' is cathartic. McDaniel observes:

Given the fact that the act of 'storying' an experience exerts some control over the event and the characters, the teller is able, through narrating, to create a structure in which he or she can place a version of the past self-- as character in the story-- along side the teller's conception of the present self, the narrator, into some pattern of a coherent whole (16).

In the examples I will draw on in this chapter, the need to control or master the past is evident, but so is the residual vulnerability, anxiety and pain of remembering, or, in Toni Morrison's words, of rememory. Strategic voice in these examples will demonstrate both self-conscious representation and manipulation of the text, for example in shifts in point of view, or literacy as metaphor, and limitations of strategic voice, signalled by unintentional ironic effect or unreconciled contradiction in the text. Limitation of strategic voice will

be observed in this chapter in the narratives of Equiano and Jacobs, and in chapter five specifically in relation to maternalism in these two narratives. *My Bondage and My Freedom* comes under scrutiny in this chapter to demonstrate the dilemmas of self-representation which Douglass felt so keenly after 1845, and which substantially shaped the second autobiography. Like Sherley Anne Williams and Toni Morrison, Spann never was a slave, and her distance from that reality provides a measure of 'safety', through objective distancing (oblique references to racism in the text do hint at the importance of silence/invisibility in a narrative of slavery, particularly from a black woman's point of view). At a 'safer distance' from the trauma of slavery not personally experienced but related to her, Dorothy Bass Spann's narrative rarely exhibits shifts in rhetorical style or point of view; it is a chronological account told in plain language. Spann wrote at a time-- 1978-- when social context could not be described as presenting the unique constraints and other factors which shape the tensions apparent in the FWP oral accounts, and at the heart of slave narrative, so strategic voice is all but absent. Though both *Dessa Rose* and *Beloved* are based on historical incidents, these novels are further removed from the immediate trauma of slavery as contemporary fictional renderings of that experience. From the vantage point of fiction, Morrison and Williams explore behind the mask of strategic posture to probe the situations which made them necessary and vital to the ex-slave attempting "to write [her]self into being".

I have drawn on a number of historical articles from *The Slave's Narrative* because the focus on oral accounts is a vivid, concrete rendering of voice, stressed by McDaniel and in Spann's rationale for 'storying' her life, and valued as specially unique in written slave narrative by Stepto and Gates. McDaniel seeks to establish that personal narratives "are much less static and situated" than is often assumed; for McDaniel, "the key ideas of dynamic process and communication are central" (17), points well observed in relation to slave narrative and the deployment of strategic voice. The historian Gerald Jaynes brings a keen approach to bear on oral narrative, folk lore and slave song, a approach uninhibited by boundaries separating oral and written sources, or separating literary from historical material. Jaynes does what a literary critic might do, exploring sentence structure and word choice in slave narrative, questioning the position, authority and constraints of the speaker, the role of audience, and relating text to context. Jaynes observes: "To understand, when

the slave or master spoke or acted, from which context the text should be analysed is to cast into treacherous waters" (18).

While Jaynes seems to be motivated in the same way as McDaniel who emphasises the interdependent relationship between text and context, seeking to "put the person, the individual, back into the fabric of what is studied" (19), Paul Escott, in "The Art and Science of Reading FWP Slave Narratives", seems determined to remove the 'humanness' from FWP accounts in the name of objectivity. Focusing on the contextual problems surrounding the FWP interviews, Escott's strategy is to separate the content of the interview from declarations of feeling, "designed to satisfy the racial etiquette of the day", thus enabling Escott to "work through layers of *distortion* toward a *truer* understanding of the former slave" (20). My italics emphasise that Escott's approach is in the Olney mould; "declarations of feeling" and "layers of distortion" are rejected as irrelevant to the historians' or literary critics' expectation of what slave narrative 'should be'. The significance of what C. Vann Woodward describes as Martin Jackson's "rare candor " when Jackson said "lots of old slaves closes the door before they tell the truth about their days of slavery... ", is too subtle for the systematisation of voice relied upon by both Escott and Olney, or the assumptions brought to bear, particularly on black women's writing, by Watts or Tanner. Jackson's doors, opening and closing, do more than figure a self-censored ex-slave, essentially silenced despite his oral/aural presence. Instead, Jackson's words inscribe the self-possessed, strategic voice of the ex-slave, who is able to read dominant white society, interpret its real dangers, and fashion into literature strategies of silence and concealment.

There is evidence in Equiano's narrative that he, in Gates' words, "said one thing to mean something quite other", and there is also evidence that Equiano was not always aware of emergent irony in the text. Edwards shows in the narrative a "process of ironic knee-bending that reveals thinly disguised rage" and points out that "while internal contradictions may point to deliberate ironies, a similar effect may often be produced by the failure of the author to reconcile such contradictions" (21). As we have seen in preceding chapters, a community of commerce shaped much of Equiano's experience, as a slave and a freeman, and ^{+his community} underlies much of the conscious and unintentional irony in the narrative. For example, in chapter one of this study, two passages cited to

illustrate the kind of adjustment taking place in Equiano's perspective of himself, and of dominant white society, work together and in relation to the text generally to create intended ironic effect. Equiano's description of his initial impressions of the slave ship create a 'Tutuolaesque' image of Europeans that is bizarre and hideous, startling and brutal. Qualities of these strange white creatures are described as alien and unhuman, bringing to mind characterisations of 'savages' encountered from the sixteenth century onwards by European explorers, traders, travellers and colonials in new 'dark worlds' such as Africa. Equiano's first impressions are of "a world of bad spirits... who looked and acted as I thought in so savage a manner: for I had never seen among any people such brutal cruelty; and this shown not only to us blacks but also to some of the whites themselves" (I. 72-75). Equiano's "capacity for realising in language the experiences of his younger self", dramatises through a child's eye-view the 'magic powers' of these strange beings, "in this hollow place (the ship)", who make the vessel go with "cloths put upon the masts" and stop the vessel with "some spell or magic they put in the water" (I. 75-77). Writing for an audience accustomed to, and himself being to some extent influenced by, literary conventions of primitivism and the noble savage, Equiano is here establishing simple ironic contrasts between 'heathen' African and 'Christian' European peoples. The ironic effect of Equiano's description of the slave ship is heightened if we recall the first two chapters of the narrative, to be discussed in detail in chapter five. Magic, spirits, sacrifice and scenes of brutality associated with the Europeans seem all the more ironic if we recall Equiano's proud account of his early childhood in Essaka in chapter one of his narrative, or his relatively humane treatment as a captive at the hands of African slave traders and African 'masters' as he is transported to the coast by those who kidnapped him. That Equiano was influenced by a specific West African/Igbo social and family practice of keeping slaves clearly shaped and contrasted with his impressions of white slave traders and masters. It also influenced his attitude toward the issue of slavery, his perception of the "good" master, and his own self-image reconciling the status of slave *and*, in freedom, slave owner, as Edwards has argued. In relation to the passage in which Equiano demonstrates an 'adjusted' opinion of Europeans and of himself, conscious irony invites the reader to re-view Equiano's relationship to his "new countrymen":

It was now between two and three years since I first came to England, a great part of which I had spent at sea; so that I became inured to that service, and began to consider myself happily situated; for my master

treated me always extremely well; and my attachment and gratitude to him were very great. From the various scenes I had beheld on shipboard, I soon grew a stranger to terror of every kind, and was, in that respect at least, almost an Englishman. I have often reflected with surprise that I never felt half the alarm at any of the numerous dangers I have been in, that I was filled with at the first sight of the Europeans, and at every act of theirs, even the most trifling, when I first came among them, and for some time afterwards. That fear, however, which was the effect of my ignorance, wore away as I began to know them. I could now speak English tolerably well, and I perfectly understood everything that was said. I now not only felt myself quite easy with ^{+ these} new countrymen, but relished their society and manners. I no longer looked upon them as spirits, but as men superior to us; and therefore I had the stronger desire to resemble them, to imbibe their spirit, and imitate their manners; I therefore embraced every occasion of improvement; and every new thing that I observed I treasured up in my memory. I had long wished to be able to read and write; and for this purpose I took every opportunity to gain instruction (I. 132-3)

Happily situated? Inured to that service? Having looked in some detail at Equiano's ambiguous position as a member of a ships' crew, and the dilemmas with which this position sometimes faced him, the reader might hesitate to take only literally some of the statements above which, in Chinosole's words, cause "no small amount of embarrassment to some post-Malcolm X critics. At first reading, we feel the hairs prickle on the backs of our necks and reach comfortingly for our frazzled copy of *Black Skins, White Masks*" (22). Equiano's use of irony expresses the dilemmas he faced in feeling happily situated at a time in his life when he ceased to see himself as a slave-- just prior to being re-sold by Pascal, a bitter reminder of his enslaved condition. Equiano fancies himself "almost an Englishman" but qualifies this, distinguishing the fact that, in other respects, he is not like his new countrymen. When Jacobs writes, "No matter whether the slave girl be black as ebony or as fair as her mistress", she is making a point about her vulnerability, but the remark also reminds her reader that blackness is more than skin-deep; no matter what the colour, one never escapes blackness, one can never be, whether one wants to or not, other than 'other'. Thus, what seems essential is Equiano's qualification "*almost* an Englishman". Equiano's use of "countrymen" to describe shipmates returns us to chapter one of his narrative, where Igbo kinsfolk are referred to as "countrymen", suggesting new relationships in a (temporarily) settled time in his life are rooted in 'homegrown' ideas of comradery. Alluding to his homeland and reminding his reader of the "terror of every kind" encountered on that first slave ship, what is

the reader to make of apparently uncritical acceptance of the "manners and customs" of a "superior society"? These ironic contrasts invite the reader to make comparisons between societies, stereotypes of which Equiano deliberately contrasts to point to the hypocrisy of western Christian values. Comparisons the reader is invited to make are precisely those which slavery made inevitable for Equiano. In relation to this, William Andrews in *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865*, is particularly relevant. Emphasising as he does with all the texts he examines the relationship between an "implied reader" and ^{the} slave narrator, Andrews' argument can illustrate a dynamic of the conscious irony in Equiano's narrative:

Having been initiated into the wonders and terrors of the Euro-Christian world order, [Equiano] could not blink away the material and technological advantage of that civilization over the one from which he had been kidnapped. Unwilling to deny his affinities with either civilization, Equiano designed an autobiographical persona that embraced both. Unwilling to hymn a testimonial to the blessings of acculturation, he paid special attention to the processes of acculturation, noting what was gained and lost as the African outsider took up a new role within the Western world order. Most important, Equiano structured the development of his own bicultural perspective in his narrative so as to conduct his white reader along the same path of psychic evolution. The result was an oratorical autobiography whose vocation was as much the creation of an implied reader as the education of the narrator. This implied reader was to be converted from his monocultural errors by experiencing repeatedly the gap between Western materialism and Western idealism. To recognize the gap, Equiano's reader is obliged to undergo a de-culturation process through which he divests himself of his insider's cultural myopia and accepts the complementary value of the African outsider's perspective (23)

Equiano "embraced" both the "Euro-Christian world" and the "civilization from which he was kidnapped", but to describe this process as "balanced and complementary" does not do justice to the complexity of experience, often indicated by the manipulation of point of view and irony, which Equiano conveys in his narrative. Equiano does illustrate a "process of acculturation", for example chronicling his quest for literacy, but as we have also seen, participating as a "sharer in the general ^{public} discourse about slavery", as anti-slavery activist and as a writer, is not a value neutral or dilemma-free process as Andrews' "balanced and complimentary" implies. The journey of the reader outside of his or her "cultural myopia", who experiences "repeatedly the gap between Western materialism and Western idealism" may begin when the

reader recognises Equiano's use of irony to point to that gap, or his failure to reconcile contrary elements within his experience.

Equiano's autobiography also reveals a level of complexity and self contradiction hardly surprising for a man engaged in working partnerships with slave traders and in paradoxical relationships with men such as Pascal and Farmer, and the Quaker Robert King who owns Equiano just prior to his self-emancipation. The perplexity and self-contradiction are apparent, again in the context of the ships' crew, in the dilemma posed for Equiano by the 'good master'. Unlike Equiano, Douglass is clear, in both the 1845 and 1855 narratives, that a master should be judged 'good' or 'bad' relative to other masters; absolute moral standards are made a mockery of in slavery. Douglass' sure-footed stand on the 'good master' is in line with Byerman's identification of "the disordered and self-deceiving world of masters..., a morally ambiguous world in which basic securities... are problematical":

Though the narrators call it a system, it is the arbitrary, fluid, unsystematic nature of the slaveholder's world that is emphasized. For example, while cruelty is stressed repeatedly, it is the inconsistent application of deception and violence that makes Southern life so harsh... In such a world, the definition of trickster behavior becomes relative, especially when masters are capable of conscious deceit (24)

In the 1845 *Narrative*, Douglass contrasts two overseers: Mr Severe, whose presence in the fields made them "the fields of blood and blasphemy" (p. 56/1845) ^{is contrasted with} the more benign Mr Hopkins. Mr Hopkins "whipped but seemed to take no pleasure in it. He was called by the slaves a good overseer" (p. 56/1845). Equiano makes the same kind of comparison discussed below, but in a very different context of disturbing self-contradiction. The comparison between Severe and Hopkins in Douglass' 1845 autobiography is a stinging example of the subversive power of slavery to turn upside down the moral values of society, while Equiano's description of his Quaker master, Robert King, as I alluded to in chapter one, cannot be understood as "crafted" in the sense that one sees Douglass' dramatisation of "the arbitrary, fluid, unsystematic nature of the slaveholder's world". Equiano writes:

I have often seen slaves, particularly those who were meagre, in different islands, put into scales and weighed; and then sold, from three pence to six pence or nine pence a pound. My master, whose

The Equiano comic-book, discussed in chapter one, asks children to read a copy of a run-away slave advertisement and to choose, from a list of words, those which describe the social attitudes toward black people conveyed in the poster. The exercise is meant to encourage critical reading skills and to begin to reveal the subtext of slavery (25). We might ask similar questions about the above passage, but the answers to those questions would be more difficult to arrive at: does Equiano approve of King's mode of selling "by the lump"? What is Equiano telling his reader about the humanity of people ^{who are} who buy and sell human beings defined by law as chattel property? How does Equiano see himself in relation to those slaves "put into scales and weighed", and in relation to his master, Robert King, who was "shocked" by this method of assessing 'property value'? By contrast, Freeland stands out in Douglass' 1845 autobiography as a 'good master' and as a 'good Southerner' compared to Freeland's slaveholding neighbours, but this is not a dilemma for Douglass. Life at Freeland's farm is "heavenly" compared to the hell at Covey's ("the nigger breaker"; "the snake"), but Douglass knows where he stands: "I will give Mr Freeland the credit of being the best master I ever had, *till I became my own master*" (p. 121/1845). In isolation, the extract from Equiano's narrative describing King's 'humane' method seems overtly ironic in the essentially irrelevant distinction made between selling by the pound and selling by the lump. But the context of the whole chapter raises questions about whether Equiano's irony is directed against the institution of slavery-- as in the case of Douglass-- or only against its cruel practices. Equiano's ambivalence lies in his explicitly stated awareness, and at times seeming approval, of benevolently practiced slavery, not in the language of irony, which draws attention to his true target, cruelty and insensitivity, precisely those features of slavery revealed 'between the lines' of the runaway slave advertisement in the comic-book version of Equiano's narrative. As reader, we associate this cruelty and insensitivity with the institution of slavery (just as Douglass does in comparing 'good' and 'bad' overseers and masters), in a way that Equiano does not, or does only in a hesitant way, having clear memories of his own experience in his father's house, and even after capture, of benevolent Igbo slaveowning.

The types of irony which I have discussed suggest the limitation of strategic voice where ironic effect is the result of unresolved, possibly unconscious

contradiction. This is unlike *Incidents*, where the 'conflict' suggested by rhetorical shifts marks the limits confronted by the narrator seeking to "tell the whole truth". The limitations of strategic voice in Equiano's narrative point to a critical dilemma described by Chinosole below. I disagree with her reading of Equiano's "elitist" self-portrayal and am supported in doing so by critics previously cited, particularly Edwards and Shaw. But Chinosole is correct to question the tendency to "dismiss a text because it does not fit a predetermined, progressive black literary canon" and to be sceptical about relativism in assessing Equiano's narrative:

The Life of Olaudah Equiano has been subjected to patronizing criticism to the extent that it has been dismissed or apologized for as semi-militant slave narrative. Clearly in the anti-slavery tradition, its tone and theme fall somewhere between the militancy of Frederick Douglass and the "uncle tomism" of Josiah Henson. Some of Equiano's non-militant elitism comes through in this self-portrayal: 'I regard myself as a *particular favorite of heaven*, and acknowledge the mercies of Providence". This kind of statement causes no small amount of embarrassment to some post-Malcolm X critics. At first reading, we feel the hairs prickle on the backs of our necks and reach comfortingly for our frazzled copy of *Black Skins, White Masks*. But can we afford to dismiss a text because it does not fit neatly into a predetermined, progressive black literary canon, or because it falls outside some idealized black aesthetic? At the same time, can we afford in our criticism to ignore or erase clear evidence of mental colonization by rationalizing that Equiano is, after all, just a product of his times? And yet, fundamentally, Equiano's *Life* is liberating to read-- in spite of, and sometimes because of, its contradictions. If we are to find what is most liberating in this work, though, we must look more closely at the *way* in which he narrates what he says. We must focus on narrative posture. (26)

Chinosole's observation of the "liberating" effect of reading the narrative, and her insistence that "we must focus on narrative posture" are difficult to fault, and apply equally well to nineteenth century slave narrative.

In chapter twenty-three of *My Bondage and My Freedom*, "Introduction to the Abolitionists", Douglass reflects on becoming a fugitive lecturer and the events which lead to his writing his first narrative. The events he recalls are ten years or more behind him, and hind-sight provides an opportunity for Douglass to assess his younger self and his abolitionist friends. He does so with skill, carefully developing scenarios in which speaking and writing as modes of self-representation are explored. Douglass writes that

young, ardent and hopeful, I entered ^{upon} this new life in the full gush of unsuspecting enthusiasm... For a time I was made to forget that my skin was dark and my hair crisped. For a time I regretted that I could not have shared the hardships and dangers endured by the early workers for the ex-slave's release (p. 219/1855)

"Unsuspecting", the repetition of "for a time" and the phrase "I was made to forget", characterise Douglass as naive and suggest that, as a "young" and "enthusiastic" fugitive, Douglass temporarily lost sight of his true identity as a black man, and of the significance of his own "hardships and dangers endured" as a slave. It is implied that the cause of abolition threatened to define Douglass. Douglass continues: "I soon, however, found that my enthusiasm has been extravagant; that hardships and dangers were not yet passed; ^{and} that the life now before me, had shadows as well as sunbeams" (p. 220/1855). This short passage is distinguished by the repeated use of the semi-colon, as Douglass shifts from remembering the past to anticipating a less predictable future where the security of closure becomes problematic. "Shadows as well as sunbeams" reminds me of Jacobs' letter to Ednah Dow Cheney, quoted in Chapter Three, where her memories of the past, her knowledge of the present, and her anxieties and hopes for the future, are summed up in the uneasy shifting between light and dark images, prevalent throughout her letters and narrative. In both cases, the simple, effective image suggests ^{an} increasingly mature and more complex analysis of slavery, befitting ex-slaves who look back and forward from a vantage-point shaped by experiences of slavery *and* freedom. In the case of Douglass, the significance that his initial "enthusiasm" had been "extravagant" is developed using metaphors of literacy which contrast his changing perception of the power of self-representation, with conventional expectations of what the slave/fugitive 'should be'. That the articulate Douglass did not give the impression of an ignorant, victimised slave when he addressed audiences as a fugitive lecturer, meant people began to doubt he had ever been a slave. The 'voice' which Douglass constructs below levels accusations at him which echo the initial impact of abolitionists on Douglass: in both cases, Douglass is threatened by a loss of identity, when others assume the power to define him-- "for a while, I was made to forget that my skin was black and my hair crisped":

They said I did not talk like a slave, look like a slave, nor act like a slave... "He don't tell us where he came from-- what his master's name was-- how he got away-- nor the story of his experience. Besides, he is educated, and is, in this, a contradiction of all the facts

we have concerning the ignorance of slaves". Thus, I was in a pretty fair way to be denounced as an impostor (p. 221/1855)

It is almost possible to imagine that the audience which Douglass constructs in the passage above had in hand Olney's "Master Plan for Slave Narrative"; their expectations demand a specific plot and certain characters, set in a predictable pattern by a simple-minded slave, preferably baring fresh wounds! Douglass recalls the qualities by which abolitionists characterised him: "I was a 'graduate of the peculiar institution', Mr John A. Collins used to say...'*with my diploma written on my back*'... I was generally introduced as a '*chattel*'-- a '*thing*'-- a piece of southern '*property*'-- the chairman assuring the audience that '*it*' could speak" (p. 220/1855). Note the frequency with which Douglass calls attention to the act of speaking and writing in these examples. In the passage above, Douglass constructs a voice which does not differentiate the speech of the unconverted, ignorant audience-- "he don't tell us...", from the more refined speech pattern which closes the statement. "Mr John A. Collins used to say...", "I was generally introduced", and "the chairman assured the audience", also call attention to speaking, while "graduate" and "diploma" call attention to formal education. Douglass' use of italics and quotation marks not only calls attention to specific words and phrases, ^{his punctuation also} repeatedly isolates words, as does his use of dashes. ^{Thus, Douglass} foregrounds language itself as a tool to create, define and establish presence. Williams' technique in *Dessa Rose*, as observed by ^{Deborah} McDowell, is relevant and should be noted. McDowell writes: "Just whose 'word' can and should be taken in *Dessa Rose* is a question the novel worries in its multiple versions of Dessa's life as a slave. A continuous thread of quotation marks woven throughout the text calls attention to words as words, evoking uncertainty and ambiguity. But then again, this stylization of quotation marks can be said to quarantine misnamings and representations from the ^{textual} implicit authority of a counterdiscourse" (27)

In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass claims that being thought "an impostor" prompted the writing of the 1845 *Narrative*, "a revelation of facts that could not be made by any other than a genuine fugitive" (p. 221/1855). Douglass writes that he "was growing, and needed room". I have pointed out that Douglass expresses restless exasperation when he recalls white abolitionist friends "who always wished to pin me down to my simple narrative"; night after night, telling the same story, as a fugitive on the abolitionist lecture circuit, was boring, uninteresting, and annoying for young Douglass. In recording the

attempts of his abolitionist friends to "pin [him] down to [his] simple narrative", Douglass could not make clearer the tendency to misread and misrepresent slave experience:

"Let us have the facts," said the people. So also said Friend George Foster, who always wished to pin me down to my simple narrative. "Give us the facts," said Collins, "we will take care of the philosophy." Just here arose some embarrassment. It was impossible for me to repeat the same old story month after month, and to keep up my interest in it. It was new to the people, it is true, but it was an old story to me; and to go through with it night after night, was a task altogether too mechanical for my nature. "Tell your story Frederick," would whisper my then revered friend, William Lloyd Garrison, as I stepped upon the platform. I could not always obey, for I was now reading and thinking. New views of the subject were presented to my mind. It did not entirely satisfy me to *narrate* wrongs; I felt like *denouncing them*. I could not always curb my moral indignation for the perpetrators of slaveholding villainy, long enough for a circumstantial statement of the facts which I felt almost everybody must know. Besides, I was growing, and needed room. "People won't believe you ever was a slave, Frederick, if you keep on this way" said Friend Foster. "Be yourself", said Collins, "and tell your story". It was said to me, "Better have a *little* of the plantation manner of speech than not; 'tis not best that you seem too learned". These excellent friends were actuated by the best of motives, and were not altogether wrong in their advice; and still I must speak just the word that seemed to *me* the word to be spoken *by* me (p. 220-1/1855)

Douglass 'quotes' the spoken word of one "excellent friend" or another, seven times in the passage above, voices which dominate the scenario Douglass creates. Garrison "would whisper" rather give full voice to his expectations of his star fugitive, implying that the famous abolitionist, not Douglass, had reason to feel "embarrassed". Douglass' repeated use of metaphors of literacy, and quoting the spoken word, articulates the hypocrisy and irony of the widely held view, among both the 'enlightened' abolitionists and unconverted audiences, that "'tis not best that you seem too learned". I have already suggested that Douglass does not differentiate the speech characteristic of different white groups, suggesting shared ignorance, demonstrated once again in the comment by an abolitionist friend, "People won't believe you ever was a slave, Frederick, if you keep on this way". The sentence broken in the middle by Collins' presence, " 'Be yourself', said Collins, 'and tell your story' ", enacts and communicates the position of conflict in which Douglass felt himself to be: As

long as others had, or assumed they had, the power to mediate Douglass' self-presentation, Douglass could not "be himself" when he told his story.

When Douglass wrote to Thomas Auld, the 'master' who had once 'owned' him, and published that letter in the *North Star* newspaperⁱⁿ 1848, and in *My Bondage and My Freedom*⁽¹⁸⁵⁵⁾, he was aware of the significance of an ex-slave addressing his ex-master "in this open and public manner"; Douglass had indeed taken "a great liberty", self-consciously changing roles so that a black man publicly names, and thus defines and controls, a white man. The letter is not intended to be cruel or malicious, and though it is amply ironic, it is also generous: the letter ends: "There is no roof under which you would be more safe than mine, and there is nothing in my house which you might need for your comfort, which I would not readily grant. Indeed, I would esteem it a privilege to set you an example as to how mankind ought to treat each other. I am your fellow-man, but not your slave." (p. 271/1855). The letter is not motivated by revenge, but is, "on the anniversary of my emancipation", intended, ironically, to draw Auld into "celebrating that truly important event" (p. 265/1855). At one level the celebration of freedom is also a demonstration of Douglass' mastery over language and through it, over Auld: "You may experience [surprise] on again finding your name coupled with mine, in any other way than in an advertisement, accurately describing my person, and offering a large sum of money for my arrest" (p. 264/1855). As in previous examples, Douglass can be seen to return to scenes, images and ideas connected to voice, both spoken and written. In the first paragraph of the letter, the analogy of Auld as a robber is significant because of the attention Douglass gives to *public display*--simultaneously recalling *and* revising images of slave-sales at the auction block, public whippings and fugitive lecturers-- and *exposure*, foregrounding strategic voice, the picaresque art of masking for protection, and manipulating the strong by the apparently less powerful:

All will agree that a man guilty of theft, robbery, or murder, has forfeited the right to concealment and private life; that the community have a right to subject such persons to the most complete exposure. However much they may desire retirement, and aim to conceal themselves and their movements from the popular gaze, the public have a right to ferret them out... Sir, you will undoubtedly make the proper application of these generally admitted principles, and will easily see the light in which you are regarded by me; I will not therefore manifest ill temper, by calling you hard names. I know you to be a man of some intelligence, and can readily determine the

precise estimate which I entertain of your character. I may therefore indulge in language which may seem to others indirect and ambiguous, and yet be quite well understood by yourself (p. 264-5/1855)

The final sentence is startling in the same way that Martin Jackson's candid statement delights by surprising the reader: it is rare in slave narrative to find direct reference to 'language games', not least of all because they are linked to physical survival, which often meant some kind of subversive, necessarily covert, activity. Douglass knows he is playing a word game which challenges Auld to see ^{Douglass} ↓ as "your fellow man, not your slave". The second paragraph shifts from crass, sentimental rhetoric-- "Just ten years ago this beautiful September morning, yon bright sun beheld me a slave-- a poor, degraded chattel - trembling at the sound of your voice..." (p. 265/1855), to a more characteristic style, as Douglass recalls his escape from bondage: "The probabilities so far as I could by reason determine them, were stoutly against the undertaking..." (p. 265/1855) Significantly, the shift in style occurs after the statement, "I have no words to describe to you the deep agony of soul which I experienced on that never-to-be-forgotten morning-- for I left by daylight. I was making a leap in the dark" (p. 265/1855). "Deep agony of soul" echoes Douglass' description of slave song, and it is easy to imagine Douglass' passage from light to dark occurring in a magical wood. At this transitional point, Douglass has "no words"; "daylight", _s, like the inflated rhetoric which opens the paragraph, illusory, followed as it is by his leap into the dark. After his "leap into the dark" self-representation demands a new voice to convey new realities. The paragraph ends: "I... took the morning tide at the flood, and a free man, young, active and strong, is the result" (p. 265/1855). The contrast between this image and the way in which it is conveyed, with the first image of Douglass as "a slave-- a poor degraded chattel" in "yon bright sun", could not be more apparent. Douglass plays with convention, stereotypical images and rhetorical devices, not only as a means of describing his flight to freedom, but also to demonstrate his understanding and grasp of the power of language to create and define presence.

As I have pointed out, early in the letter, Douglass anticipated Auld's surprise at finding their two names linked together in a form other than a run-away slave poster. ^{When} ↓ Douglass confronts Auld with the continued ill-treatment of Douglass' siblings, he writes: "At this moment you are probably the guilty holder of at least three of my own dear sisters, and my only brother, in bondage. These you regard as your property. They are recorded in your ledger" (p. 269/1855). Douglass

demands that Auld inform him of their welfare: "And my sisters-- let me know all about them. I would write to them, and learn all I want to know of them, without disturbing you in any way, but that, through your unrighteous conduct, they have been entirely deprived of the power to read and write... Your wickedness and cruelty, committed in this respect on your fellow-creatures, are greater than all the stripes you have laid upon my back or theirs" (p. 270/1855). Douglass is somewhat unconventional in assuming that literacy skills are the right of black women at a time when even white women had difficulty exercising their right to an education. More importantly, Douglass' sisters take on an even greater importance when Douglass, who previously cast Auld in the role of robber and criminal with no right to "concealment", becomes the villain who threatens "your own lovely daughter, Amanda":

How, let me ask, would you look upon me, were I, some dark night, in company with a band of hardened villains, to enter the precincts of your *elegant* dwelling and seize the person of your own lovely daughter, Amanda, and carry her off from your family, friends, and all the loved ones of her youth-- make her my slave-- compel her to work, and I take her wages--place her name on my ledger as property-- disregard her personal rights-- fetter the powers of her immortal soul by denying her the right and privilege of learning to read and write--feed her coarsely-- clothe her scantily, and whip her on *the* naked back occasionally; more, and still more horrible, leave her unprotected-- a degraded victim to the brutal lust of fiendish overseers, who would pollute, blight, and blast her fair soul...Sir, your treatment of my beloved sisters is in all essential points precisely like the case I have now supposed. Damning as would be such a deed on my part, it would be no more so than that which you have committed against me and my sisters (p. 270/1855)

The scene which Douglass creates to shock his ex-master into recognising the human identity of black people would be unthinkable in the 1845 *Narrative*, not only because of the boldness with which Douglass presents himself as villain, threatening a young white girl, but also, and more importantly, because of the authority Douglass assumes through language. Auld is challenged to see his own daughter as a "chattel"--a "thing"--a piece of outhern "property"'. Auld is helpless to protect her from the enslavement Douglass imposes through the scene he creates: "I would... place her name on my ledger". As we shall see in chapter six, throughout *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass performs naming as an "act of genealogical revisionism", and reflects on the power of slavery to "rob" words "of their true meaning": "I heard the words brother and

sister, and knew they must mean something, but slavery had robbed these terms of their true meaning" (p. 36/1855).

Incidents provides the most striking narrative representation of Martin Jackson's opening and closing doors, in the consistent, striking rhetorical shifts from plain language to sentimental rhetoric. I pointed out an example of such shifts in Jacobs' account of her mistress's betrayal, but shifts from a 'normal' to a stilted, 'artificial' voice tend to occur primarily when Jacobs' sexual history is the subject. I want to look at what these shifts may signify about strategic voice in *Incidents*, particularly the extent to which Jacobs can be seen, like Douglass, to consciously manipulate and thus control the narrative. Unlike Escott, Olney or Watt, Gloria Shepherd is able to appreciate "constraints of racial etiquette", particularly when sexual experience is the subject, in her treatment of three black women's FWP accounts. Shepherd writes:

Two of the three accounts hint that acts of sexual exploitation were facts of life, known but rarely discussed. These accounts do not become narratives fully controlled by the black women subjects because they are constructed out of responses delivered to the questions of a shaper/interviewer/ editor... In the FWP narratives, the reader is conscious of the interviewer, but not always aware of the informant's presence, whose voice in some instances can hardly be heard (28)

Laura Tanner acknowledges such constraints by focusing her analysis on *Incidents*, and fundamentally disagreeing with Stepto's analysis of modes of slave narration. ^{Tanner} argues that the eclectic narrative ^{who is} enacts an act of defiance on the part of a narrator ^{who is} unwilling to integrate his tale within an externally imposed framework (29). Shepherd sees that full length written narratives, such as Jacobs' *Incidents*, Elizabeth Keckley's *Behind the Scenes, Or Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House* (1868) and Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859), are better positioned than oral accounts, through the manipulation of point of view and flexibility of form, to disguise and reveal the experiences of black women in slavery. As writers they are in a relatively powerful position to control experiences previously outside their control (30). But, as Wallace points out, the need to disguise experience, or the inability to speak directly about it, testifies to the vulnerability of black women writers:

That black women should be unable to articulate their own experience other than in the most allegorical and coded language ('fiction') has everything to do with how 'race' currently functions

to corroborate and validate their economic and political inequality
(31)

The observations of Shepherd and Wallace are not opposed, since both women recognise the position of black women as a dilemma when she 'stories' her experiences. Jacobs is no exception. Shepherd's acknowledgement of the difficulty for the female ex-slave to be fully present in her own self-representation includes the possibility of a more substantial presence in the accounts. FWP female informants "had to negotiate strategies of discourse... [in order] to present a fraught subject [such as rape] to an interviewer", who was usually a much younger white male. These black women must have realised that "the turning over of their power", (exposing themselves through disclosure) "was not always to their advantage... Realising the dangers in giving other people the power to present their realities [black women interviewed] allowed certain incidents... to stand without explanation" (32). Shepherd's observation is critical if we are to understand the significance of silence in black women's early writing, specifically Jacobs' *Incidents*. Shepherd's reading of the FWP accounts is considerably more subtle than Tanner's reading of *Incidents*, where she takes literally what I would interpret as verbal posture. Harriet Jacobs, like Martin Jackson and the black women's FWP accounts, 'opens and closes doors', and in so doing exercises the power of self-representation, fully aware of the dangers in "giving other people the power to present [her] realities".

Jacobs certainly recognised the inadequacy of self-representation rooted in a literary convention such as the sentimental, as I have argued. She also realised the danger in turning over her power to Harriet Beecher Stowe, as Yellin, who views Jacobs' encounter with Stowe as "decisive in the genesis of *Incidents*" also suggests (33). Jacobs agreed to Amy Post's proposal that Jacobs should write an account of her life. The project was initially envisaged by Jacobs as a dictated narrative in which Stowe would be involved, but the famous author seemed interested in the project only in so far as it served her own needs. Stowe informed Post, who acted as go-between on Jacobs' behalf, that she intended to use Jacobs' story in her forthcoming *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*-- 'evidence' gathered after the publication of the novel to counter accusations of sensationalism (34). We might see in Stowe's response to Jacobs the kind of attitude which Olney implies characterised white sponsors in relation to ex-slaves. Stowe went further than assuming the right to present Jacobs' realities;

she treated the heroic slave mother with disdain. Through Post, it was suggested that Jacobs' daughter, Louisa, could accompany Stowe abroad. Jacobs' hope that Louisa would benefit from the experience, as well as interest Stowe in her mother's story, was dashed when Stowe rejected the idea. Jacobs was angry and disappointed, not least of all for the sake of her daughter, and must have felt, as Yellin states, "betrayed as a woman, insulted as a mother and threatened as a writer" (35).

If the Stowe incident can stand as an instance of self assertion by a black woman in the face of the danger Shepherd describes, then Jacobs' letters to Post concerning the incident begin to illustrate the dilemmas which Jacobs would face as a writer who, as I have pointed out, was determined to give a truthful account, "not a portraiture of feelings". Jacobs' judgement of Stowe as "our friend" and as "not lady like" following the incident might remind the reader of Equiano's "thinly disguised rage", apparent as both intentional irony, and as unconscious ironic effect. Jacobs' treatment of Stowe's betrayal also conceals rage; Jacobs tries to remain positive and to maintain hope that there are opportunities for the project, and Louisa's journey. Jacobs mentions Stowe's rationale for excluding Louisa-- the trip would "subject her to much petting and patronizing"-- but she encourages Post to pursue the matter, and reminds Post that Jacobs intends to "pay Louisa's expenses". Jacobs' letter shows she is particularly annoyed that Stowe, in order to validate the story of Jacobs life received from Post, contacted Jacobs' employer, Mrs Willis (Mrs Bruce in the narrative), for verification:

I had never opened my lips to Mrs Willis concerning my Children-- in the Charitableness of her own heart she sympathised with me and never asked their origin my suffering she knew it embarrassed me at first but I told her the truth but we both thought it was wrong in Mrs Stowe to have sent your letter [to Mrs Willis] she might have written to enquire if she liked Mrs Willis wrote her a very kind letter begging that she would not use any of the facts in her key saying that I wished it to be a history of my own life entirely by itself which would do more good and it needed no romance but if she wanted some facts for her book that I would be most happy to give her some. she never answered the letter she [Mrs Willis] wrote again and I wrote twice with no better success it was not ladylike to treat Mrs Willis so she would not have done it to anyone I think she [Mrs Stowe] did not like my objection I can't help it (p. 235)

Already, Jacobs' dilemma of how to handle her sexual history is apparent in her anxiety-- "it embarrassed me at first"-- that her friend and employer should find out about her past through Stowe-- "it was wrong in Mrs Stowe". Despite the controlled presentation of her anger and disappointment in the letter, Jacobs is frank in stating that Stowe behaved wrongly and rudely. Jacobs is prepared to acknowledge that she offended a relatively powerful public figure, but is unapologetic: "I can't help it". In another letter to Post, Jacobs' unambiguous response to Stowe's betrayal is made clear in frank, candid language : "Think dear Amy that a visit to Stafford House would spoil me as Mrs Stowe thinks petting is more than my race can bear well what a pity we poor blacks don't have the firmness and stability of character that you white people have" (36). If the example of Stowe suggests Jacobs' awareness of the power inherent in self-representation (which ^{Jacobs} claims by deciding to write her own account rather than dictate it to a white amanuensis), then the treatment in *Incidents* of her sexual history is testament to her vulnerability as a black woman writer, ^{this is} signalled by her anxiety about Stowe's breach of trust in contacting Mrs Willis, and apparent in the narrative where sexual experiences are left to "stand without explanation" in the silent space between conflicting narrative voices.

Jacobs describes her response to Dr Flint's sexual harassment and her limited options for dealing with him in the passage below:

My soul revolted against the mean tyranny. But where could I turn for protection? No matter whether the slave girl be black as ebony or as fair as her mistress. In either case, there is no shadow of law to protect her from insult, from violence, or even from death; all these are inflicted by fiends ^{who bear} the shape of men (p. 27)

Young, isolated in Flint's home, afraid of losing her virginity which her grandmother has carefully guarded, Jacobs apparently has no power to affect the course of events of her life which point to concubinage or rape. Similarly, as an adult black woman narrator writing about a taboo topic, Jacobs is severely constrained and cannot, despite her repeated desire expressed in letters written before *Incidents*, "tell the whole truth". Toni Morrison and Sherley Anne Williams can and do treat sexual experience in slavery from female points of view, both love making and the abuse of power through rape, in a full, frank way that Jacobs cannot. The expectation, which Tanner seems, perhaps unconsciously, to bring to the text, that *Incidents* should present sexual experience openly, is to deny the ^{historical} and literary constraints which shape

female experience in, and writing about, slavery. In *Incidents*, Jacobs can be seen to address her reader directly, through stilted language, reminding the reader of her desire to give an honest account of lived experience, "let it cost me what it may". She records her "plunge into the abyss"-- a sexual liaison with a white man-- in similarly guarded language, though the image brings to mind Douglass' "leap into the dark" where the fear of the unknown is second only to the horror of the known in slavery. Jacobs asks, "pity me and pardon me, O virtuous reader!", which, in isolation, could be interpreted as self-condemnation in line with Laura Tanner's analysis, but Jacobs continues:

You never knew what it is to be a slave; to be entirely unprotected by law or custom; to have the laws reduce you to the condition of a chattel, entirely subject to the will of another. You never exhausted your ingenuity in avoid^{ing} the snares, and elud^{ing} the power of a hated tyrant; you never shuddered at the sound of his footsteps, and trembled within hearing of his voice. I know I did wrong. No one can feel it more sensibly than I do. The painful and humiliating memory will haunt me to my dying day. Still, in looking back^{calmly} on the events of my life, I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others (p. 55-6)

It is difficult to accept Tanner's reading of ^{rhetorical shifts in} *Incidents*: Jacobs "calls into question her own integrity as a human being" because she "presents and defines herself in the context of a white Christian ethic which fails to take her life situation into account" (37). Jacobs appeals to the sympathies of an audience she often addresses as female, but she does not ask to be judged according to white standards of appropriate sexual behaviour. Repeating "You never knew", and stating "no one can feel", Jacobs distinguishes the circumstances of her sexual history as unique to black women. She avoids a self-image as sentimental heroine and repeatedly points to the failure of law and custom to recognise her as a woman with the sole right to her body. The presence of Flint makes her "shudder" and "tremble", but Jacobs is an ingenious woman who has outwitted this "fiend" in the shape of a man. Significantly, Jacobs maintains her blunt style when she states "I know I did wrong". Rather than beg forgiveness, she asserts her ability and right to form that judgement, "no one can feel it more sensibly than I do", suggesting that the "wrong" done is judged as such according to standards not dictated by nineteenth century American Victorian morality. The shifts into guarded language, "Pity me and Pardon me, O virtuous reader!" seem significant in context, not in isolation as an example of sentimental rhetoric. The final sentence in the passage above is

perhaps the most compelling shift in the whole narrative wherein Jacobs reflects, deliberately and clearly, in the present tense, that the *context* in which the slave woman is confronted with apparently impossible choices demands our attention, if actions such as a "plunge into the abyss" are to be understood, not as moral failure, but as survival strategy: "Still, in looking back, ^{calmly,} on the events of my life, I feel that the slave woman ought not ^{to} be judged by the same standard as others".

Jacobs guides our response to the silent spaces created by the shifts in voice, particularly through her complex characterisation of Linda Brent. When Jacobs learns that Flint intends to build a house in a secluded place and "make a lady of her", Jacobs vows never to enter it. Brent is characterised, not as a helpless victim, begging our sympathetic forgiveness, but as a determined young woman who has a right to live unmolested and cannot, so she must make an apparently impossible choice:

I was determined that the master whom I so hated and loathed, who had blighted the prospects of my youth, and made my life a desert, should not, after my long struggle with him, succeed at last... I would do anything, everything, for the sake of defeating him. What *could* I do? I thought, till I became desperate, and made a plunge into the abyss (p. 53)

Jacobs' question, "What *could* I do?" challenges the reader to put herself in Brent's situation, arrived at only after "determined" effort and "long struggle" against a "hated and loathed" master whom Jacobs is determined to defeat. So the reader is not prompted by Jacobs' question to see life through the eyes of a victim, but rather, from the stand point of a gutsy young black woman pushed to act in desperation. As readers, we are challenged by Jacobs to see her in terms of Rufel's recognition of Dessa's courage and agency (though not in terms of ^{Rufel's} belittling language): "Something in [Rufel] wanted to applaud the girl's will, the spunk that had made ^{action} possible. The wench was nothing but a little old colored gal, yet she had helped to make herself free" (38). Jacobs asserts that Brent's choice between, on the one hand, becoming a concubine or being raped, and, on the other hand, doing what she has been taught is a sin, but what she knows to be her weapon of revenge and means of self-assertion, is a decision made with "deliberate calculation". The passage below presents a complex portrayal of Brent and her sexual history:

So much attention from a superior person was, of course, flattering; for human nature is the same in all. I also felt grateful for his sympathy, and encouraged by his kind words. It seemed to me a great thing to have such a friend. By degrees, a more tender feeling crept into my heart. He was an educated, eloquent ^{gentle} man; too eloquent, alas, for the poor slave girl who trusted him. Of course I saw whither all this was tending. I knew the impassable gulf between us; but to be an object of interest to a man who is not married, and who is not her master is agreeable to the pride and feelings of a slave, if her miserable situation has left her any pride or sentiment. It seems less degrading to give one's self than to submit to compulsion. There is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you, except that which he gains by kindness and attachment. A master may treat you as rudely as he pleases, and you dare not speak; moreover the wrong does not seem so great with an unmarried man, as with one who has a wife to be made unhappy. There may be sophistry in all this; but the condition of a slave confuses all principles of morality, and, in fact, renders the practice of them impossible.

When I found that my master had actually begun to build the lonely cottage, other feelings mixed with those I have described. Revenge, and calculations of interest, were added to my flattered vanity and sincere gratitude for kindness. I knew nothing would enrage Dr Flint so much as to know that I favored another; and it was something to triumph over my tyrant even in that small way. I thought he would revenge himself by selling me, and I was sure my friend, Mr Sands, would buy me (p. 54-5)

At one level the passage is a testament of adolescence. While I disagree with Tanner, who characterises the liaison as a love relationship, Brent's confused and unfamiliar emotions are complex, as is the characterisation of Samuel Tredwell Sawyer, Mr. Sands in *Incidents* (39). Every adolescent knows the power of those bewitching feelings that "crept in" to Jacobs' heart. Jacobs' choice to enter into this relationship rather than "submit to compulsion" is complicated by her age, references to which render Jacobs' account of the "plunge" more human, despite her guarded language and difficult subject. As I argued in chapter three, the journey from slavery to freedom can be seen at one level as an archetypal human voyage from childhood innocence to adult maturity. Jacobs' affair with Mr. Sands is a result of adolescent affection and curiosity, as ^{well} as a strategic step toward freedom. This is important, not only because experiences of childhood and adolescence in slavery tend to be overlooked in slave narrative, thereby diminishing their complexity; Jacobs ^{also} can be seen to suggest a wider context of sexual attraction and activity, opposed to the sexual pressures she endures from Dr. Flint: "for human

nature is the same for all". I am not suggesting that Jacobs condones or advocates "free love" or sex outside of marriage; her moral values, "the pure principles inculcated by my grandmother and the good mistress of my childhood"(p. 54), in no way suggest this. My point is that the relationship with Mr. Sands is part of the larger narrative fabric, in the same way that the shifts into sentimental rhetoric are too; neither can be seen as isolated acts/expressions. Jacobs' first step toward freedom is also the beginning of the end of her girlhood, made exceptionally traumatic by slavery, as her grandmother knows. When she welcomes home her pregnant granddaughter having initially thrown her out in anger over the affair, grandmother's knowing silence speaks louder than words of the "living death" endured by female slaves: grandmother "did not say 'I forgive you'; but she looked at me lovingly, with her eyes full of tears. She laid her hand gently on my head, and murmured, 'poor child! poor child!'" (p. 57) Jacobs loves and respects her grandmother, but circumstances demand that she break the 'rules' , central to what she has been taught by the loved figure. I commented in chapter three that I disagree with Yellin's reading of the relationship between Jacobs and her grandmother which does not appreciate either the complex circumstances strain the relationship, or the extent to which silences communicate in *Incidents*. As we shall see in chapter six, Betsy Baily's withholding voice as a response to the inevitable suffering of her grandson, Frederick Douglass, also is misunderstood. Yellin's refusal to penetrate the silences results in a reading of the text that provides much needed historical background to Jacobs' life, but does not allow Jacobs' voice to be fully heard. ^{It is} as if we were listening behind a closed door. Thus, Yellin swithers in assessing rhetorical shifts: "it is difficult to determine the extent to which [Jacobs'] characterisation of her action as "a head long plunge" and a "great sin" are merely conventional, and the extent to which these articulate a serious endorsement of a sexual standard which condemns her" (40). The result of Laura Tanner's decisive but equally flawed reading of Jacobs' rhetorical shifts also seriously constrains the possibilities of *Incidents*.

Furthermore, as the long passage makes clear, the "plunge" is a distinctly female manipulation of the strong by the weak, calculated to infuriate Dr. Flint, showing Jacobs in fine picaresque form. Jacobs insists that the event with Sands be seen in the wider *context* of her ingenuity and determination to thwart, for as long as possible, the inevitable 'show down' between Jacobs and Dr. Flint. Jacobs recognises the 'sin' of sex outside of marriage as a weapon of revenge and

a means of self assertion: "I knew nothing would enrage Dr. Flint so much"; "It was something to triumph over my tyrant even in this small way"; "there is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you". Tanner's reading of Jacobs' affair with Sands misreads the picaresque use of voices in *Incidents*; she rejects any possibility that Jacobs could "open and close the door". Shepherd observes that black women interviewed in the FWP felt it expedient to let silence testify to sexual exploitation in slavery: they "allowed certain instances... to stand without explanation". To Tanner, that silence in *Incidents* testifies to Jacobs' loss of integrity in her attempt to represent her sexual history through language "inherently inadequate" to the task (41). For Tanner, using "pure white language" is analogous to "turning over your power", raising the issue of post modernism and slave narrative. While this particular critical approach does not direct my study, it should be acknowledged; the debate between Joyce A. Joyce, Houston A. Baker^{Jr.} and Henry Louis Gates^{Jr.} in *New Literary History* demonstrates this unequivocally (42). Michele Wallace sees the value, and the dangers, of post modern criticism: the need for familiarity with "major works of male (and ethnocentric) intellectual figures" leads Wallace to identify a two-fold problem: "not only is there the manner in which sexism and racism are reinscribed by these texts, there is the larger problem of risking being unable to communicate with a heterogenous black and female audience if one takes too seriously one's reference to such work". But Wallace does not reject post modernism because of these limitations:

Nevertheless, as I become increasingly interested in the cultural problems of black female 'silence', negation and absence, I am inclined more and more to draw upon such intellectual and theoretical explanations of discourse and mass culture in order to describe these problems (43)

Any theoretical framework brought to bear on slave narrative must take account of text as well as context, and of the relationship which pertains between the two, as Wallace acknowledges. Like Chinosole, Wallace explicitly questions the role and position of the critic in promoting-- and possibly undermining-- an understanding of black creative expression. To claim, as Tanner does, that Jacobs calls into question *her integrity as a human being* because she relied upon "an inherently inadequate... pure white language", is to make wrong assumptions about the options open to Jacobs, and about the very nature of language itself.

As a master of what Gates, in *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, describes as "metaphorical literacy", Martin Jackson, and the black women Shepherd discusses, can be seen as sharing essentially with their 'exceptional' brothers and sisters in slavery, such as Equiano, Douglass and Jacobs:

Black people have always been masters of the figurative: saying one thing to mean something quite other has been basic to Black survival in oppressive *Western* cultures. Misreading^{sig} could be, and indeed often was, fatal. 'Reading', in this sense, was not play; it was an essential aspect of the 'literacy' training of a child. This sort of metaphorical literacy, the learning to decipher complex codes is just about the blackest aspect of the black tradition (44)

I have discussed the significance of literacy for Equiano, Douglass and Jacobs in terms that recognise each writer as, in some respects, unique, as well as in terms that recognise continuity of experience in slavery over time and across gender distinctions. Part one of this study has stressed that achieving literacy meant more than learning to read, or write, or do sums, though the real importance of these empowering skills should not be underestimated. It is no accident that in both *Beloved* and *Dessa Rose*, black women protagonists must contend with "schoolteacher" and "Teacher Man", white male characters whose very names encode issues of power and presence specifically tied to literacy. It is significant that in McDowell's discussion of *Dessa Rose*, the quote from *Beloved*, "the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay", shifts McDowell's focus from Dessa's capacity to resist and frustrate Nehemiah's (Teacher Man's) efforts to represent her in his book, to Dessa's real vulnerability as a young, illiterate woman with deeply felt pain to conceal: "Dessa's refusal to confess the intimate details of her life... is both an act of resistance (she is the repository of her own story) and a means of containing her pain by forgetting the past... Like so many Afro-American novels, *Dessa Rose* links getting 'beyond' slavery to remembering it, paradoxically burying it and bearing it" (45). I will argue in chapter seven that *Dessa Rose* and *Beloved*, two contemporary narratives of slavery, are compelling precisely because the imaginative treatment of "the blackest aspect of the black tradition" foregrounds silence and voice in slavery, specifically for the female slave.

As McDaniel recognises: "part of the strong urge to tell, to 'story' can be explained by the concept of liminality" (46). In Victor Turner's article "Betwixt and Between": The Liminal Period in *Rites De Passage*", this anthropologist discusses rites of passage, focusing on the liminal stage of "neither this nor that".

Intriguing similarities with the situation of the slave should be apparent (keeping in mind of course that rites of passage, unlike slavery, exclude in order to re-incorporate, and deny identity in order to redefine and validate presence in the group). Turner's emphasis on invisibility, naming rituals, and ^{the} solidarity of the group undergoing passage, are compelling observations in relation to slave narrative, including FWP accounts. During the liminal period, the state of the ritual subject or "passenger" is ambiguous, that is, "structurally, if not physically, invisible" (47). Turner observes: "The structural invisibility of liminal personae has a two-fold character. They are at once no longer classified and not yet classified"(48). He goes on, bringing to mind, for example, naming linked to identity in slave narrative. Turner writes: "Often their very names are taken from them and each is called solely by the generic term for neophyte or initiand... Transitional beings have physical but not social identity... they *have* nothing... no status,... no rights. In the words of King Lear they represent 'naked, unaccommodated man' " (49). In "I yam what I am: the topos of (un)naming in Afro-American Literature", Kimberly W. Benston writes:

For the Afro-American, then, self-creation and reformation of a fragmented familial past are endlessly interwoven: naming is inevitably genealogical revisionism. All of Afro-American literature may be seen as one vast genealogical poem that attempts to restore continuity to the ruptures or discontinuities imposed by the history of black presence in America. At its center-- the slave-narrative tradition, which the poet Michael Harper calls 'sacred texts' of the canon-- we find most explicitly the need to resituate or displace the literal master/father by a literal act of unnamings... In its earliest manifestations the act of unnamings is a means of passing from one mode of representation to another, of breaking the rhetoric and "plot" of influence, of distinguishing the self from all else(50)

It is at this level of significance that Samuels explores "the myriads of significant data that [Equiano] included in his narrative", specifically in the "reciprocal relationship he sought to establish between [his given European name] and his African name" as representing "his effort to disguise, mask, and invert the essential meaning of his discourse. The dual names are not present for historical accuracy alone, for Equiano sought to use them to amplify and give credence to the central "metaphor of self" which he seems to have consciously employed in his narrative-autobiography" (51). Douglass' letter to Auld, where the names of his sisters and brother are figuratively replaced by the name of Auld's daughter, and persistent naming throughout *My Bondage and My*

Freedom, clearly substantiate Benston's observation, as does Jacobs' fury at Stowe, who threatened to define and thus control her.

Black women interviewed for the FWP repeatedly stress "the strong culture that blacks created within the circumstances of their lives. It is obvious in Minnie Davis' story that the most important aspect of black culture, with the exception of the family, was religion, which she presents as the practice that kept blacks from becoming complete victims" (52). This continuity in FWP accounts is in line with the consistent presence in earlier slave narrative of family and community as dominant in slaves' lives, counterbalancing the victimisation of slavery, as well as conventional images of the male 'picaro-slave'. Dixon, drawn on extensively in chapter two of this study, describes the slave community's church built "upon the rock that was traditional African religion as well as American Christianity". He stresses the importance of "conversion-like initiation" to that group, "an inner cult":

The complexity of the religious experience, as well as the complexity of the day to day social experience in the slave quarters, centered in a conversion-like initiation and became further testing grounds for individual and corporate faith in the possibility of freedom. And, as the slave lived, he would reckon with time, community and his own life journey. He sang:

God dat lived in Moses' time
Is jus' de same today.

Slavery brought black men and women face to face with the extreme fact of their wretchedness as individuals. Conversion to an inner cult, an in-group morality, provided the very real awareness that individual loneliness and despair could be resolved in group solidarity (53).

It is a central argument of this study that the slave's own world is far more significant than has generally been recognised in relation to slave narrative. It is in the early narratives such as Equiano's autobiography, and female slave narrative, that this is most explicit.

These voices, normally treated as marginal to the tradition, have much to tell us about the "one vast genealogical poem that attempts to restore continuity to the ruptures and discontinuities imposed by the history of black presence in America". Turner's discussion of comradeship among "transitional beings" ^{who} "under-go a rite of passage, recalls the emphasis on slave family and community in chapters two and three of this study, but similarities between Turner's conceptualisation of

"transitional beings", those who, in Benston's words, are "passing from one mode of representation to another", takes us beyond simply recognising black community in slave narrative. We are compelled to appreciate a deeper dynamic shaping that group, a process which Douglass handles beautifully in his treatment of the slave's wild songs. Turner writes: "the liminal group is a community or comity of comrades... This comradeship transcends distinctions of rank, age, kinship position and [sometimes] even sex. Much of the behaviour recorded by ethnographers in seclusion situations falls under the principle 'each for all, and all for each other'" (54). ^{In Turner's description we hear an} echo of Douglass' description of fraternal bonds between slaves on Freeland's farm: "we never moved separately, we were one; and as much by our tempers and dispositions as by the mutual hardships and suffering to which we were necessarily subjected by our condition as slaves" (p. 122/1845). Douglass' abiding love for his brother slaves, "deeper than anything I have experienced since", dominates his memories of Freeland's farm in both autobiographies. This group of male slaves were "linked and interlinked with each other" (p. 121/1845), and, when they fail in their attempt to run away and are jailed, Douglass suffers less from the disappointment of 'a dream deferred' and more from the forced break-up of this "comity of comrades". Turner's exploration of liminality can be seen to describe the journey of the ex-slave from a state of deracination and legally-defined "non-personhood" to freedom, where the valued skills of literacy are vital to establishing public identity. Turner provides a perspective which encourages us to see the journey from slavery to freedom as ritual passage and archetypal human voyage, a level at which slave narrative is a uniquely compelling and engaging literature. But Turner provides more than an anthropological metaphor (55) for the "dynamic process", to use McDaniel's phrase, of slavery; Turner's exploration of liminality signifies the tensions at the heart of slave narrative, "betwixt and between" academic subject categories, and challenging conventional approaches and ideas of what literature "should be". It is not labouring the analogy of slave as "transitional being" to see in Turner's description of the liminal, a description of the tensions, ambiguities and complexities which distinguish these "plain, unvarnished tales": "This coincidence of opposite processes and notions in a single representation characterises the peculiarity of the liminal: that which is neither this nor that and yet is both" (56).

...to listen to the spaces that the long-ago singing had left behind

--Beloved

Silently [Dessa] had thanked the Lawd, Legba and all the gods she knew... She
would not be a slave anymore in this world

--Dessa Rose

CHAPTER V.
MATERNALISM IN
EQUIANO'S *INTERESTING NARRATIVE* AND
JACOBS' *INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF A SLAVE GIRL*

This chapter does not argue, as the title might be construed to suggest, that Olaudah Equiano and Harriet Jacobs both wrote narratives fundamentally shaped in the same way by maternalism. Indeed, on first reading these two narratives, the reader would probably be struck by the vastly different contexts in which the narrators experienced slavery, sought freedom and attempted to determine the course of their lives. Equiano's boyhood in Africa prior to enslavement, the world of the ships' crew in slavery and freedom, his abolitionist and other activities which made of him a travelled and practised public speaker in eighteenth century Britain, are in stark contrast to what I have characterised as the intimate domestic world of Harriet Jacobs, a nineteenth century black American woman, born into slavery. Furthermore, while Jacobs' account is rooted in her experience of omnipresent sexual threat and her determination to provide a decent life for her children, Equiano's account is rooted in a predominantly male world, from which conventional domesticity, or the plantation slave's domestic world, treated by Douglass and Jacobs, are virtually absent. As I have pointed out and have drawn on in previous chapters, Edwards provides the most salient treatment of Equiano's quintessentially male world in " 'Master' and 'Father' in Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*", while Costanzo specifically locates in a literary context the male friendships made possible at sea (1). I recognise this and other critical work as valid and important, not least of all because it allows Equiano's narrative to be

valued in relation to his African heritage and the world of the ships' crew. It should be noted that Equiano scholarship has yet fully to address female presence, an omission which I hope to begin to correct in this chapter (2). Baker is right to point to the "subtlety" of Equiano's narrative which "defies the single view", and to call attention to its elusive possibilities (3).

Part one of this study does not simply establish difference in slave narrative on the basis of gender, or identify negative female images in male slave narrative. The implicit critique embodied in *Incidents* of the 'sacred' male text initially excited me about slave narrative generally, and helped establish the gender subtext of this study. ^{However,} re-viewing two classic male slave narratives in light of alternative realities and literary strategies evident in *Incidents* is not intended to labour the obvious point that female and male slave narrative differ from each other. I share Deborah McDowell's historical appreciation of, and scepticism about, separatist approaches to black writing, and I recognise that attempts to define black women's writing, however necessary, are probably ultimately futile if critical enterprise ends there. While McDowell "believe[s] that the immediate concern of Black feminist critics must be to develop a fuller understanding of Black women writers who have not yet received the critical attention Black male writers have", more importantly, McDowell

cannot advocate indefinitely such a separatist position, for the countless thematic, stylistic and imagistic parallels between Black male and female writers must be examined. Black feminist critics should explore these parallels in an effort to determine the ways in which these commonalities are manifested differently in Black women's writing and the ways in which they coincide with writings by Black men.

Of course, there are feminist critics who are already examining Black male writers, but much of the scholarship has been limited to discussions of the negative images of Black women found in the works of these authors. Although this scholarship served an important function in pioneering Black feminist criticism, it has virtually run its course. Feminist critics run the risk of plunging their work into cliché and triviality if they continue merely to focus on how Black men treat Black women in literature (4)

This chapter will focus on images of African women, slave women, and white women in Equiano's *Narrative* to establish female presence linked to the African identity Equiano sought to develop in his autobiography. As Edwards and Shaw observe: "Equiano's devotion to the writing of his *Narrative*, often

under the most difficult circumstances, is obviously at one level an outcome of his detestation of slavery. But at another level, it might properly be seen as a homage to his Igbo ancestors in whose concepts and values his experience of a personal god of destiny is rooted" (5). While Samuels' analysis of Equiano's disguised African voice focuses on the male world of chapter four, and substantiates my general observations about strategic voice in Equiano's narrative, it also relies on female-focused passages of the narrative. I would argue that the significance of women in Equiano's narrative begins to emerge in its protest elements, and in Equiano's autobiographical journey, what Samuels deems "the single most important purpose of the narrative: the recreation of a 'single self' which is related to an idealised African identity that Equiano wishes to claim as his legacy" (6). Furthermore, this chapter will assess that female presence in relation to *Incidents*, and a critical context that includes black feminist ^{readings} of black male writing.

In chapter one of Equiano's narrative, details of the manners and customs of Equiano's village Essaka include women in celebrations, patterns of work and family life, religious rites, attention to cleanliness and warfare. Equiano illustrates the last three with memories of his mother about whom he writes: "I was very fond of my mother, and was almost constantly with her" (I. 28). The picture of Igbo society which emerges is idyllic, contrasting with white society particularly in terms of women's traditional roles. Essaka is a stable world from which emerges a moral system illustrated with an account of the punishment of adultery. The passage below is the first example of the consistent association Equiano makes between the presence and role of women in society and that society's sense and demonstration of morality and justice. It could be read as Equiano advocating a conventionally European sexual morality; the hypocrisy of a sexual morality which jealously guards the fidelity of wives but not husbands seems to suggest that the adult writer was indeed, as Equiano at one point describes himself, "almost an Englishman". Equiano describes how

Adultery...was sometimes punished with slavery or death; a punishment which I believe is inflicted ^{on it} throughout most of the nations of Africa: so sacred among them is the honour of the marriage bed, and so jealous are they of the fidelity of their wives. Of this I recollect an instance:-- a woman was convicted before the judges of adultery, and delivered over, as the custom was, to her husband to be punished. Accordingly he determined to put her to death; but it being found, just before her execution, that she had an infant at her breast; and no woman being prevailed on to perform

the part of a nurse, she was spared on account of the child. The men, however, do not preserve the same constancy to their wives, which they expect from them; for they indulge in a plurality, though seldom more than two... (I. 8-9)

It would be a misreading of the passage to accept that Equiano has assumed a white Christian morality in judgement of adultery, or, more generally, a conventionally Euro-American view of women, particularly since it is found in the first chapter of the narrative where Equiano carefully reconstructs the world of his Igbo childhood. The importance of the infant or child to Igbo society, not just the moral implications of adultery, is privileged in Equiano's account of an *African* system of moral justice, and surely this is significant from the pen of an African man whose childhood was cruelly disrupted by slavery. The favourable light in which Equiano casts his memories of Turkey is an important context in which to view this passage. As Edwards and Duffield point out, "just as his experience of superior Turkish commercial morality provided sharp commentary on, and contrast with, some deep and bitter memories [of commerce among Europeans], so did his experience of Turkish sexual morality" (7). In chapter nine of his narrative, Equiano presents a positive picture of life in Smyrna and feels very much at home when he visits there after achieving his freedom. Equiano describes mutually favourable impressions among the Turks who were "well looking and strongly made and treated me always with great civility. In general I believe they are fond of black people" (II. 88); "I liked the place and the Turks extremely well" (II. 90). From Equiano's perspective, Turkish society is, like Igbo society, hospitable, generous and devout. The Turks are presented as dealing honestly in trade and commerce, are handsome and healthy, and demonstrate a sexual morality which appeals to Equiano's African sensibilities; indeed, Equiano is tempted by the offer of two wives from a Turkish host keen that Equiano stay among them. Observations of Turkish society work both within the protest and autobiographical elements of the narrative and are not revengeful, but rather, a compelling analogy encouraging Equiano's audience to see, through the eyes of the ex-slave, the hypocrisy of Christian Britain. The passage concerning the treatment of the female adulterer in Igbo society is significant not simply on the grounds of female presence, but because sexual morality is rooted in a stable African society, defining its own system of justice.

There is further explicit evidence that Equiano is inviting his reader to view Igbo women in relation to a positive image of Africa, and to distinguish African

women as a presence, different from white and slave women. Equiano's use of the word 'even' shortly after the previous passage suggests his conscious awareness of contrasting roles and attitudes toward women in African and European societies. Equiano describes agriculture as "our chief employment, and everyone, *even* the children and women are employed in it" (I.20). He writes that "all are taught the use of weapons, *even* our women are warriors and march boldly out to fight along with the men" (I. 25). In his 1937 account of Igbo life, C.K. Meek identifies a variety of Igbo women's roles in agriculture, viewed as complementing men's agricultural activities (8). The image of the African woman as an 'Amazonian' warrior is confirmed by Meek's account of the Women's Riots in 1929. Meek links the riots to the need for some form of colonial government in the region, and feels compelled, at the end of the book, to return to the subject of the riots. Meek seems obsessed by the women's riots, referred to as a "strange phenomena", threatening law and order. The Igbo women rioters seem to represent to Meek a particularly terrifying and uncontrollable threat to the kind of "apple pie order" which Conrad's accountant strives to achieve in the West Africa of *Heart of Darkness*

(9). Meek writes:

The women's riots broke out suddenly in November of 1929. It is unnecessary to describe them in detail-- how mobs of frenzied Amazons, sometimes numbering 10,000, with their heads decorated with palm-leaves and wild fern (a symbol of war), their faces smeared with charcoal, and carrying cudgels of bamboo or cassava, marched from village to village assaulting the "Warrant Chiefs" and compelling them to deliver up their caps of office-- a mode of degradation practiced by the Ozo and other titled societies-- how they pulled to pieces and burnt down the Native Courts buildings, destroyed bridges, looted European trading stores, released prisoners and in many cases offered active opposition to armed bodies of Government police or troops (10)

Equiano describes the positive physical and moral characteristics of the Igbo woman in terms which can be seen to challenge, if not contradict, the stereotypical image of black women suggested by Meek's "mobs of frenzied Amazons". In the passage below, Equiano's description of the affinity between the Igbo woman and 'Mother Africa' could not be more explicitly stated:

Our women were in my eyes at least uncommonly graceful, alert and modest to a degree of bashfulness; nor do I remember to have ever heard of an instance of incontinence among them before marriage. They are also remarkably cheerful. Indeed cheerfulness and affability are two of the leading characteristics of our nation (I. 21).

This description emerges early in the narrative, where Equiano recalls happy, pre-slavery youth in Essaka, so it is not surprising that images of strong, nurturing African women such as his mother are made central to the physical, moral and spiritual health of the community. What begins to emerge as a multi-faceted, Igbo female presence in Equiano's narrative, seems to substantiate Christine Oppong's editorial comments on recent articles exploring gender in West Africa: "A notable feature of social and economic life in West Africa is the segregation of the sexes and yet at the same time the sense of connection and complementarity of the roles of women and men is strong and pervasive" (11). Oppong views the position of West African women as "betwixt and between" the domestic and the public, the passive and the aggressive, the visible and the invisible: "this simultaneous ambiguity of separation and connectedness [manifests itself] in several spheres of traditional life: in the division of labour; in political and military life; in ritual and ideology; in domestic economies; and in sexuality and procreation" (12).

The perspective which Oppong provides encourages us to consider Igbo women in Equiano's narrative in relation to black women in Harriet Jacobs' narrative where they are a locus of strength within the slave community. Many examples could be pointed out, including Jacobs' reminiscence, quoted earlier, of her mother: "they all spoke kindly of my dead mother, who had been a slave merely in name, but in nature was noble and womanly" (p. 7). Perhaps more revealing are Jacobs' memories of her Aunt Nancy, who can be seen living in the "simultaneous ambiguity of separation and connectedness" as a domestic slave in the Flint household. Jacobs describes Aunt Nancy at the centre of two domestic worlds, that of the plantation home and that of Jacobs' own family, but Aunt Nancy is not the mammy stereotype suggested by the opening of the passage below-- "nothing went on well without her"; rather, she is a guiding mother force who advocates resistance to oppression in slavery-- "never to yield"-- and who does "everything in her power" to keep her family morally and spiritually whole, as the bulk of the passage from *Incidents* below clearly demonstrates:

Aunt Nancy was housekeeper and waiting-maid in Dr. Flint's family. Indeed, she was the *factotum* of the household. Nothing went on well without her. She was my mother's twin sister, and, as far as was in her power, she supplied a mother's place to us orphans. I slept with her all the time I lived in my old master's house, and the bond between us was very strong. When my friends

tried to discourage me from running away, she always encouraged me. When they thought I had better return and ask my master's pardon, because there was no possibility of escape, she sent me word never to yield. She said if I persevered I might, perhaps, gain the freedom of my children; and even if I perished in doing it, that was better than to leave them to groan under the same persecutions that had blighted my own life. After I was shut up in my dark cell, she stole away, whenever she could, to bring me the news and say something cheerful. How often did I kneel down and listen to her words of consolation, whispered through a crack! "I am old, and have not long to live", she used to say, "and I could die happy if I could only see you and the children free. You must pray to God, Linda, as I do for you, that he will lead you out of ^{this} darkness". I would beg her not to worry herself on my account; that there was an end of all suffering sooner or later, and that whether I lived in chains or freedom, I should always remember her as the good friend who had been the comfort of my life. A word from her always strengthened me, and not me only. The whole family relied upon her judgement, and were guided by her advice (p. 144)

Equiano provides details about African women which show them as a mother force that combines gentle nurture and warrior strength. Black women who resist and assert themselves against brutality in Douglass' *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), differ from the dominant, recurrent image of the defenceless female slave in the 1845 *Narrative*. Douglass' mother and grandmother, all but absent from the 1845 *Narrative*, are powerful figures of love, security and strength in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, as I argue in chapter six. In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, the whipping of Aunt Ester (she is Hester in 1845) is revised to emphasise Ester's will to resist, the use below of "of course", and "meet they would, and meet they did", being particularly emphatic. Ester refuses to obey her master's order that she stop seeing her black lover, Edward Roberts. Douglass explains that Thomas Auld

strictly ordered her to quit the company of Roberts, telling her that he would punish her severely if he ever found her again in ^{said} Edward's company. This unnatural and heartless order was, of course, broken. A woman's love is not to be annihilated by the peremptory command of any one... It was impossible to keep Edward and Ester apart. Meet they would and meet they did (p. 57-8/1855)

Even more striking is the characterisation of the slave woman Nelly, whose general demeanour, and whose response to being whipped, can be seen to manifest warrior strength of will as a response to brutality. Significantly, Douglass asserts that Nelly was "a vigorous and spirited woman" (p. 61/1855), words he uses to describe his beloved grandmother. Unlike the 1845 *Narrative*

where slave women are merely figures of abuse, in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, scenes of brutality simultaneously show the warrior strength and will to resist of the slave woman, and act as an indictment of slavery. When Douglass sees Sevier the overseer dragging Nelly to a tree to flog her, Nelly is "sternly resisting", while three of her five young children "gallantly came to their mother's defence" (p. 62/1855). The overseer is made to suffer:

There were numerous bloody marks on Mr Sevier's face, when I first saw him, and they increased as the struggle went on. The imprints of Nelly's fingers were visible, and I was glad to see them...She nobly resisted, and seemed determine to make her whipping cost Mr Sevier as much as possible. The blood on his (and her) face, attested to her skill, as well as her courage and dexterity in using her nails ... There were many times when she seemed likely to get the better of the brute, but he finally overpowered her (p. 62-3/1855)

Douglass' treatment of Nelly suggests how the slave woman could ultimately triumph despite brutality personally suffered. Douglass observes that Nelly "was whipped-- severely whipped; but she was not subdued... He had bruised her flesh, but had left her invincible spirit undaunted" (p. 63/1855). Neither Nelly nor Equiano's mother can be seen to ^{simply} validate the romanticised view of the Amazonian [African/slave] woman, since Equiano, and Douglass in 1855, provide in their narratives a range of female 'types', making the identification of stereotypical images problematic for the reader. My point in drawing attention to female characters such as Jacobs' Aunt Nancy and Douglass' Ester and Nelly, in relation to Equiano's early memories of his mother, is the comparative grounds which emerge when female presence in male slave narrative is explored at more than a superficial level. Not only do similarities between male and female slave narrative emerge, but the slave narrative tradition can be seen to make more substantial the intermittent presence of "black female heroes" in the early tradition of Afro-American writing (13).

A major difference of course, between Jacobs' images of black women, and those presented by a male writer, is the point of view from which they are rendered which determines to a large extent complexity and depth of presentation. The resonance I am suggesting between free African women of Equiano's youth, and black women such as Aunt Nancy in *Incidents* or Nelly in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, persists if we examine how Equiano positions and relates to African women during his journey to slavery. It is useful to see Equiano's journey to slavery as structured by the transition from black to red and finally to white, a

journey from a pre-colonial African village, through the world of the mahogany-coloured people, the Oye-Eboe, both like and unlike Equiano, which ends in the alien white man's world. During Equiano's forced journey to the coast after being kidnapped, Equiano is kept in African households similar enough to those of Essaka to be comforting. Despite feeling "quite oppressed and weighed down by grief after my mother and friends" (I. 53), Equiano is among people who "did all they could to comfort me" (I. 53). In reconstructing this initial journey, Equiano not only draws attention to his mother by foregrounding his memory of her, he also makes her presence real by continuing to associate morally sound behaviour ^{with} the Igbo woman. Equiano writes of accidentally killing a chicken belonging to his first African master and he admits to the crime despite great fear. When he writes that "I told the truth because my mother would never suffer me to tell a lie" (I. 54), he reminds the reader of the moral code which will help him navigate a difficult course to freedom, ^{a moral code} which consistently contrasts with the values and behaviour of white society. Later in the narrative, Equiano "hoped, if ever I was freed, whilst I was used well, it should be by honest means" (I. 258). An African sense of correct behaviour prevents Equiano from escaping from the West Indies on French ships bound for Europe; he remembers his mother's "maxim, that 'honesty is the best policy'" (I. 252), and remains in the West Indies. It is this integrity and honesty which ultimately persuade King not to sell Equiano on the basis of rumours that his valuable slave is planning to run. Indeed, King and his ship's master, Farmer, then make available to Equiano increased opportunities to earn money trading, and King promises him his freedom, "for forty pounds sterling money, which was only the same price he gave for me" (I. 260). We might see in *My Bondage and My Freedom* a manifestation of the African moral code which Equiano associates with his mother (14).

Equiano's remarkable self-restraint, what he refers to as "the African metal" (I. 261) honours his mother who was clearly a strong, meaningful presence in his lived and written life (15). ^{Similarly,} the actual guiding presence of Aunt Nancy strengthens and sustains Jacobs, enabling her to follow a difficult road to freedom, defined in moral terms by this surrogate mother. The moral code associated with Equiano's mother also may remind the reader of Jacobs' grandmother's moral expectations against which the adolescent was compelled to transgress, losing her virginity in her attempt to thwart her licentious master.

A guiding maternal presence may have helped Equiano remember the wealthy African widow whom Equiano is meant to serve as a slave, and her son. Equiano's sense of belonging among "people who did all they could to comfort me", his hope that "I was to be adopted into the family", resonate with the feeling of home, and may remind the reader of Jacobs' self-identification as "orphan" cared for by her mother's twin sister, Aunt Nancy. Equiano writes:

I was washed and perfumed and when meal-time came I was led into the presence of my mistress, and ate and drank before her with her son. This filled me with astonishment; and I could scarce help expressing my surprise that the young gentleman should suffer me, who was bound, to eat with him who was free;... he would not... eat or drink till I had taken first because I was the eldest, which was agreeable to our custom. Indeed everything here, and all their treatment of me made me forget I was a slave (I. 64)

As we shall see in chapter six of this study, the imaginative perceptions and joys of boyhood, despite enslavement, pervade *My Bondage and My Freedom*, particularly when Douglass is under the maternal care of his grandmother. In this "resemblance to [his] happy state" Equiano and his "young master" were daily attended by slaves and "with other boys sported with our darts and bows and arrows, as I had been used to at home". Able to communicate easily because the language and customs of these people "resembled ours so nearly", Equiano "passed about two months" (I. 65). The narrative continues to move toward the reality of slavery when he is snatched at night from this potential family, and is faced with "a scene which is inexpressible", confronting him now as the author, and then as a child eleven years old, with the alienation of enslavement, foreshadowed in chapter one. In chapter one, Equiano writes of frequent visits with his mother to the market (16) which was "sometimes visited by stout mahogany-coloured men... red men living at a distance", who "brought firearms, gun powder... and always carried slaves through our land" (I. 18). The violent link suggested between the red African slave traders and Europeans disrupts the narrative, giving Equiano's childhood memory of the market--mother-focused and happy--ominous meaning. Equiano writes, "this practice of kidnapping induces me to think that... their principle business among us was to trepan our people. I remember too they carried great sacks... which not long after I had an opportunity of fatally seeing applied to that infamous purpose" (I. 19-20).

In chapter two, 'inexpressible' is perfect to describe the red slave traders' society since this unfamiliar world is characterised in terms of absence. The "red men living at a distance", whom Equiano is now among, are not 'African' in terms of Equiano's Igbo world-view. These people are characterised by negations of Igbo practice. Furthermore, characteristics of the red men which establish presence-- iron pots, fist fights, and European-style weapons-- are linked to white society, but are not characteristic of Igbo society. In the passage below, the commercial link between red and white slavers is violent, a face of slavery soon to be revealed, while the lack of an adequate moral code is made apparent through women's immodest conduct, as well as the absence of community values previously associated with Igbo women and Essaka:

I came among a people who did not circumcise and ate without washing their hands. They cooked also in iron pots, and had European cutlasses and cross bows, which were unknown to us, and fought with their fists amongst themselves. Their women were not so modest as ours, for they ate, and drank, and slept with their men. But above all, I was amazed to see no sacrifices or offerings among them (I. 67)

By implicit comparison with Essaka, Equiano characterises an unfamiliar African society as inferior because crucial signs of a whole, healthy society are irredeemably absent. This scene anticipates Equiano's arrival in a land even further, in physical and moral terms, from Essaka. But that arrival is delayed, thereby creating suspense in the narrative. Just as the foreboding presence of red men at the market with their "great sacks" foreshadows Equiano's kidnapping and creates suspense, so Equiano presents the above scene as a stage between freedom and enslavement, community and isolation, civilisation and barbarism. If we think of Jacobs' self-incarceration as a staging post, the contrast between the two journeys to freedom could not be more apparent. On the one hand, Equiano's narrative describes a journey through time and space, structured in the narrative by the transition from black to red and finally to white society, a passage marked by proximity to qualities signified by the Igbo woman; on the other hand, one quarter of Jacobs' narrative describes a state of limbo between slavery and freedom where actual movement is all but impossible and narrative action becomes internal. Another dimension of the contrast is also apparent. Equiano's staging post signals the end of hope; his arrival at the coast is delayed-- but inevitable: there is no possibility that among the "red men living at a distance" Equiano will find a surrogate family

and "forget I was a slave". By contrast, despite long hardship and seemingly overwhelming odds against completing the journey to freedom, Jacobs' staging post is a position of strength and a place of hope, as interpreted by Aunt Nancy whose words of encouragement "always strengthened" Jacobs.

Having been kidnapped from Essaka, and moved through 'red' African society to finally arrive at the coast, Equiano is on the threshold of becoming, in Gates' words, "a traveler, albeit an abrupt, ironic traveler" from Essaka to a new world (17). When Equiano arrives at the coast, his journey to slavery ends, as does contact with free African women, who can be seen to signify a sustaining community presence in which morality, justice and kindness are firmly intact. Brutality and violence assume giant proportions once Equiano sees "the sea, and a slaveship... waiting for its cargo" (I.70). The "white men with horrible looks, red faces and loose hair", whose language is unintelligible, signify the complete absence of civilised society. As I pointed out in chapter four, Equiano dramatises this scene through a child's point of view, asking naive questions characterised by emptiness, no's, never's and not's (emphasised by my italics). He asks about the white men "if these people *had no country* but lived in this *hollow place* (the ship)", and then relates the absence of home and country to Essakan history: "how come *we never heard* of them?". He queries, "*where were their women... had they any like themselves and why... do we not see them?*" (I. 76), the first instance of invisible presence used to characterise white women in the narrative. At this point in the narrative we are invited to see white society as the antithesis of civilised African society, a perspective rooted in the immediacy of African experience for Equiano, as well as black picaresque tradition. Equiano is mystified by the ship, how it moves and when his questions to his 'countrymen' have been answered, Equiano is convinced he has arrived in an inhuman world of "bad spirits" where he "feared I should be put to death, the white people looked and acted, as I thought, in so savage a manner; for I had never seen among any people such instances of cruelty: and this not only shewn towards us blacks, but also to some of the whites themselves" (I. 75) (18). Equiano has arrived in "the disordered and self-deceiving world of masters... a morally ambiguous world in which basic securities... are problematical" (19).

The figure of the African woman continues to be significant in the narrative, specifically in relation to Equiano's account of gaining freedom which is consciously rooted in an African context. But before we go on to consider

passages from the text to support this, it is useful to consider a critical context in which to place images of the African woman which emerge in Equiano's narrative. In doing so, Christine Oppong's observation of the "simultaneous ambiguity of separation and connectedness" of West African women in "several spheres of traditional life" is important to keep in mind. Oppong writes: "Whatever their activities within or beyond the confines of the home, [West African] women maintain a basically domestic or maternal orientation... At the same time, however, we are given important insights [in the essays which Oppong reviews] into female spheres of control and influence", where West African women demonstrate their assertiveness, alacrity, and autonomy. (20). Omolara Ogandipe-Leslie points out that "the European notion of femininity is even less applicable to Africa where women have adopted all kinds of roles not considered feminine in Europe. The wife of ^{Amos} Tutuola's *Palm Wine Drinkard* is one of the best and most correct images of the Yoruba woman of all classes" (21). In a literary context exploring African and Afro-American women's fictional portrayals of motherhood, Barbara Christian emphasises "the many-sidedness of African women's status" (22), and she observes: "given the importance of the concept of motherhood in African culture, it is not surprising that [motherhood] is a major theme in twentieth century African literature" (23). The examples cited from the early chapters of Equiano's narrative, and critical observations such as those quoted above, begin to convey the significance of female presence in the narrative, and how we might assess that significance.

Another African context for comparison might be the nineteenth century political writing of African notables James Africanus Horton and Edward Wilmot Blyden. Their writings focus on the interrelated themes of education, religion and race in nineteenth century African development. Equiano's narrative does not articulate specific support for women's rights as a dimension of his commitment to black people, enslaved and free, but his narrative distinguishes itself in the portrayal of African women when it is compared

to Horton's *West African Countries and People* (1868). Horton's view of the barbaric state of unimproved African society contrasts strikingly with Equiano's image of Essaka. Despite infrequent reference to African women, Horton's view of indigenous African society is influenced by them and implies that ^{African women} are external to the social group. Horton holds African women responsible for deforming and debilitating generations of Africans because they are squashed and smothered as babies carried on their mother's backs! African

women are subjected to the debasing influence of field labour which leads to "reckless liberty"; "rude tastes" develop and consequential women hold a "degraded position among men" (24). In Equiano's narrative, the refreshingly frequent presence and humane portrayal of a variety of free black women, and his awareness of different gender roles for women in African and European societies, is basic to his positive portrayal of black communities, thus challenging the stereotype and bias informing Horton's perspective of West African society. Blyden's bitter racism contrasts with Equiano's attitude to racial miscegenation, but Blyden makes explicit his belief, like that of Douglass, in equal educational opportunities regardless of gender. Unlike Douglass, Blyden clearly links equal access to education to the maintenance and indeed strengthening of women's traditional domestic roles. In *Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race* (1887), Blyden declares:

I trust arrangements will be made by which girls... may be admitted to share in the advantages of this College [newly established in Liberia]. I cannot see why our sisters should not receive exactly the same general culture as we do. I think ^{that} the progress of the country will be more rapid and permanent when the girls receive the same general training as the boys; and our women, besides being able ^{also} to appreciate the intellectual labours of their husbands and brothers, will be able to share in the pleasures of intellectual pursuits. We need not fear that they will be less graceful, less natural, or less womanly; but we *may* be sure they will make wiser mothers, more appreciative wives, and more affectionate daughters (25)

Blyden's views on women's education are probably influenced to some extent by the unhappy circumstances of his paradoxical private life. Despite his hatred of people with mixed ancestry he married a woman who was not, in Blyden's words, "pure black". One of Blyden's daughters was mentally disabled, and his letters show that he was miserable in his marriage to a woman who did not provide intellectual stimulation (26). Perhaps the image Blyden puts forward of intelligent women able to "appreciate the intellectual labours of their husbands", reflects personal regret and longing, as much as it reflects a progressive view of equal opportunities in education. Douglass also seemed to harbour regrets concerning his domestic life which emerge in a letter to a female friend: "I am sad to say that she [Douglass' wife Anna Murray Douglass] is by no means well-- and if I should write down all her complaints there could be no room even to put my name at the bottom, although the world will have it that I am actually at the bottom of it all " (27). Equiano's will provides money for his daughter's education, while Douglass' daughter Rosetta provides a fascinating

insight into her parents' relationship, focussing on her mother's lack of education, in a memoir written as a tribute to Anna Murray Douglass. Extracts from the rare memoir, as well as from Douglass' letter discussing his wife, can be found in Phillip Foner's introduction to *Frederick Douglass on Women's Rights*, an invaluable source of information on Douglass as a "women's rights man" and his life-long commitment to the causes of race and gender equality (28).

I have already drawn on anthropological observations made early in the twentieth century, and more recent observations, to illuminate female presence in Equiano's narrative. The anthropologist Margaret Green observed in 1947 women's mediation role in relation to peacekeeping in the Igbo village: "in war it is the function of the woman to override the fighting of the men and make peace... the female principle seems to be, in general, associated with a cooling, pacifying influence" (29). In 1937 Meek, previously quoted, makes similar observations about Igbo women in the roles of Umada and of Eze: "the women known as Umada sometimes intervene as arbitrators in quarrels between kindreds or local groups" (30), and "exercise considerable authority in the community, for not only are they arbiters in quarrels between women, but they sometimes intervene to settle quarrels which the male authorities have been unable to settle. They often play an important part in preserving the peace of the market" (31). We have seen that Equiano draws on the 'Amazonian' warrior image, as well as the image of nurturer, in presenting his mother and other African women. More recently, the Kenyan anthropologist, Christine Obbo, describes what she believes is the contemporary African male conceptualisation of the position and role of African women in terms that can be seen as relevant to Equiano's narrative, and which relate to Green's and Meek's observations:

even though the world is changing all around them, it seems that women's own attempts to cope with the new situations they find themselves in are regarded as a 'problem' by men and a betrayal of traditions which are often confused with women's roles. *Women must act as mediators between the past and the present, while men see themselves as mediators between the present and the future* (32)

Equiano did not view or present the Igbo woman as a "problem"; rather, my italics draw attention to what we might see as a fair description of the position of African women in Equiano's narrative, presented as mediating between the past

and present, and of Equiano's autobiographical self, mediating between the present and future, through the act of narration. As we shall see, Equiano remembers Essaka and female loved ones in the moment he achieves freedom, looking back to his African boyhood to root and give meaning to his new identity in freedom which will shape his future. In this sense, Obbo's positioning of the African women between the past and present can be seen to anchor Equiano's autobiographical journey to a proud past which helps define an unsure future (33).

The stereotype of the "sweet, sacrificing African Mother" figure, commonly conflated with an image of unspoiled, fruitful "Mother Africa" identified in contemporary African men's literature (34), is tempting to associate with the first two chapters of Equiano's narrative. ^{However,} I would heed Baker's warning about taking the narrative "as the episodic ramblings of an exotic primitive": "only at a very primitive level of literary understanding could one interpret Vassa's assertions of the 'unbounded credulity and superstition' of his fellow Essakans and his descriptions of the indigenous purity of the African interior as testimony from the school of noble savagery" (35). How we might assess "the institutionalised sexism of contemporary African life" is a "vexed issue" in African studies; "long standing debate" about the origin of stereotypes of African women will "probably never be settled once and for all" (36). Katherine Frank in *Women in African Literature Today* outlines the terms of the literary debate:

Flora Nwapa and Ama Ata Aidoo hold that it derives from the white man, or more accurately, from the white man's wife...According to this view, the European imperialists..brought the norm of feminine subordination in the face of masculine power and oppression. Writers such as Buchi Emecheta, and the critic Lloyd Brown, however, disagree and reject in Brown's words, "the image of the free-spirited and independent African woman whose problems, as women, have flowed from colonialism rather than indigenous mores". This false image... "has become one of the enduring clichés of African studies everywhere" (37)

The majority of African women literary critics in the collection *Women in African Literature Today*, associate with African men's literature the mystification of the rural African woman and nostalgic yearning for the "patriarchal past where [man] was definitely king as father, husband and ruler" (38). It would be wrong to charge Equiano with stereotyping the African woman in this way. We can identify in the narrative the "free spirited African woman", but also we can look to the treatment of the unfaithful African wife to see how

"indigenous mores" maintained a "norm of feminine subordination" long before the white man and his wife arrived in Africa. In "Male Chauvinism: Men and Women in Ghanaian Highlife Songs", Nimrod Asante-Darko and Sjaak Van Der Geest argue that "the views on love and marital problems expressed in the songs often serve as ideological charters, expressing the male point of view and supporting a view of male supremacy", but the lyrics also mask a deeper level of meaning where women can be seen to "retain power and independence in more hidden forms" (39). Eldred Durosimi Jones points out in the introduction to *Women in African Literature Today*: "It is not true to say that all male [African] writers have been unsympathetic towards [African] women, or have lacked the ability to present truly complex women, or have merely given us stereotypes" (40). Jones refers to contemporary African writers, but the comment is validated by Equiano's autobiography, not in that Equiano presents us with a 'female character' but in that he assimilates into his account a more complex image of women than would be conveyed by a stereotype.

In Miriama Ba's words, "the nostalgic praise of the African Mother, who, in his anxiety, man confuses with Mother Africa" (41), takes on a new and deeper meaning in a context of slavery, experienced prior to the systematisation of that institution which entrenched racism and racist stereotypes of black people. Just as Equiano's identity as a slave narrator should not be limited to the conventional image of the nineteenth century male narrator as picaro-slave, neither should Equiano be constrained by the title, African writer. The significance of maternalism in Equiano's narrative is revealed from a critical stand-point that recognises Equiano as "betwixt and between" the identifications 'African writer' and 'slave narrator'. This is especially clear when we examine how Equiano positions and draws on images of 'The African Mother/Mother Africa' in narrating the achievement of freedom. Indeed, that achievement, and Equiano's conscious foregrounding of the power of the written word to validate identity, demonstrates his unique position as ^{an} African slave narrator in the eighteenth century.

The foregrounding of women in Equiano's narrative works to define the African identity of his freedom, the achievement and demonstration of which are recorded in chapters seven through nine of the narrative. As such, Equiano's narrative can be seen, like *Incidents* and *My Bondage and My Freedom*, to ground the search for home in female presence. In chapter seven

Equiano presents a double vision, recording an imagined self-image which, it is suggested, the Igbo people continue to hold of him. On his way to receive his free papers, Equiano imagines himself like the Biblical Peter and places this Christian image within an African frame of reference. He writes that he flew to the Register Office like "Peter (whose deliver^{ance} from prison was so sudden and extraordinary that he thought he was in a vision)" (II 15). Equiano continues, significantly in the present-tense, to describe idealised images of the free slave as the triumphant African son reunited with family and community:

I could scarce^{ly} believe I was awake. Heavens! Who could do justice to my feelings at this moment! Not the conquering heroes themselves, in the midst of a triumph-- Not the tender mother who has just regained her long-lost infant, and presses it to her heart-- Not the weary hungry mariner, at the sight of the desired friendly port-- Not the lover, when he once more embraces his beloved mistress, after she has been ravished from his arms!-- All within my breast was tumult, wildness, and delirium! My feet scarcely touched the ground, for they were winged with joy... (II. 16)

Images of the "conquering hero" and "hungry mariner" echo Equiano's life at sea, particularly his account in chapter four of the Seven Year War. Samuels describes Equiano emerging in this chapter "as one who has risen to the status that would have been his in Essaka, where the male youth's self-understanding is grounded in the conceptual metaphor 'man is warrior' and 'warrior is a person of honour, action, and bravery'"(42). While Samuels can be seen to overstate the aggressive signified by the tag "man as warrior", I would want to substitute 'titled man' as a more appropriate metaphor, and I think the narrative substantiates this. We may recall that in chapter one of the narrative Equiano's mother is central to his memories of the use of weapons and ^{of} those who defend Essaka, an image which combines the 'feminine' and 'masculine' as I have already argued. The "lover...ravished from his arms" may remind the reader of descriptions in chapter two of Equiano's reunion, separation ^{from} and reflections on the fate of his sister, about which more will be said: "Though you were early forced from my arms, your image has been always rivetted in my heart, from which neither time nor fortune have been able to remove it" (I. 61). It seems obvious that Equiano's mother is foremost in his mind when he hurries to the Register Office. Perhaps the people of Essaka, and his aged mother whom he imagines praying for him in the passage below, hold a similar image of their lost son, whose achievement of freedom and heroic roles in slavery-- ship's captain, author, polemicist and source of Igbo/Christian

balance, and ultimately as successful businessman and 'politician'-- fulfil his African destiny. Equiano receives his free papers and

before night I who had been a slave in the morning, trembling at the will of another, was become my own master, and completely free. I thought this was the happiest day I had ever experienced; and my joy was still heightened by the blessings and prayers of the sable race, particularly the aged, to whom my heart had ever been attached with reverence (II. 16-17).

The context developed above seems to be a reference to 'the Ancestors', the aged ones, associated by Equiano with his mother's nocturnal visits to her "mother's tomb" (I. 28). In the context of the achievement of freedom, I would argue that 'The African Mother/Mother Africa', takes on a unique significance grounded in the experience of slavery. In a sense, the immediacy of his African past and its fundamental importance to the identity of the autobiographical self, show Equiano as able to return, at least through the act of narration, to the "patriarchal past" in a way that the modern African writer cannot. Like contemporary nostalgic African images, Equiano's African women are not fully or deeply drawn characters, but they are notable as more than stereotypes by virtue of Equiano's position as an African slave narrator, particularly when compared to nineteenth century male slave narrative, as we shall see. This chapter will also show that the sustaining presence of a black support system, even only remembered from 'slavery days', is vital to defining freedom in *Incidents*, where Jacobs, like Equiano, places the achievement of freedom in a personally significant and satisfying context.

Equiano's self-image in freedom is a double vision in another sense. The shared image of the triumphant son achieving freedom is set within and against a white legalistic context of freedom. Equiano includes in the text a copy of his manumission papers which interrupt the narrative. The free papers potentially silence Equiano's voice and threaten to re-define the African image of the ex-slave. Keenly aware of this power to validate-- and thus define and control-- his new identity as a free man, Equiano challenges the power of the white man's word. He contains it in the presentation of the manumission papers: they are physically isolated from the surrounding text by heavy horizontal lines prior to and following the papers. Equiano confronts the exclusive power of the white man's word: he inserts his own voice-- one short paragraph-- within this delineated space, challenging its power and explaining that his free papers

"express the absolute power and dominion one man claims over his fellow' (II. 17). The relationship between the white and African contexts of freedom is made more complex if we recall that Equiano's freedom is given Biblical standing by comparison with visionary moments from both the Old and New Testaments, with Elijah's ascent into heaven, and with the deliverance of St. Peter from prison. The white legalistic context of freedom is not the sole register through which Equiano's freedom is validated and defined, since the very act of quoting the manumission papers subsumes them into the narrative, establishing the slave's voice as an extension of the full power of 'The Word'.

Equiano continues to register his freedom within an African context immediately following the quotation of his manumission papers. The celebration described below, and the numerous references to dance celebrations at this point in the narrative, makes real Equiano's original vision of triumphant freedom, and may be seen as ritualising the transition from slavery to freedom. Turner's insights into liminality and ritual transition drawn on extensively in chapter four, and Dixon's insight into black American slave culture previously cited, support such a view. Equiano writes:

In short, the fair as well as the black people immediately styled me by a new appellation, to me the most desirable in the world, which was Freeman, and at the dances I gave my Georgia superfine blue clothes made no indifferent appearance, as I thought. Some of the sable females, who formerly stood aloof, now began to relax and appear less coy... (II. 19)

This is a fine, appropriate celebration for the newly named Freeman, who wrote in chapter one "we are almost a nation of dancers, musicians, and poets. Thus every great event, such as a triumphant return from battle... is celebrated in public dances, which are accompanied with songs and music... (I. 10). We also learn in chapter one of the narrative that blue is a "favourite colour" in Essaka (I. 12), while the "sable females" at Equiano's dance suggest the link between the journeys through slavery and adolescence to freedom and manhood. In chapter nine, just prior to visiting Turkey, Equiano celebrates his long awaited departure from the West Indies with "free dances, as they are called, with some of my countrymen" (II 79-80), and, in Smyrna he witnesses Greek dances which remind him of Essaka. In keeping with the portrayal of his African identity in freedom, Equiano presents positive images of slave society in Jamaica which he visits after leaving Turkey. Equiano describes a gathering of "Africans... at a

large commodious place called Spring Path" where "each different nation of Africa meet and dance after the manner of their own country" (II. 101). Like the repeated validation of new identity through dance, the naming ritual which confers a titled identity is enacted once again in chapter seven after Equiano steers to port his captain's ship. "Many were surprised when they heard of my conducting the sloop into the port and I now obtained a new appellation, and was called Captain. This elated me not a little, and it was quite flattering to my vanity to be thus styled by as high a title as any free man in this place possessed" (II. 35). The structure of this chapter, contrasting black and white contexts of freedom and ending with Equiano at the helm in the West Indies, could be seen as a revision of the journey to slavery in chapter two, where the narrative moves from Mother Africa to the division of families and sale of individuals into slavery in the West Indies.

While the editor of *Women in African Literature Today* acknowledges that the African male writer may be able to go beyond trivialising African women, he concludes that "in the final analysis... it is left to the women writers, as Katherine Frank says, to present female characters 'with a destiny of their own' " (43). Barbara Christian names a number of African women writers and points out that "in the process of attempting to strengthen their societies, through critiquing them as well as celebrating them, they all present, in varying degrees, more realistic portraits of the African mother" (44). Like Equiano, Jacobs imagines central loved ones witnessing her achievement of freedom. When Jacobs learns that her employer Mrs Bruce has purchased Jacobs' and her children's freedom, Jacobs writes "my heart was exceedingly full", and immediately contextualises her gift of freedom in domestic experience and personal/social memory, just as Equiano links freedom to memories of his African homeland and casts himself as fulfilling his Igbo destiny. The passage below compares well with Equiano's treatment of gaining freedom, particularly his explicit memories of home and his intense desire to have distant loved ones know and participate in the great occasion. Jacobs writes:

I remembered how my poor father had tried to buy me, when I was a small child, and how he had been disappointed. I hoped his spirit was rejoicing over me now. I remembered how my good old grandmother had laid up her earnings to purchase me in later years, and how often her plans had been frustrated. How that faithful, loving, old heart would leap for joy, if she could look on me and my children now that we were free! My relatives had been foiled in all their efforts, but God had raised up a friend among strangers, who

had bestowed on me the precious long-desired boon. Friend ! It is a common word, often lightly used. Like other good and beautiful things, it may be tarnished by careless handling; but when I speak of Mrs Bruce as my friend, the word is sacred (p. 200-1)

As does Equiano in assuming his rightful role as titled man in freedom, Jacobs achieves the role of heroic mother by saving herself and her children from a life of bondage, fulfilling Aunt Nancy's prayers. Furthermore, as chapter three of this study has established, the image of the heroic slave mother is presented not only in relation to the conventional role of nurturing mother, but also in terms of the larger struggle in slavery against racist and patriarchal domination. As such, the image of the heroic slave mother can be seen not only to revise the image of the defenceless female slave, but also to participate in a tradition of the black woman as nurturing peace-keeper *and* warrior/defender, as creative force *and* receptive 'space'. Strong, nurturing African women in Equiano's narrative, who can be seen to "mediate between the past and the present", emerge in *Incidents* as black women who not only endeavour to control the present, but also who are shown to strive to determine their future, and a better future for family members, particularly children.

Jacobs' account of Aunt Nancy's death characterises black women "with a destiny of their own", who are "linked and interlinked with each other", to borrow Douglass' phrase, and also linked to white people, particularly white women, as previous chapters of this study have demonstrated. However, unlike Jacobs' account of her beloved mistress's betrayal, in which the familial bonds of foster sister and mother signal a genuine emotional dilemma for Jacobs, here, Jacobs calls attention to familial bonds which reveal the hypocrisy and cruelty of the Flint family. An important dimension of the death scene and its aftermath is the fact that these black and white women are members of the same 'family', though they comprehend and experience this reality differently. The death of Aunt Nancy is a loss to Aunt Nancy's real family, but also to the Flint family, though the Flints do not recognise, indeed, refuse to face, their responsibility for Aunt Nancy's life of hardship and poor health, including six premature still-births, and the death in infancy of two babies. Jacobs observes, when Mrs Flint decides that Aunt Nancy should be buried in the Flint graveyard, "it never occurred to Mrs Flint that slaves have feelings" (p. 146), but Jacobs also refers to Mrs Flint as the foster sister of Aunt Nancy (p. 145). The interlinking of the Flint family and their slaves is evident when Jacobs' grandmother goes to comfort her dying daughter Nancy: "Grandmother had not

entered Dr. Flint's house for several years. They had treated her cruelly, but she thought nothing of that now" (p. 144), encoding a domestic drama which unfolds in *Incidents*. The bonds between three generations of black women are obvious at Aunt Nancy's death bed. Nancy and her mother (Jacobs' grandmother) are "devoted to each other" and are linked by mutual love and respect, as well as by the secret of Jacobs' concealment, "that had weighed so heavily on the hearts of both" (p. 144-5). Jacobs carefully avoids stereotypical images of black women, while Mrs Flint, who does not fully comprehend the meaning of Aunt Nancy's life or her death, is presented as the typical insensitive slave mistress. Mrs Flint is portrayed as unable to cope with the emotional strain of Aunt Nancy's death and is presented as sentimental and ineffectual, as well as cruelly responsible for Aunt Nancy's hard life: "Mrs Flint rendered her poor foster-sister [Nancy] childless, apparently without any compunction; and with cruel selfishness had ruined her health with years of incessant, unrequited toil, and broken rest. But she was now very sentimental" (p. 146). While Jacobs relentlessly exposes the cruelty of Mrs. Flint, Aunt Nancy's "foster-sister", and employs bitter mother wit against Mrs Flint, the treatment of Mrs Flint does not signify *only* antagonism between black and white women. More importantly, Jacobs renders a domestic world which is threatening *and* nurturing, disempowering *and* the source of tremendous strength for black women. If we recall white women in the narrative shown to be sturdy friends, and those who are unpredictable but not as cruel as Mrs Flint, then Jacobs' social matrix can be seen to articulate an elaborate maternalism. In *Incidents*, "foster sister" can be seen to signal a complicated bond of genuine affection which is threatened by the constraints of slavery and patriarchal society in general. As Jacobs' treatment of the relationship between Mrs. Flint and Aunt Nancy demonstrates, "foster sister" may also be used as purely ironic, in order to dramatise the huge gulf between black and white women who live in the same house together, but whose experiences and perceptions are worlds apart. Jacobs assumes the position of power accorded to the heroic slave mother and, as narrator, she is able to control the painful past, to put people in their proper perspective, just as Aunt Nancy is laid to rest, not in the Flint grave-yard as Mrs Flint desires, but "with all the rest of the family" (p. 146). In so doing, Jacobs renders a scene in which black women "have a destiny of their own", communicating silently with each other, protecting and supporting each other, ensuring freedom for those who can endure long enough, and seeing that those who die in slavery do so with dignity, among those who truly loved and

appreciated them. The funeral scene which Jacobs describes below is a powerful evocation of black community, and an indictment of the trivialisation of black experience:

It was talked of by the slaves as a mighty grand funeral. Northern travellers, passing through the place, might have described this tribute of respect to the humble dead as a beautiful feature in the 'patriarchal institution'; a touching proof of the attachment ^{between} slaveholders and their servants; and tender hearted Mrs Flint would have confirmed the impression, with handkerchief at her eyes. We could have told them a different story (p. 146-7)

The passage directly addresses the inability of outsiders-- "passing through the place"-- to comprehend or represent black experience, but recognises and embeds this experience within the web of relationships that slavery activates, particularly for black and white women, sharing the domestic stage of the drama of slavery. The chapter which narrates Aunt Nancy's death is a virtuoso performance by Jacobs, a beautiful tribute to a much loved surrogate mother, a study of the complex web of women's relationships in slavery, and a powerful indictment of slavery.

Jacobs vulnerability in freedom can be observed as another dimension of maternalism. Jacobs found little peace in her hard earned freedom, and no real security living with her trusted friend and employer, Mrs Bruce, who presents a dilemma for Jacobs. Jacobs is clearly opposed to paying money for her freedom, despite her vulnerability as a fugitive: "paying money to those who had so grievously oppressed me seemed like taking from my sufferings the glory of triumph" (p. 199). Jacobs experiences deep frustration as a fugitive, particularly concerning the tenuous freedom of her children threatened by Mr Dodge, a relative of Jacobs' deceased master, who searches out Jacobs and her children to return them to slavery. Jacobs writes with anger and conviction, but she has little power to protect herself or her children:

I had been told that Mr Dodge said his wife had never signed away her right to my children, and if he could not get me, he would take them. This it was, more than anything else, that roused such a tempest in my soul... I thought of what I had suffered in slavery at [my daughter's] age, and my heart was like a tiger's when a hunter tries to seize her young (p. 198-9)

When Mrs Bruce informs Jacobs of her intention to 'do a deal' with Mr. Dodge, Jacobs "felt grateful... but the idea was not so pleasant to me as might have been

expected" (p. 199). Jacobs initially thanks Mrs Bruce for her kindness, but rejects the plan to purchase her freedom because "being sold from one owner to another seemed too much like slavery; ...such a great obligation could not be easily cancelled" (p. 199). Mrs Bruce goes ahead and arranges for money to be paid to Mr Dodge, securing the legal freedom of Jacobs and her children. As I have pointed out, Jacobs "felt a heavy load had been lifted from my shoulders" (p. 200), and proclaims "when I speak of Mrs Bruce as my friend, the word is sacred" (p. 201), but the account in the final pages of *Incidents* is more complex than Jacobs' relief and gratitude might suggest. I have already suggested a rejection of sentimental convention in Jacobs' statement that her "story ends... not in the usual way, with marriage". In the passage below, Jacobs distances herself from the frustration and disappointment that "the dream of my life is not yet realised" by 'blaming' God, and making a distinction between white pity towards black people, and the practical outcome of freedom, especially for her children. Further, Jacobs expresses the pain and difficulty of remembering and narrating "the dreary years", made tolerable by "tender memories of my good old grandmother". Jacobs reminds her reader that the "inestimable boon of freedom" is a shared triumph, not defined solely by the intervention of her employer/friend. Jacobs writes in the closing paragraphs of *Incidents*:

Reader, my story ends with freedom; not in the usual way, with marriage. I and my children are now free!...The dream of my life is not yet realized. I do not sit with my children in a home of my own. I still long for a hearthstone of my own, however humble. I wish it for my children's sake far more than for my own. But God so orders circumstances as to keep me with my friend Mrs Bruce. Love duty, gratitude, also bind me to her side. It is a privilege to serve her who pities my oppressed people, and who has bestowed the inestimable boon of freedom on me and my children.

It has been painful to me, in many ways, to recall the dreary years I passed in bondage. I would gladly forget them if I could. Yet the retrospection is not altogether without solace; for with those gloomy recollections come tender memories of my good old grandmother, like light, fleecy clouds floating over a dark and troubled sea (p. 201)

Both Equiano and Jacobs explicitly speak of gratitude and obligation as uncomfortable bonds, and in other ways dramatise the paradoxical dynamic of indebtedness to those who, friend or otherwise, are able to determine their futures in ways that they, as black people, cannot. As I have shown, Equiano is active in the process of gaining his freedom, but Equiano can be seen, at an emotional level, to be in a position like that of Jacobs at the end of *Incidents*.

Equiano feels "bowed down by gratitude" when his captain/master from whom he has purchased his freedom, asks Equiano to continue working for him in the West Indies. Equiano does so, despite his long-held wish to return to England as a free man, and determine the course of events of his own life. Edwards has shown how Equiano becomes "master of the ship of his own destiny and passes beyond the need for a surrogate father, though not without attendant pangs" (45), pangs which reveal Equiano's position in freedom, like that of Jacobs, as vulnerable and insecure. The complicated bonds of "love, duty and gratitude" between Jacobs and her employer, Mrs Bruce, underscore a level of vulnerability, and limited options, for a black woman, that is linked in *Incidents* to the threat to the family posed by slavery. In freedom, Jacobs "still longs for a hearth my own, however humble". Douglass seems to comprehend the essential meaning and vulnerability of home conveyed in *Incidents*, in part because he imagines it from a female perspective in *My Bondage and My Freedom*: "My poor mother, like many other slave-women, had *many children* but NO FAMILY. The domestic hearth, with its holy lessons and precious endearments, is abolished in the case of a slave-mother and her children" (p. 36/1855).

The image of the female slave is, in Hazel Carby's words, "excluded from the parameters of virtuous possibilities". As an image of unrestrained sexuality, the slave woman becomes responsible for bringing out the beast in the white man, who is thus both rapist and victim (46). Frances Smith Foster speaks for many critics when she states that "our most frequent images of the slave woman are of victims of illicit sex and as childless mothers" (47). Foster and Carby both argue that the image of the defenceless female slave is in large part a legacy of nineteenth century male slave narrative. It certainly is true that critical neglect of female slave narrative has meant the bloody, half-naked image of Aunt Hester in Frederick Douglass' 1845 *Narrative* prevails over alternative female images in *Incidents*, from Harriet Jacobs, who chooses sex with a free white man rather than "submit to compulsion" with her licentious master, to Jacobs' grandmother, Aunt Nancy, as well as white women who are capable of great cruelty, as well as genuine friendship. Unlike nineteenth century narrators, Equiano could draw directly on childhood memories for what are alternative images of black women. The persistent presence of women in the narrative shows great variety: free African women and girls--working, worshipping, defending Essaka, enjoying wealth as a widow; enslaved African

females in Africa, the West Indies and Virginia, indoors, in the fields and as members of slave communities, like the "sable females" at dances celebrating Equiano as Freeman; in England, white girls, Captain Pascal's girlfriends, and Pascal's relations the Miss Guerins who see to Equiano's education in London and to his baptism; Turkish women, and of course, outside the *Narrative* but present in Equiano's letters, will and private papers, his white wife Susanna Cullen and their two daughters.

Images of defenceless female slaves in Equiano's narrative are not drawn from this realm of strong, self-determining black women, but can be seen to comment on the experience of separation from 'Mother Africa'. Relatively infrequent images of slave women in Equiano's narrative communicate his on-going vulnerability as he reconstructs painful past events, unable to put his situation into words. Immediately following the description of the slaveship at the end of chapter two, Equiano concludes the chapter with an account of families divided and individuals sold at the auction block in the West Indies, a standard image of the 'evil institution'. This first use of inflated rhetoric in the narrative signals the profound rupture between an African ^{slave} narrator and his home and family in Essaka. So, despite the conventional abolitionist language-- "O, ye nominal Christians! Might not an African ask you..."-- the image of vulnerable black families conveys deeper meaning than a simple stereotype: "Why are parents to lose their children, brothers their sisters, or husbands their wives? Surely this is a new refinement in cruelty" (I. 87-88). Chapter three opens with an abrupt shift of style and language, dramatising the loneliness and estrangement of a young boy in a new world, confronted by silence and maternal absence. Chapter three begins: "I now totally lost the small remains of comfort I had enjoyed in conversing with my Countrymen; the women too, who used to wash and take care of me, were all gone different ways, and I never saw one of them afterwards" (I. 89-90). The juxtaposition of abolitionist rhetoric and this vulnerable voice points to the fundamental dilemma for the slave narrator of literacy and identity, of finding a voice and through that process maintaining or recovering the self from the physical and psychological violence of slavery. Equiano is taken to "Virginia county where we saw few or none of our native Africans, and not one soul who could talk to me... I was now exceedingly miserable, and thought myself worse off than any of the rest of my companions, for they could talk to each other but I had no person to speak to that I could

understand" (I 90-91). Equiano is called in from the fields to fan a white man. He writes:

When I came into the room where he was I was very much affrighted at some things I saw, and the more so as I had seen a black woman slave...who was cooking dinner, and the poor creature was cruelly loaded with various kinds of iron machines; she had one particularly on her head, which locked her mouth so fast that she could scarcely speak; and could not eat nor drink. I was much astonished and shocked at this contrivance, which I afterwards learned was called the iron muzzle. (I. 91-92)

Baker's analysis of chapters one through three of Equiano's narrative focuses on the foregrounding of technology and culminates in the iron muzzle ^{given above} passage, Equiano captures "one of the most significant implications of the European industrial revolution... not only has he arrived in a land moving toward a new mechanical order (one in which the African is muzzled and cut off from nourishment), but also he has come face to face with a culture where objects of manufacture are put to cruel and inhumane use" (48). Equiano's portrayal of women supports Baker's thesis-- the muzzled African *woman* symbolises the inhumanity of white society in silencing the voice and denying sustenance in a single mechanism. The emptiness and silence that are the focus of the beginning of chapter three-- the 'gap' between abolitionist rhetoric and the simple prose that follows; the experience of isolation as silence; the muzzled slave woman-- are central concerns in Morrison's *Beloved*, where, as we shall see, this author draws on the powerful muzzle image to explore imposed and self-imposed silence : " He wants to tell me, she thought. He wants me to ask him about what it was like for him--about how offended the tongue is, held down by iron, how the need to spit is so deep you cry for it. She already knew about it, had seen it time after time... The wildness that shot up into the eye the moment the lips were yanked back... " (49). Morrison's engagement with black history (50) underscores the continuity of black writing. In *Beloved* her lucid prose articulates what only silence and omission can communicate in the slave narrative tradition.

Carby indicates that male portrayals of mothers, sisters and daughters can be seen to be "linked to a threat to or denial of the manhood of the male slave" (51), and this is born out in Equiano's narrative, for instance in descriptions of the rape of slave girls. In chapter five, Equiano describes his position as disempowered observer, witnessing "the constant practice of rape": "I was, with

reluctance, obliged to submit at all times , being unable to help them" (I. 205). Equiano's position is similar to Douglass' self-presentation in 1845 as witness to the whipping of his Aunt Hester: "I was doomed to be a witness and a participant. It struck me with awful force. It was the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which I was about to pass. It was a most terrible spectacle" (p. 51/1845). Douglass relied heavily on the recurrent image of the defenceless female slave in the first autobiography to present a rational critique of the institution of slavery. Like Equiano in the passage below, Douglass is emotionally distant from an image meant to move readers' hearts, and his emotional response to witnessing such atrocities is silently suppressed in the 1845 *Narrative*: "I wish I could commit to paper the feelings with which I beheld it" (p. 51/1845). Equiano writes:

I have ^{even} known [white men to] gratify their brutal passion with female [slaves] not ten years old;...And yet in Montserrat I have seen a negro man staked to the ground, and cut most shockingly...because he had been connected with a white woman who was a common prostitute: as if it were no crime in whites to rob an innocent African girl of her virtue; but most heinous in a black man only to gratify a passion of nature, where the temptation was offered by one of a different colour, though the most abandoned ^{woman} of her species (II.206-7).

Male experience is the focus of this passage, particularly the threat to black manhood which Carby identifies. While Equiano's relative powerlessness is apparent, so is his choice as a writer to treat "the constant practice of rape" from a distance where rape is simply a moral issue, like prostitution. Images of brutalised black girls and a white prostitute do not challenge negative female stereotypes, but the acknowledgement of black male sexuality departs from the stereotype of black sexuality as unnatural and threatening. In contrast to Equiano, and Douglass' first autobiography, Jacobs omits lurid, possibly titillating details of sexual and other abuse, but is able to convey the horrors of such atrocities with immediacy and urgency, in part because she narrates personal experience, as both witness to and object of, sexual exploitation.

A more personal perspective is afforded in Equiano's treatment of his sister, who was kidnapped with Equiano, but separated from him early in the journey to the coast. Equiano's sister cannot be treated 'objectively' like a slave girl observed but not personally known, but neither can the full force of Equiano's emotions be expressed, so the silence of omission carries the emotional weight of a passage which superficially confirms Carby's analysis. Equiano writes of his

"anxiety" about his sister's fate after they are finally separated, and of his "apprehension", "lest her sufferings be greater than mine, when I could not be with her to alleviate them" (I. 61). He refers to her as "my dear partner of all my childhood sports ! thou sharer of my joys and sorrows !" (I. 61), and reflects on her being "forced from my arms" (I. 61):

To that Heaven which protects the weak from the strong, I commit the care of your innocence and virtues, if they have not already received their full reward, and if your youth and delicacy have not long since fallen victims to the violence of the African trader, the pestilential stench of the Guinea ship, the seasoning in the European colonies, or the lash and lust of a brutal and unrelenting overseer (I. 62)

In the context of the developing isolation and traumatic loss in which Equiano records this image of his sister, the conventional, overwrought style-- made more personal by Equiano directly addressing his sister, "*your* innocence and virtue", "*your* youth and delicacy"-- suggests^s the silence and pain of 'rememory' which haunt *Beloved*. After all, this passage follows accounts of a series of losses for Equiano: he is kidnapped with, and separated from, his sister; he is snatched from a kind widow; he suffers the second loss of his sister after they are unexpectedly reunited and separated; he is confronted with the society of the red slavers and finally the slave ship. A cumulative sense of loss and growing isolation for an eleven year old boy emerges and is still real-- Equiano's shifts into the present tense are always suggestive. The impersonal language protects the adult narrator from what he does not want to know or remember-- the reality of slavery for his sister. To paraphrase Schwipper, Equiano can be seen to transpose the personal trauma of slavery onto the image of his sister because he is unable to put some aspects^{of} his situation into words.

CONCLUSION

Equiano's portrayals of black women, both free and enslaved, can be seen in relation to the characterisation of white women as invisible or insubstantial presence, noted in Equiano's description of female absence on the slave ship. White women characterised as insubstantial presence can be found in chapter three, when Equiano first sees white women in Falmouth and "could not help remarking on the slenderness of their women... I thought they were not so modest and shame-faced as the African women" (I. 106). While Equiano does

mention white women other than those "slender" ones he sees in Falmouth, their flat, infrequent presence in the narrative underscores a male focus and African context in which Equiano places the autobiographical self. Equiano gets a fright when a young white girl takes a fancy to him. He "began to fear I should be betrothed to this young lady" (I. 108) and is clearly relieved when he escapes from her, with the help of his ships' crew under cover of night-- a comic scene which hints at the sexual tensions a life at sea may avoid. Equiano also gets a fright from the rosy cheeks of a second little white girl whom he also mentions in chapter three. While a number of critics seize on Equiano's "mortification" at the difference in their complexions to interpret it in deep psychological terms, my impression is of the larger context of male adolescent experience and awakening in which he meets this little girl. A number of passages from chapter three of Equiano's narrative can be cited to demonstrate Equiano's conscious self-presentation as the adventurous, care-free boy: "My griefs...which in young minds are not perpetual were now wearing away" (I. 112); "There was a number of boys on board ship which still made it more agreeable; for we were always together and a great part of our time was spent in play" (I. 112). Indeed, Equiano seems to deal effectively with the mortification of racial difference boxing with white boys aboard ship. ^{Such} scenes do not communicate the painful vulnerability, rooted in racial identity, that, for example, Ellison demonstrates in the boxing match in *Invisible Man*, where blind-folded black boys are forced to fight each other for the amusement of white on-lookers (52). Equiano's account mingles the pain and pleasure of adolescence made more complex and threatening by slavery, recalling the twilight world of childhood/adolescence made prominent in *My Bondage and My Freedom*. We may also recall Jacobs' complex motivations for a sexual relationship with a white man, as an adolescent apparently trapped between the threat of rape by her master on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the moral expectations of her grandmother, made impossible in the context of "a morally ambiguous world in which basic securities... are problematical". These examples suggest that we must keep in mind the relatively infrequent encounters with white women which Equiano had. Their invisibility in the text may be seen to reflect a facet of eighteenth century slavery, and an 'off-shore', male perspective of it, not necessarily literary strategy.

More intriguing perhaps, Equiano places outside the text two white women who crucially influence his fate. Significantly it is in a *footnote* that Equiano explains

how jealousy and rivalry between a previous and a new girlfriend of his master forced Pascal to suddenly sell his young slave Equiano:

Thus was I sacrificed to the envy and resentment of this woman for knowing that the lady whom she had succeeded in my master's good graces designed to take me into her service;...She felt her pride alarmed at the superiority of her rival in being attended by a black servant... (I. 186) (53)

As foot-noted information, we might read these white women simply as incidental, an afterthought located outside of the main text. But as foot-noted information, we also might interpret Equiano as consciously marginalising white women. If we choose to see the footnote as strategically placed, then questions can be asked regarding the coherence of maternalism in Equiano's narrative. Can Equiano's portrayal of women in the narrative be seen as reversing the terms of meaning defining blackness as absence and negation? A variety of black women are *present* throughout the narrative, while white women central to the events of Equiano's life, are marginalised in a footnote. This seems significant in relation to Carby's discussion of the conventional image of the slave woman. This critic argues that figurations of black women, since at least the nineteenth century, exist in an antithetical relationship with the values embodied in the Cult of True Womanhood, an absence of piety and purity being a crucial signifiers (54). If we recall the image of the Igbo woman as physically beautiful, modest and pure, then we might ask if maternalism in Equiano's narrative be seen to reverse the antithetical relationship identified by Carby. The structure of the narrative encoding elements of protest against white society suggests white women lack those characteristics with which Equiano defined Igbo womanhood. Even when they are physically absent, black women remain a meaningful presence during Equiano's journey through slavery, and help define the African identity of his freedom; white women in the text are noted as slender or in other ways lacking, or they are notably absent. If Igbo womanhood signifies the moral and just society, do images of the slave woman-- muzzled, in the kitchen-- signal the descent of that society, violated by slavery, into one in which the invisible white woman signifies an empty society, devoid of humanity, compassion, morality and justice? Though it may be tempting to answer such questions so that maternalism is seen as a coherent pattern, Equiano's text stubbornly resists a forced reading of the significance of maternalism. Unlike *Incidents*, where black and white women are at the centre of a complex domestic drama of slavery, a drama embedded in a larger struggle

for black advancement, women in Equiano's text cannot be described as constituting a "social matrix". But women in Equiano's narrative are a presence with which to be reckoned, challenging the reader for whom male slave narrative is accepted as the sacred slave text, communicating a uniformly negative image of the slave woman. Perhaps what we can conclude from the footnote is inherent in its ambiguous position outwith, and yet connected to, the main text. The footnote may be generally interpreted as a metaphor of the ambiguous relationship between the story of Equiano's life, and the liminal presence of white women in it. Just as a footnote is linked to and comments on the main text, so female presence in Equiano's narrative may be viewed as "betwixt and between" what is central to, and what is outside of, Equiano's journey from slavery to freedom. Thus, it is *the process of questioning possible meanings* of female presence that is of the greatest significance.

As I hope this study has made clear, through the act of careful reading and attentive 'listening' to a text such as *Incidents*, the reader not only participates in the restoration of female presence in the slave narrative tradition, the reader also is made more fully aware of the latent possibilities of male slave narrative. By opening up the tradition so that it includes female as well as male voices, the reader is in a position to reevaluate the whole tradition. From this vantage point, the identification of female presence in Equiano's narrative becomes an act of revision that is liberating, regardless of whether or not we may ultimately conclude that a feminist pattern has emerged in the text. One danger inherent in the re-visioning of a text such as Equiano's narrative is the danger of only partially completing the task. Deborah McDowell makes this clear when she states that the task of the black feminist critic must include more than identifying and retrieving black female presence in literary traditions. As I have pointed out, McDowell encourages the critic to isolate female presence *in order to reincorporate and look again* at the traditions which have excluded black female voices. So identifying female presence in Equiano's narrative should not be an end in and of itself; the next step is to view that presence in relation to the text as a whole, and in relation to literary traditions in which the text participates. To do so reveals that conventional assumptions about male slave narrative have limited these texts, an observation borne out in chapter six, as we shall see. Women in Equiano's narrative reveal a degree of complexity and variety not normally recognised in male accounts of slavery. Furthermore, we are confronted with the unique position of the eighteenth century text, in closer

proximity to^{an} African heritage, and reflecting a relatively ambiguous experience of slavery, where a young Igbo boy is made to become an "ironic traveler" as slave-sailor, entrepreneur, Freeman/captain, author, activist, husband and father. How many other slave narratives invite us to witness Igbo dance, as well as take us through the icy seas toward the Arctic, and to the hot coast of British Honduras? Equiano's narrative is alive with possibilities, many of which are made apparent when we open our eyes and see the women who shaped his early life, and those on the periphery of it.

Equiano's narrative encourages his reader to develop the skill of "diasporan literacy" described by Abena Busia as "an ability to read a variety of cultural signs of the lives of Africa's children at home and in the New World... To acquire 'diasporan literacy'... is to be able to see again the fragments that make up the whole, not as isolated individual and even redundant fragments, but as part of a creative and sustaining whole" (55). Such reading skills make it more likely that male and female slave narrative will be read "as part of a creative and sustaining whole". Also, exploring maternalism in Equiano's narrative and *Incidents* demonstrates the opportunities for analysing slave narrative in the context of African literature. That is not to say that slave narrators should be treated as if they were no different from African writers; just as African histories and cultural traditions must be accounted for in appreciating African writing, so must the historical and cultural realities of the slave narrator be acknowledged. But African studies does provide a context in which images of women as well as value and cultural systems, and survival strategies, take on a new dimension in slave narrative. This is made clear by exploring Equiano's and Jacobs' narratives together, revealing roots of similarity, and the basis of difference^s, which are too easily obscured or ignored if the texts are opposed on the basis of gender, or on the basis of geography-- eighteenth century 'high seas' slavery versus nineteenth century American plantation slavery. McDowell stresses the importance of historical context in reading black women's writing, particularly early writing, before 1940:

Regardless of which theoretical framework Black feminist critics choose, they must have an informed handle on Black literature and Black culture in general. Such a grounding can give this scholarship more texture and completeness and perhaps prevent some of the problems that have had a vitiating effect on the criticism.

This footing in black history and culture serves as a basis for the study of the literature (56)

Just as the displacement and reevaluation of the male slave voice by a text such as *Incidents* transforms the way in which we see and value female presence in Equiano's narrative, so the displacement by *My Bondage and My Freedom*⁽¹⁸⁵⁵⁾ of the privileged position of Douglass' 1845 *Narrative* transforms the way in which his second autobiography is read and valued. *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) will be shown to establish a female presence which shows great variety, but which goes beyond the possibilities of Equiano's representations. Women in *My Bondage and My Freedom* are at the centre, crucially embedded in the autobiographical act and, as in *Incidents*, linked to the need and search for home that is the goal which drives Douglass' second narrative journey from slavery to freedom.

MY BONDAGE AND MY FREEDOM

The intriguing sentence, "But to return, as before, to begin," in chapter three of Douglass' *My Bondage and My Freedom* suggests alternative ways in which this text can be read in relation to the 1845 *Narrative*. On the one hand, "But to return, as before, to begin" might be read as a claim to re-established literary continuity that *My Bondage and My Freedom* is a sequel and further expansion of the first narrative. The sentence is what I have drawn attention to slightly because it returns to chapter three in the portrait of the reader which he began in chapter one. In these initial chapters of *My Bondage and My Freedom* Douglass has had to go to London through his early childhood, including his mother's remarriage, with John Stowe in establishing the text's narrative past above a whole of the 1845 *Narrative*. The journey from slavery to freedom which structures and defines the first narrative might be seen as diluted in the second narrative, apparently providing information about Douglass' early childhood, including his mother's remarriage, but which is a less convincing moralising about his own and a less compelling account of incidents in freedom, as well as a spiritual epiphany. If we read the text as a sequel to the first *Narrative* of 1845, then, from the conventional critical perspective that is more, or rather, as begun by Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a self-indulgent narrative, in the *Tell A Free Slave*, what is the conventional approach to reading William Andrews' *Incidents*?

Only one critic has thus far taken the time to evaluate the 1855 *Narrative* in light of *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), and his conclusion is that the "ambiguity" of the *Narrative* is the only "defining literary motif" in the events of 1845 and 1855. James Hitchcock argues that *My Bondage and My Freedom* is a "diffuse

Definitions belonged to the definers, not the defined

--Beloved

I couldn't see that printing press often enough to suit me

--Dessa Rose

CHAPTER VI. REMEMORY AND FEMALE PRESENCE IN

MY BONDAGE AND MY FREEDOM

The intriguing sentence, "But to return, or rather, to begin..." in chapter three of Douglass' *My Bondage and My Freedom* suggests alternative ways in which this text can be valued in relation to the 1845 *Narrative*. On the one hand, "But to return, or rather, to begin", might be seen to validate the established critical opinion that *My Bondage and My Freedom* is a verbose and boring expansion of the first narrative. The sentence to which I have drawn attention signals Douglass' return in chapter three to the portrait of his mother which he began in chapter one. In these initial chapters of *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass has been seen to wander through his early childhood, indulging in nostalgic reminiscences with little interest in establishing the brisk narrative pace characteristic of the 1845 *Narrative*. The journey from slavery to freedom which structures and defines the first narrative, might be seen as diluted in the second narrative: apparently irrelevant information about Douglass' early childhood, sentimental reflections on boyhood in slavery, long commentaries moralising about slavery, and a loose collection of incidents in freedom, as well as appended speeches, all but ruin the bold and brutal loner's world of 1845. Thus, from the conventional critical perspective, "But to return, or rather, to begin", signals ^{the} poor literary practice of a self-indulgent narrator. In *To Tell A Free Story*, where this conventional approach is discussed, William Andrews tells us that

only one critic has thus far taken the time to evaluate the [1845] *Narrative* in light of *My Bondage and My Freedom* [1855]... and his conclusion is that after the "excellence" of the *Narrative*, we find only "declining literary merit" in the efforts of 1855 and thereafter... James Matlock argues that *My Bondage and My Freedom* "is diffused

and attenuated by an enormously loosened sense of structure and stylistic control". He dismisses the book with the epithets of a cursory, impressionistic reading. *My Bondage and My Freedom* isn't "taut and crisp"; "its pace lags"; its narration is "rambling"; its rhetoric is "puffy"; "there is no punch to it". Such a commentary would scarcely be worth noting here but for what it suggests about the privileged status that the *Narrative* may be assuming as the paradigm by which everything else Douglass wrote is now being measured (1)

In previous chapters I have suggested that the "privileged status" of the 1845 *Narrative* has limited our appreciation of the work's subtler features, for example the treatment of "the slave's wild songs" which I discussed at length in chapter two, and will comment on again in this chapter. Furthermore, because the 1845 *Narrative* is viewed as the sacred text of the slave narrative tradition, our understanding of that tradition is at risk of being reduced to a list of ingredients which match the "taut and crisp excellence" of the 1845 *Narrative*. As Andrews recognises,

When Matlock complains that "the terseness so appropriate to describing life under ^{the} hardships of bondage" has been squandered in the "complex and sloppy" sentence structure of *My Bondage and My Freedom*, [Matlock] assigns moral and political as well as literary correctness to only one of the many stylistic devices Douglass exploits in the *Narrative* (2)

Andrews' comment is relevant to a wider consideration of slave narrative, since the assignment of "moral and political as well as literary correctness" to slave narrative has consistently privileged some slave voices, specifically that of the 1845 Douglass, while marginalising others, such as eighteenth century and female slave narrators. Up to Andrews' treatments of *My Bondage and My Freedom*, the critical neglect of this text demonstrates the unfortunate consequence of accepting the picaresque as dominant in slave narrative: the text which does not conform to this expectation is rejected or simply ignored. Like much women's, and in particular black women's, writing, *My Bondage and My Freedom* has for too long been rendered invisible. As we have seen in chapter five, and shall explore further in this chapter, *My Bondage and My Freedom* shares qualities of Equiano's and Jacobs' narratives which are only hinted at in the 1845 *Narrative*, in particular the importance of home and community prior to, as well as in, slavery and freedom. It has been established in the slave narratives under discussion in this study, that apparently "complex and sloppy" sentences may signal something quite other than poor writing, providing a

glimpse behind the picaresque mask of deference, innocence, or mock ignorance, and suggesting the limitation of strategic voice at the tenuous boundary between disclosure, and suppression of what is too painful to tell. Like Equiano's and Jacobs' narratives, *My Bondage and My Freedom* challenges long-standing critical convention, but *My Bondage and My Freedom* does so in a much more immediate way, since it is written by the author of the most famous and influential slave's "Word" on slavery, and can be seen to challenge and revise the "textual temple" that is the 1845 autobiography:

To Matlock, the 1845 *Narrative* was the first and final Word, whose purity Douglass could never restore as he wearily ground out his later memoirs. Matlock is appalled to discover the desecration of the textual temple of 1845 throughout the revisions of 1855... Next to the *Narrative's* pristine leanness of phrase and tone of "righteous anger", *My Bondage and My Freedom* can only be rated a tired and "flabby" sequel that supplements the original text with "verbiage" that only "stretches out" and "dilutes" that good"old material from the *Narrative* (3)

Andrews declares that "it is time to rethink [conventional] assumptions and to ask, if the second autobiography can be seen as the successor of the first, why can't the *Narrative* be examined as the precursor of *My Bondage and My Freedom*?". If we accept the new relationship between Douglass' first and second autobiographies that Andrews encourages us to pursue, then the sentence, "But to return, or rather, to begin", can be seen to suggest the complex autobiographical process of simultaneously returning to and revising the story of Douglass' life. It is a process explored in fictional narratives of slavery by Toni Morrison in *Beloved* and Sherley Anne Williams in *Dessa Rose*, as I pointed out in chapter four of this study, quoting Deborah McDowell: "like so many Afro-American novels, *Dessa Rose* [and *Beloved*] links getting 'beyond' slavery to remembering it, paradoxically burying it and bearing it" (4). I think this process of rememory is evident in Douglass' second autobiography, made apparent, as I hope to show, by calling attention to point of view. Rememory as point of view will be examined in this chapter in relation to the restoration and revision of female presence in *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Andrews' introduction to this text argues that "Douglass probed the dynamics of love, authority and power in almost all of the major relationships of his life, particularly those involving father figures" (5). My emphasis on maternal figures brings to the fore the importance of women in Douglass' early life, and the link between female presence and the "fraternal community", as Andrews

defines it, which Douglass poses as an ideal of Afro-American community in *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Andrews recognises that his introductory discussion "can only outline Douglass' psychological struggles after leaving his first home" (6), while this chapter focuses on that early home and looks in more detail at women such as Douglass' mother, about whom Andrews has little to say.

As Andrews observes, "*My Bondage and My Freedom* was not designed to serve as merely an updated second instalment of the *Narrative*. In its tone, structure and dominant metaphors, the new book represents a thoughtful revised reading of the meaning of Douglass' life... *My Bondage and My Freedom*... is bigger, roomier, more detailed, and more expository, befitting the more reflective mood of its author in 1855" (7). Like the wide parameters of Equiano's life and travels, *My Bondage and My Freedom* occupies a more expansive geographical space than the terrain of the 1845 journey from (Southern) slavery to (Northern) freedom. Douglass' references to the Western American frontier, and to Britain, show the extent of his travels and the larger landscape of his experiences in freedom after 1845. Describing the "slaves' wild songs" in 1855, Douglass recalls that "I^{had} never heard any songs like those anywhere since I left slavery, except when in Ireland. There I heard the same *wailing notes*, and was much affected by them. It was during the famine of 1845- 6" (65/1855). Douglass did not travel to Africa, but the many references in *My Bondage and My Freedom* to Africa, and to "genuine Africans" such as Sandy Jenkins, suggests he travelled to Africa in his mind, rooting his 1855 protagonist, and black people in general, in a larger historical landscape. As I have argued, the 1845 *Narrative* only hints at this community reality in slavery, through the treatment of slave song, and the presence of brother slaves such as Jenkins, whom Douglass recalls in both autobiographies with great affection. Throughout *My Bondage and My Freedom* frequent echoes of great works of literature, particularly *Hamlet*, suggest an expanded and enriched intellect, further borne out by evidence of the literary content of Douglass' newspaper (8). This more expansive geographical and intellectual terrain suggests that *My Bondage and My Freedom* displaces freedom and independence as the "consuming goals in life", as Andrews points out: "before the ideal of freedom had infused [Douglass'] consciousness, his heart had been profoundly touched by hunger for a home" (9). Like Jacobs' and Equiano's narratives, in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass establishes the importance of his roots in family and the black community. In the 1845

Narrative, the alienation of Douglass' early years, communicated through images of brutalised black women, and through a sketchy account of parentage, is re-figured in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, a process set in motion in chapter one, the account of Douglass' early childhood with his grandmother, Betsy Baily.

Chapter one of *My Bondage and My Freedom* indicates a shift in self-perception which calls into question the image of the male slave as picaro, accepted by many critics as representative of Douglass as slave narrator. It is of more than anecdotal interest that the sentence, "But to return, or rather, to begin", makes good Douglass' promise in chapter one to provide the reader (and himself) with the *presence* of his mother in the revised story of his life. In the process of fulfilling his promise to the reader, Douglass returns in his mind to the silent space of the 1845 *Narrative* signifying lack of maternal affection and connection and, in 1855, brings the maternal realm to life. Throughout *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass can be seen to encourage his reader to appreciate childhood in a way that he perhaps came to value his own childhood as a special and formative period of his life, through the process of restoring central maternal figures to his autobiography. In chapter one, Douglass establishes the importance of childhood as a basic human state of "wild freedom", and as a specific time in his own life over which "dark clouds hung", but which was, in the main, as happy as any white boy's childhood. In the opening pages of Douglass' story, we are immediately reminded of Jacobs' characterisation of her childhood as a sunny realm in *Incidents*, and of Equiano's childhood, in Essaka as well as on board ships as a young personal slave. Douglass writes, "The sorrows of childhood, like the pleasures of after life, are transient. It is not even within the power of slavery to write *indelible* sorrow, at a single dash, over the heart of a child" (p. 31/1855). Douglass dramatises the experience of slavery through the child's eye view in much the same way that Equiano recreates his innocent perspective early in his narrative. Douglass repeatedly refers to his own "boyish vision" in the early chapters of *My Bondage and My Freedom*, and writes, "children have their sorrows, as well as men and women; and it would be well to remember this in our dealings with them" (p. 30/1855). Such comments probably disappoint critics anticipating the "pristine leanness" of the 1845 account, since reflections such as these are frequent and often lengthy. I think they are significant indications of Douglass' process of rememory, revealing to the reader a narrator self-consciously re-visioning his life. Douglass is adept at dramatising the child's eye view, for example, his lovely description

of features of his grandparent's cabin where he spent the first five years of his life. Douglass recalls that

The dwelling of my grandmother and grandfather had few pretensions... To my child's eye, however, it was a noble structure... A few rough, Virginia fence-rails, flung loosely over the rafters above, answered the triple purpose of floors, ceilings and bedsteads. To be sure, this upper apartment was reached only by a ladder-- but what in this world could be better for climbing than a ladder? To me, this ladder was really a high invention, and possessed a sort of charm as I played with delight upon the rounds of it (p. 29/1855)

Douglass closes the first chapter of *My Bondage and My Freedom* with the reflection that "he is, for the most part of the first eight years of his life, a spirited, joyous, uproarious, and happy boy, upon whom troubles fall only like water on a duck's back. And such a boy, as far as I can now remember, was the boy whose life in slavery I am now narrating" (p. 32/1855). A comment such as this, particularly the shift into third person point of view, suggests that Douglass' return to his childhood helped establish in his own mind the importance of point of view, as narrative stance as well as theme, in his second autobiography, as I hope to show. When Douglass is moved from his grandmother's home to the Lloyd plantation, the child's eye view dominates throughout the chapter, as he shows his reader the "almost Edenic beauty" and opulence of "The Great House" and its' surroundings: "They occupied [the Great House]; I enjoyed it... It was a treat to my young and gradually opening mind, to behold this elaborate exhibition of wealth, power and vanity" (p. 47/1855). Douglass reflects on his boyhood friend Daniel Lloyd-- in terms strikingly similar to Equiano's account of his attachment to Dick Baker-- and then shifts into present tense observation; Douglass writes, "the equality of nature is strongly asserted in childhood, and childhood requires children for its associates. Color makes no difference with a child" (p. 53/1855). Just prior to leaving the Lloyd plantation for Baltimore, Douglass dramatises a contemplative face of childhood: "I used to contrast my condition with the black birds, in whose wild and sweet songs I fancied them so happy! There are thoughtful days in ^{the} lives of children-- at least there were in mine" (p. 85/1855). When Douglass leaves for Baltimore, the mood and image he creates strongly echo Equiano's familiar place aboard ships, and Equiano's 'off shore' point of view. The passage below is perhaps the most explicit example of the link between the importance of establishing the self as child and point of view, an act which both grounds and empowers the adult narrator as self-conscious self-creator:

We sailed out of Miles River for Baltimore early on a Saturday morning... After taking this last view [of Col.Lloyd's plantation], I quitted the quarter deck, made my way to the bow of the sloop, and spent the remainder of the day in looking ahead; interesting myself in what was in the distance, rather than what was near or behind. The vessels, sweeping along the bay, were very interesting objects. The broad bay opened like a shoreless ocean on my boyish vision, filling me with wonder and admiration (p. 87/1855)

While this chapter cannot begin to reveal the extent or significance of childhood as a major theme in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, its importance is unquestionable, not least because of the comparative possibilities which emerge with other slave narratives such as Equiano's autobiography and, in particular, *Incidents*, where childhood and motherhood are interdependent themes in Jacobs' life. Childhood in slave narrative has emerged in this study as a significant and virtually unexplored theme which deserves critical attention.

Until the age of five, Douglass' life as presented in *My Bondage and My Freedom* is like that of Jacobs who was, before the age of six, "so fondly shielded that I never dreamed I was a piece of merchandise, trusted to [her parents] for safe keeping, and liable to be demanded of them at any moment" (p. 5). The image which best conveys childhood as significant to Douglass' autobiographical 're-birth', is that of the sweet potato seedling nurtured and protected by Betsy Baily, Douglass' maternal grandmother. Betsy Baily is virtually absent from the 1845 *Narrative*, as is Douglass' early childhood in Tuckahoe, Maryland. When Jacobs writes, "I had also ^{great} a treasure in my maternal grandmother who was a remarkable woman in many respects" (p. 5), one might imagine Douglass introducing his reader to Betsy Baily with precisely the same words. The sweet potato seedling also brings into focus all the qualities with which Douglass characterises his grandmother as a respected, wise, skilful woman, whose power of nurture is close to miraculous and, as such, is similar to the powers of the "genuine African", Sandy Jenkins, a "conjure man" who, as we shall see, also is able to work with the natural environment to ensure that vulnerable life is safe and may "flourish":

my grandmother, especially, was held in high esteem, far higher than is the lot of most colored persons in the slave states. She was a good nurse, and a capital hand at making nets for catching shad and herring; and these nets were in great demand, not only in Tuckahoe, but [in]... neighboring villages. I have known her to be in the water half the day. Grandma was likewise more provident than most of her neighbors in the preservation of seedling sweet potatoes, and it

happened to her... to enjoy the reputation of having been born to "good luck". Her "good luck" was owing to the exceeding care which she took in preventing the succulent root from getting bruised in the digging, and in placing it beyond the reach of frost, by actually burying it under the hearth of the cabin during the winter months. In the time of planting sweet potatoes "Grandmother Betty", as she was familiarly called, was sent for in all directions, simply to place the seedling potatoes in the hills; for superstition had it that, if "Grandmamma Betty but touches them at planting, they will be sure to grow and flourish". This high reputation was full of advantage to her, and to ~~the~~ children around her (p. 28-9/1855)

Douglass' connection to his grandmother is "full of advantage". Like the seedling sweet potato, Douglass will flourish and grow, despite the less than conducive environment of Tuckahoe, Maryland, "a small district of country, thinly populated and remarkable for nothing that I know of more than the worn out, sandy, desert-like appearance of its soil, the general dilapidation of its farms and fences, the indigent and spiritless character of its inhabitants, and the prevalence of ague and fever" (p. 27/1855). Tuckahoe does not appear conducive to living things establishing roots and growing, but Betsy Baily is able to ensure that even the most vulnerable seedlings do just that. She is able to do so because of her skills and strength, which establish her position of authority within ~~her~~ own family and ^{local} community, both of which are outside of the paternalistic web of slavery. Furthermore, Douglass tells us that he spent these early years with cousins, the sons and daughters of Betsy Baily's daughters. Douglass names his grandmother's daughters, drawing attention to the act of naming by capitalisation: "Their names were JENNY, ESTER, MILLY, PRISCILLA and HARRIET. The daughter last named was my mother, of whom the reader will learn more by-and-by" (p. 30/1855). Throughout *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass names his relatives, his boyhood friends, both black and white, influential adults, the slaves with whom he suffers tremendous hardship on Covey's farm, the brother slaves on Freeland's farm, as well as white people, many of whom are named as an act of exposure. The consistency with which Douglass names people in *My Bondage and My Freedom* is clearly an act of "genealogical revisionism", to return to Kimberly Benston's words (10).

In chapter one Douglass reflects that "Betsy Baily took delight in having [her grandchildren] around her, and in attending to their few wants"(p. 29/1855), much like Jacobs' grandmother. As an old women caring for her own grandchildren who will inevitably be taken from Tuckahoe to work as slaves

and possibly be torn from loved ones through sale, Betsy Baily, again like Jacobs' grandmother, knew all too well the vulnerability of the slave as child. When Douglass comments in chapter thirteen of *My Bondage and My Freedom* on the sudden re-location and sale of slaves, including himself and his grandmother, he examines the importance of *place* to the slave, directing his reader back to the first chapter of *My Bondage and My Freedom*, which establishes as essential family and community rooted in an actual place. In chapter thirteen, "The Vicissitudes of Slavery", Douglass reflects that, unlike "the people of the north, and free people generally", who "have less attachment to the places where they are born and brought up", and who enjoy the ability "to go and come, to be here and there", the slave "is pegged down to a single spot, and must take root here, or nowhere. The idea of removal elsewhere, comes, generally, in the shape of a threat", or punishment, and is "attended with fear and dread" (p. 111/1855). Douglass writes that the slaves' forced removal from the place where he has taken root "is like a living man going into the tomb, who, with open eyes, sees himself buried out of sight and hearing of wife, children and friends of kindred tie" (p. 111/1855). In being buried alive, Douglass renders a powerful image which bears a complex relationship to the image of the sweet potato seedling, readied for planting by the warm protection of the hearth, and which must be buried in order to grow. While both images draw on the idea of burial, "going into the tomb" conveys the experience of deracination which *up-roots* the slave who experiences social death when removed from the family and community. That death is all the more horrible because it is presented as consciously experienced, "with open eyes [he] sees himself buried...". Toni Morrison draws on precisely the same image of being buried alive in *Beloved*. Paul D is sold after his unsuccessful attempt to run away from Sweet Home with his fellow slaves, to whom he is bound in much the same ^{way} Douglass is to the Freeland farm slaves. In Alfred, Georgia, Paul D works with forty-five other men, chained together, doing hard labour. At night, they are put into "wooden boxes":

...he saw the ditches; the one thousand feet of earth-- five feet deep, five feet wide, into which wooden boxes had been fitted. A door of bars that you could lift on hinges like a cage opened to three walls and a roof of scrap lumber and red dirt. Two feet of it over his head; three feet of open trench in front of him with anything that crawled or scurried welcome to share that grave calling itself quarters (11)

Morrison also explores the cost of this social death, consciously experienced, in the recurrent image of suppressed emotion buried and locked in boxes that replace the heart as the seat of life-affirming emotion; for Paul D, it is the "tobacco tin lodged in his chest... nothing in this world could pry it open" (12).

Unlike Douglass' 1845 *Narrative* where the account of threatened deracination drives home the vicissitudes of slavery and reinforces an image of Douglass as isolated and insecure (13), in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, deracination takes on a deeper meaning because black families and the black community are established realities for slaves. The threat of being separated from "wife, children and friends of kindred tie", does not simply illustrate the evils of slavery, its sole purpose in the 1845 *Narrative*. Ten years later, Douglass is also concerned to dramatise the human cost, personally experienced, of such practices. Significantly, it is in chapter thirteen of *My Bondage and My Freedom* that Douglass chooses to transplant whole his 1845 description of his grandmother's fate. Douglass writes, "Ten years ago, while speaking of the state of things in our family, I used this language" (p. 112/1855), but the meaning of the passage is transformed in a context which has established Betsy Baily and her home as significant and representative of a communal, empowering dimension of slave experience. In 1845, the image of Betsy Baily-- no longer useful to her master, banished to a cabin in the woods and "welcome to the privilege of supporting herself there in perfect loneliness" (p. 113/1845)-- is a victim-image, essentially no different from the 1845 Aunt Hester; the fate of both women illustrates slavery as heartless and evil. In the 1845 *Narrative* there is virtually no emotional link between Douglass and his grandmother, whose sole appearance in the 1845 *Narrative* is described with inflated rhetoric and snatches of sentimental poetry (14). The act of literally deconstructing the 1845 text and weaving a section of it into the 1855 text is a bold act, simultaneously validating and redefining the figure of Betsy Baily, as sufferer of the vicissitudes of slavery and as beloved maternal protector, steeling her kin against such threats.

As suggested by the lovely description of the ladder-- "what in this world could be better for climbing?"-- Douglass seems to enjoy his autobiographical journey, and, as the child's eye view in the ladder and ship passages quoted earlier indicates, he seems to delight in the act of narration itself; ^{Douglass seems} to grasp, in a new way in 1855, the significance of the power to represent his own realities. The woods scene below can be seen as a device with which Douglass both shapes and

comments on his 1855 autobiographical journey. In chapter two, "The Author Removed From His First Home", we have the continuation of the story of Douglass' childhood focused upon his grandmother, and his separation from her. The passage below suggests that bondage not only refers to the experience of slavery, but also signifies a deeper and more enduring dependence upon the central loved one, Betsy Baily, to whom Douglass is bound as a ^{family} member:

The distance from Tuckahoe to Wye river-- where my old master lived-- was full twelve miles, and the walk was quite a severe test of the endurance of my young legs. The journey would have proved too severe for me, but that my dear old grandmother-- blessings on her memory!-- afforded occasional relief by "toting" me (as Marylanders have it) on her shoulder. My grandmother, though advanced in years-- as was evident from more than one gray hair, which peeped from between the ample and graceful folds of her newly-ironed bandanna turban-- was yet a woman of power and spirit. She was marvellously straight in figure, elastic and muscular. I seemed hardly to be a burden to her. She would have toted me further, but that I felt myself too much of a man to allow it, and insisted on walking. Releasing dear grandmamma from carrying me, did not make me altogether independent of her, when we happened to pass through portions of the somber woods which lay between Tuckahoe and Wye river. She often found me increasing the energy of my grip, and holding her clothing, lest something should come out of the woods and eat me up. Several old logs and stumps imposed upon me, and got themselves taken for wild beasts. I could see their legs, eyes, and ears, or I could see something like eyes, legs, and ears, till I got close enough to them to see that the eyes were knots washed white with rain, and the legs were broken limbs, and the ears, only ears owing to the point of view from which they were seen. Thus early I learned that the point of view from which a thing is viewed is of some importance (p. 35/1855)

At one level Douglass is dramatising the child's eye view, just as Equiano does in describing features of the slave ship, "cloth ^{upon} put the masts" and "this hollow place" to create an innocent perspective of the sails and hull of the ship which takes him from Africa. Douglass calls attention to his own youth, being "toted" by his grandmother when his "young legs" were tired, and to the typically child-like insistence upon autonomy, "I felt myself too much ^{of} a man... and insisted on walking". In particular Douglass evokes the imaginative responses of the child to an unfamiliar environment, tightly gripping his grandmother's hand and clothing when it seemed the woods would "eat me up". Equiano emphasises that the white men aboard ship are like creatures from the imagination who

might eat him up, but there is real danger represented by these "horrible creatures", which Equiano is able to convey at one level by the innocence of his perspective. By contrast, in the passage above, Douglass is safe in the charge of his maternal protector. He emphasises a gradual shift in innocent perspective which I would suggest signifies the process undergone by the narrator to bring into being *My Bondage and My Freedom*. As my italics suggest, in a single sentence which uses the comma and 'or', 'till', and the repetition of 'see' to brilliant effect, Douglass moves his reader from the child's reality of beasts in the woods, to the act of seeing what appear to be beasts, and finally to the power of point of view, assumed by the adult narrator, to create and revise this crucial scene foreshadowing separation from his beloved grandmother: " I *could see* their legs, eyes, and ears, *or I could see something like eyes, legs, and ears, till I got close enough to see* that the eyes were knots... and the legs were broken limbs, *and the ears, only ears owing to the point from which they were seen*" (p. 35/1855). This sentence may be seen as a camera lens held up to the reader's eye which Douglass focuses, adjusting the lens so that images come into view and are transformed by shifting perspective. Ultimately it is the *process of seeing* to which Douglass draws attention, making of the reader an active participant who recognises, like Douglass, the process of re-viewing and coming to terms with devastating loss. That lens is also turned on Douglass as narrator so that the reader observes Douglass in the self-conscious act of re-visioning himself: "thus early I learned that the point of view from which a thing is viewed is of some importance". The sentence embodies the life cycle, from innocence to self-conscious awareness, mirroring the journey from the writing of the 1845 *Narrative*, to the writing of *My Bondage and My Freedom*. As in the 1845 account of the slaves' songs, it is not simply *meaning* or interpretation of events upon which Douglass focuses; rather, it is the *interpretive process* of reassessing meaning which Douglass seeks to reveal.

I believe the attention which Douglass gives to point of view in chapter two is linked to his on-going process of rememory, of coming to terms ^{with} in this instance, the separation from his grandmother that the journey to Wye River made inevitable. In the passage under discussion, the careful and loving description of Betsy Baily--"more than one gray hair... peeped from between the ample and graceful folds of her newly-ironed bandanna turban"-- continues to establish a very specific maternal presence, not least of all because of the care she is described as having taken with her appearance (15). And we should not be

surprised to learn that, despite her age, she is a physically strong and supple woman; she would have to be to "be in the water half the day" (p. 28/1855) fishing with her nets, as Douglass records. This emotional bond establishes in *My Bondage and My Freedom* not only relationships absent from the 1845 *Narrative*, but also an emotional dimension of Douglass as narrator that does not emerge in the first autobiography. When Douglass writes "releasing dear grandmamma from carrying me, did not make me altogether independent of her", he acknowledges the persistence of a bond despite their separation. Whereas Andrews sees Douglass as virtually abandoned by his grandmother, who delivers him at the Wye River plantation of Col. Lloyd with no forewarning that he is never again to live with her at Tuckahoe, I think Douglass directs our interpretation of the event in a different way, through shifting point of view. Thus, ^{Douglass invites} the reader to see the depth of the emotional bond between the grandmother and child ^{in order} to deepen the alternative view point-- the child's sense of betrayal.

We might conclude that the act of narrating separation puts Douglass in the position to relieve his grandmother of the emotional burden of having delivered her grandson to "the envious, greedy, and treacherous hands of slavery" (p. 39/1855). In 1845, nothing is said of this journey through "the somber woods which lay between Tuckahoe and Wye river", or of separation from Betsy Baily. In 1855, Douglass is able to look back and comprehend that his loss was also his grandmother's loss: "Grandmamma looked sad. She was soon to lose another object of affection, as she had lost many before. I knew she was unhappy, and the shadow fell from her brow on me though I knew not the cause" (p. 35/1855). That Douglass' grandmother is strong and supple begins to take on a deeper meaning as Douglass recognises the emotional burden of inevitable separations which a slave woman endures. Undoubtedly the separation is the first and most painful betrayal at the hands of an adult loved one which Douglass suffers. Jacobs would "give anything to blot out that one great wrong", the betrayal of her beloved childhood mistress; features of Equiano's narrative suggest the on-going pain of rememory, and of coming to terms with betrayals by failed father figures; Douglass can be seen to be at yet another point in the process of coming to terms with enormously painful personal loss. Having been left at the Lloyd plantation by his grandmother, Douglass writes: "I had never been deceived before" and is "indignant that a trick had been played upon me in a matter so serious" (p. 36/1855). The

betrayal "was, in fact, my first introduction to the realities of slavery" (p. 37/1855). I disagree with Andrews' presentation of Betsy Baily as a kind of neutered father figure, the first of a number of otherwise male adults whose betrayals set in motion a process of ironic disillusionment for Douglass. I also disagree with Andrews' sole focus on the separation, rather than on the larger context in which it takes place, for that context not only includes the characterisation of Betsy Baily as distinct maternal presence, it also draws attention to point of view as a mechanism of rememory, allowing Douglass to face and come to terms with a painful loss. Andrews does not allow for the complex emotional bonds that the text has established between grandmother and child, which gives special significance to withholding voice as a response to the grandchild's potential suffering. So Andrews fails to consider that the separation is a revision of the 1845 *Narrative*. In the first autobiography, Douglass positions himself at "the blood stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery" (p. 51/1845) as a result of having witnessed Aunt Hester's whipping. In 1845, Hester represents not only the dominant image of women in the narrative, but also can be seen to represent the absence of maternal affection suffered by Douglass; he is a disempowered observer of female suffering, and in no positive way is he linked to maternal succour. It is the closeness of Douglass to Betsy Baily which is emphasised in 1855, establishing familial bonds prior to the realities of enslavement, as well as setting in motion the re-visioning of female presence. But Andrews only sees that Douglass³ "trusted grandmother, having hidden from him the reason why she had taken him away from home, left him without warning or explanation... He had believed implicitly in Betsy Baily, but she, the first authority figure in his life, had deceived him" (16). I suspect that a close reading of childhood as dominant theme in *My Bondage and My Freedom* would further reveal the inadequacies of Andrews' treatment of female presence. Andrews writes that "the reader of *My Bondage and My Freedom* cannot ignore... the genuine sense of loss that accompanied Douglass' repeated separation from or rejection of paternal (and sometimes maternal) authorities, from Betsy Baily to William Lloyd Garrison" (17), but the parenthetical 'maternal' suggests only a minor role for women in Andrews' reading of *My Bondage and My Freedom*. The woods passage from chapter two suggests that Douglass is able, as 'camera man', to arrive at a perspective from which that separation is bareable and bearable-- he can reveal/express a dimension of experience, the pain of which, in 1845, was perhaps so great that virtually nothing is said of Betsy Baily in the first narrative.

As I suggested in chapter five, female presence is more various and more significant in *My Bondage and My Freedom* than it is in the 1845 *Narrative*. Between the benign authority of Douglass' grandmother, Betsy Baily, and the evil power of the slave woman Aunt Katy, other slave women in *My Bondage and My Freedom* such as Aunt Ester (her name is Hester in the 1845 *Narrative*) and Nelly are presented in terms that emphasise will to resist despite the threat of brutalisation. In chapter five of this study I pointed to these "vigorous and spirited woman", severely constrained by circumstance, who nevertheless refuse, like Jacobs, to be dehumanised. In line with the significance I have attached to point of view in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass emphasises his position as observer in witnessing both Ester and Nelly being whipped. In the 1845 *Narrative* Douglass' position as disempowered observer draws attention to his isolation as I have argued, but in 1855 Ester is valued for continuing to see her black lover, despite the inevitable whipping which results. In the scene which presents Nelly fearlessly resisting the overseer, Douglass is, like Nelly's own children, active in the event. He does not intervene as do Nelly's children, but as narrator he is able to present the scene so that the reader comprehends her vigour and spirit: "I caught sight"; "when I first saw him"; "I expected to see"; "I watched" (p. 62-3/1855). Dramatically, the reader is led to watch the battle through Douglass', the narrator's, eye. Slave women such as Nelly and Ester do not emerge as prominent characters in either autobiography, but they are significant in the revision of female presence in *My Bondage and My Freedom*. In 1845 we learn of a slave girl named Henny who has been severely maimed as a result of falling into fire as a child. Her hands are so disfigured and disabled that she cannot use them. Henny is turned out by Thomas Auld, forced to fend for herself, because ^{she is} unable to work. In the 1845 *narrative*, Henny is presented as a doomed and pathetic victim of slavery, observed by, but not connected to, Douglass. In 1855, we learn that Henny is Douglass' cousin, a fact omitted in 1845. Furthermore, Henny is grounds for an argument between Thomas Auld, Douglass' owner, and Thomas' brother Hugh Auld, whom Douglass serves as domestic slave in Baltimore. Hugh Auld's refusal to take Henny into his service leads Thomas to cast her out, and to remove Douglass from Baltimore as an act of revenge. Douglass returns to Thomas Auld and soon finds himself 'leased' for one year to Covey the "nigger breaker" to be broken (18). Within six months of arriving at Covey's, Douglass' spirit is broken, his love of learning has faded and repeated beatings have weakened him. This baptism by fire at the hands of Covey further

links Douglass to his cousin Henny: Henny's fate sets in motion another passage of Douglass' life where Douglass, who may be fit and able, is, in reality, just as vulnerable as Henny. Douglass is little more than a fish trapped in a net whose destiny is not his own to determine. Similarly, Equiano presents himself as "sacrificed" by Pascal's new girl friend, treated as an object that is simply discarded on a jealous whim: "Thus was I sacrificed to the envy and resentment of this woman..." (I. 186). Minor characters such as Ester, Nelly and Henny are woven into the texture of *My Bondage and My Freedom*, and as such they give shape to a sense of community which is similar to the close knit black community of *Incidents*.

Like the positioning of Aunt Hester and Henny in the first autobiography, in the 1845 *Narrative* Douglass' mother's lonely walks at night to visit her son are a figure of separation dramatising the isolation of the slave child. Little can be gleaned about the character of Douglass' mother, whose function in the first narrative seems to confirm an image of the ^{mole slave} narrator as deracinated picaro-slave, as put forward by Nichols: "the slave narrators are neglected (often abandoned) children constantly subject to physical punishment and hounded by fear... They lose the capacity for love; the soul in them virtually dies" (19). Douglass writes in 1845 that "my mother and I were separated when I was but an infant-- before I knew her as my mother" (p. 48/1845), and that "I received the tidings of her death with much the same emotions I should have probably felt at the death of a stranger" (p. 49/1845). In both narratives Douglass describes his mother's nocturnal walks to visit him, but in the second autobiography, he includes the dangers that this journey entailed for ^{his mother,} Harriet Baily and, more significantly, he includes a vivid recollection of Harriet Baily *acting as mother*, nurturing and protecting her son. In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, we are given a portrait of Harriet Baily, as well as details about the outcome and consequence of Douglass' early separation from her, which simultaneously root the slave child in a maternal context, *and* illustrate the inhuman exploitation of female slaves. In chapter three, Douglass makes good his promise in chapter one to tell his reader more about his mother, the fifth daughter of Betsy Baily. He begins by establishing her physical presence: "But to return, or rather, to begin. My knowledge of my mother is very scanty, but very distinct. Her personal appearance and bearing are ineffaceably stamped upon my memory. She was tall, and finely proportion^{ed}; of deep black, glossy complexion; had regular features, and, among the other slaves, was remarkably sedate in her manners"

(p. 38/1855). We are left in no doubt about the place of Harriet Baily in her son's life--"yet I cannot say that I was very deeply attached to my mother; certainly not so deeply as I should have been had our relations in childhood been different" (p. 39/1855)-- but Douglass places the tenuous link between mother and son in a context that includes his grandmother, Betsy Baily: "The germs of affection with which the Almighty, in his wisdom and mercy, arm the helpless infant... had been directed in their growth towards that loving old grandmother, whose gentle hand and kind deportment it was the first effort of my infantile understanding to comprehend and appreciate" (p. 39/1855). In the passage below, the displacement of attachment from mother to grandmother is viewed in the context of general hardships unique to slave women. Significantly, he has no words to describe the empty space of maternal absence. Douglass' repeated reference to names on ledgers in his letter to Thomas Auld, discussed in chapter four, recurs below:

The slave-mother can be spared long enough from the field to endure all the bitterness of a mother's anguish, when it adds another name to a master's ledger, but *not* long enough to receive the joyous reward afforded by the intelligent smiles of her child. I never think of this terrible interference of slavery with my infantile affections...without feelings to which I can give no adequate expression (p. 39/1855)

By 1855 we learn that Douglass' mother was a woman such as Jacobs, willing to risk her life to protect her child, and capable of intervening on her child's behalf. The tyrannical Aunt Katy described in the passage below, is a most interesting figure in the terms set out by Andrews in *To Tell a Free Story*:

Aunt Katy's... freedom to "beat, as well as starve" [Douglass], regardless of the fact that she was only a slave like himself, attests to a pecking order in the slave quarters whose character and function the narrator of *My Bondage and My Freedom* is at some pains to bring to light...Aunt Katy exploits her position in the kitchen by "cramming" her own offspring with food, though it means "starving" little Fred and other black children who depend on her. Though in principle her master's slave with no right to deny other chattels in his property their sustenance, she behaves in fact more like his vassal (20)

The scene which Douglass describes below is "instructive as well as interesting" because it teaches the young slave boy that he was "somebody's child", despite apparently meaningless status in the world of Aunt Katy's kitchen and, by extension, the world of the Lloyd plantation, where "the slave boy found little to

call home" (21). Douglass remembers the scene below "very vividly, as affording a bright gleam of a mother's love, and the earnestness of a mother's care" (40):

The friendless and hungry boy, in his extremest need-- and when he did not dare to look for succour-- found himself in the strong, protecting arms of a mother; ^{a mother} who was, at the moment (being endowed with high powers of manner as well as matter) more than a match for all his enemies. I shall never forget the indescribable expression of her countenance, when I told her that I had had no food since morning; ^{and} that Aunt Katy said she "meant to starve the life out of me". There was pity in her glance at me, and a fiery indignation at Aunt Katy at the same time; and, while she took the corn from me, and gave me a large ginger cake, in its stead, she read Aunt Katy a lecture which she never forgot. My mother threatened her with complaining to old master on my behalf; for the latter, though harsh and cruel himself, did not sanction the meanness, injustice, partiality and oppressions enacted by Aunt Katy in the kitchen. That night I learned the fact, that I was not only a child, ^{but somebody's} child. The "sweet cake" my mother gave me was in the shape of a heart, with a rich dark ring glazed upon the edge of it. I was victorious, and well-off for the moment; prouder, on my mother's knee, than a king upon his throne (p. 41/1855)

Barbara Christian's exploration of motherhood in African and Afro-American societies recognises that "slave narratives of men, as well as women, stress the vital role their mothers played, through sacrifice, will and wisdom, to ensure the survival of their children" (22). Douglass' portrayal of his mother recalls the kind of images Jacobs cherished in her mind of her Aunt Nancy, her mother and her grandmother, and the kind of image Jacobs' own children must have cherished of their mother, who made dangerous, nocturnal walks to visit and comfort them. In the passage above, Douglass' mother takes on the stature of heroic slave mother despite infrequent contact with her son. Aunt Katy is, as Andrews demonstrates, interlinked in the complex "chains of privilege and obligation that linked slave to master and master to overlord" (23), but Aunt Katy can also be appreciated specifically in relation to other women in the text. Like Aunt Hester, Nelly, and Henny, Aunt Katy contributes to a more subtle and complex picture of interrelated black and white communities in slavery. Andrews points to Douglass' relationship to Lucretia, who becomes Mrs Thomas Auld, and the young boy Daniel Lloyd, son of the plantation owner, Colonel Lloyd, as examples of how Douglass learned at an early age to manipulate this complex web of power relations on the plantation. I believe the

relationships with Lucretia and Daniel are deeper than Andrews suggests. The passage below can be seen to substantiate my opinion. Douglass writes:

The reader will see that I now had two friends, both at important points-- Mas' Daniel at the great house, and Miss Lucretia at [Douglass' master's] home. From Mas' Daniel I got protection from the bigger boys; and from Miss Lucretia I got bread, by singing when I was hungry, and sympathy when I was abused by that termagant [Aunt Katy], who had the reins of government in the kitchen. For such friendship I felt deeply grateful, and bitter as are my recollections of slavery, I love to recall any instances of kindness, any sunbeams of humane treatment, which found way to my soul through the iron grating of my house of bondage. Such beams seem all the brighter from the general darkness into which they penetrate, and the impression they make is vividly distinct and beautiful (p. 84/1855)

Like Jacobs' letter to Ednah Cheney, quoted in chapter three, which foregrounds the *process of memory* as Jacobs recalls loved family members, Douglass tells us not only of his affection for Lucretia and Daniel, *he* also emphasises the pleasure of remembering them. Drawing on images of light and dark similar to those which Douglass uses above, Jacobs writes "I love to sit here and think of them. They have made the few sunny spots in that dark life sacred to me" (p. 249). In chapters seven through nine of *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass repeatedly stresses that Daniel is his friend, relied upon as a protector who mediates between Douglass and the *great house*. "In Mas' Daniel I had a friend at court, from whom I learned many things which my eager curiosity was excited to know" (p. 72/1855). Both Douglass and Daniel are liminal figures as children in the structured world of slavery. Their friendship is strongly reminiscent of Equiano's friendship with Dick Baker, "a kind interpreter, an agreeable companion, and a faithful friend" (I. 99). When Lucretia nurses Douglass' wounds inflicted by Aunt Katy, Douglass recalls that "the balsam was not more healing to the wound in my head, than her kindness was healing to the wounds in my spirit, made by the unfeeling words of Aunt Katy. After this, Miss Lucretia was my friend" (p. 84/1855). Douglass' mother and Lucretia Auld are both presented as protectors of young Fred against "that termagant" in the kitchen, Aunt Katy. In both examples of maternal succour, Douglass reveals a depth of emotional need absent from the 1845 *Narrative*. When Douglass returns to Baltimore after his ill-fated attempt to run away from the Freeland farm, he is severely beaten by white workers at the shipyard where he is learning to be a caulker. The scene in which Sophia Auld nurses Douglass' wounds--

"No mother's hand could have been more tender than hers" (p. 191/1855)-- repeats the pattern of women acting as nurturers of Douglass' physical and emotional needs. Sophia Auld is "like a mother" to Douglass, while Lucretia is described as "only second in my regard to [Sophia] Auld" (p. 112/1855).

It is important to note that Douglass does not mask or ignore the painful realities of loss signified by separation from, or absence of, maternal figures. For example, Douglass renders his mother through a portrait metaphor which simultaneously establishes Harriet Baily's presence, and defines the limits of her presence. Douglass presents his mother as a text-book image which is personally significant but inaccessible, a partial, disembodied figure which is 'mother' only through an act of imaginative longing:

There is in *Pritchard's Natural History of Man*, the head of a figure-- on page 157-- the features of which so resemble those of my mother, that I often recur to it with something of the feeling which I suppose others experience when looking upon the pictures of dear departed ones (p. 39/1855)

I would suggest that the narrative process of creating Harriet Baily's image enacts the bonding of mother and son which could not happen naturally, since their relationship was disrupted by slavery, and cut short by Harriet's death:

It has been a life-long, standing grief to me, that I knew so little of my mother; and that I was so early separated from her. The counsels of her love must have been beneficial to me. The side view of her face is imaged on my memory, and I take few steps in life, without feeling her presence; but the image is mute, and I have no striking words of her's treasured up (p. 41-2/1855)

By restoring Harriet Baily to the story of his life, Douglass provides the "striking words" which give his mother significance ~~presence~~ in the present, despite the silence of her presence in the past. Douglass writes that slavery "converted the mother that bore me into a myth" (p. 43/1855), but through restoring her presence to his second autobiography, Douglass is able to at least partially re-establish a mother-son bond, and recognise the significance of Harriet Baily's brief presence in his life. The use of the portrait metaphor, and treating maternal absence as silence, takes on greater significance when Douglass reveals that his mother was literate. Harriet Baily becomes the ancestral ground in which Douglass roots his love of learning, like the place beneath the Tuckahoe hearth where grandmother buries the sweet potato seedling. Both Betsy and Harriet Baily are shown in *My Bondage and My Freedom* to be remarkable

women of "native genius" whose abilities and achievements are extraordinary despite the unpromising environment of Tuckahoe:

I learned after my mother's death, that she could read, and that she was the *only* one of all the slaves and colored people in Tuckahoe who enjoyed that advantage. How she acquired this knowledge, I know not, for Tuckahoe is the last place in the world where she would be apt to find facilities for learning. I can, therefore, fondly and proudly ascribe to her an earnest love of knowledge. That a "field hand" should learn to read, in any slave state, is remarkable; but the achievement of my mother, considering the place, was very extraordinary; and, in view of that fact, I am quite willing, and even happy, to attribute any love of letters I possess... to the native genius of my sable, unprotected, and uncultivated *mother* (p. 42/1855)

In chapter seventeen, Douglass is at his lowest point following a brutal beating by Covey, but he proudly assumes his mother's distinctive position as the only literate slave in the region, a link between mother and son which Douglass encourages us to recognise by italicising *only* and *now*: "although I was hated by Covey and ^{by} my master [Thomas Auld], I was loved by the colored people, because *they* thought I was hated for my knowledge, and persecuted because I was feared. I was the *only* slave *now* in that region who could read and write" (p. 146/1855).

With his love of knowledge rooted in his mother, his achievement of literacy began to bloom under the guidance of his Baltimore Mistress, Sophia Auld: "I had been treated as a *pig* on the plantation; I was treated as a child now... I therefore soon learned to regard [Sophia Auld] as something more akin to a mother, than a slaveholding mistress" (p. 90/1855). In the 1845 *Narrative*, Douglass stresses conflict with Hugh Auld when Hugh's wife Sophia is made to discontinue Douglass' reading lessons: "what he most dreaded, that I most desired. What he most loved, that I most hated. That which to him ^{was} a great evil, to be carefully shunned, was to me a great good, to be deliberately sought..." (p. 79/1845). In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, the conflict which Douglass' reading lessons precipitates is more finely drawn. Douglass can be seen to liberate himself from Olney's triangular relationship: in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, literacy is not presented simply as a power struggle along racial lines between the black (male) slave and white patriarchal society, played out in the public arena of abolition. Douglass' love of knowledge rooted in Harriet Bailly precedes his achievement of reading and writing, skills which a white woman, as well as children such as the Baltimore boys, help make possible. Unlike the 1845 account where Hugh Auld is the central character of interest in the male

battle for literacy linked to freedom, in the 1855 account of learning to read, Sophia Auld is the primary focus:

I frankly asked her to teach me to read; and, without hesitation, the dear woman began the task, and very soon, by her assistance, I was master of the alphabet, and could spell words of three or four letters. My mistress seemed almost as proud of my progress, as if I had been her own child; and supposing that her husband would be^{as} well pleased, she made no secret of what she was doing for me (p. 92/1855)

When Auld forbids his wife from further instructing Douglass, he sets in motion the dissolution of the bond between "Young Freddie" and Sophia Auld:

If dear Tommy was exalted to a place on his mother's knee, 'Feddy' was honored by a place at his mother's side. Nor did he lack the caressing strokes of her gentle hand, to convince him that, though *motherless*, he was not friendless... Tommy and I, and his mother, got on swimmingly together, for a time. I say *for a time*, because the fatal poison of irresponsible power, and the natural influence of slavery customs, were not long in making a suitable impression on the gentle and loving disposition of my excellent mistress (p. 91-2/1855)

Jacobs dramatises the patriarchal power of the written word personally experienced through Dr Flint's foul notes; in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass dramatises the same patriarchal will to dominate and control when he describes the events which brought to an end his reading lessons under the instruction of Sophia Auld: "Master Hugh was amazed at the simplicity of his spouse, and, probably for the first time, he unfolded to her the true philosophy of slavery, and the peculiar rules necessary to be observed by masters and mistresses... Mrs Auld evidently felt the force of his remarks; and, like an obedient wife, began to shape her course in the direction indicated by her husband" (p. 92-3/1855). As the embodiment of patriarchal slavery, Hugh Auld is shown to put people in their place so that the drama of slavery may be acted out properly, according to the written and unwritten Southern code of practice which defines the drama and the roles of the actors-- black, white, male and female. It is precisely these roles assigned on the basis of race and gender which *Dessa Rose* explores and recasts. Douglass' relationship to Sophia Auld, and to her son Tommy, changes dramatically over time, so that both Sophia and Tommy ultimately are taught to see Douglass, in racial terms, as inferior; they each learn the meaning of 'slave' and adopt the proper role in relation to that designated 'type'. As I pointed out in chapter two, Douglass resents that he

"could grow... but must remain, all my life, a minor-- a mere boy" , while Tommy "could grow and become a MAN" (p. 187/1855). Douglass regrets that Tommy's journey to manhood inevitably teaches him to see Douglass in diminished terms, no longer as the "half- brother" of his youth: "the time had come when [Tommy's] *friend* must become his *slave*" (p. 186/1855). Sophia is eventually taught by her husband to see Douglass as slave, and to see her self as mistress , though Douglass is grateful to find that "her affectionate heart was not yet dead, though much hardened by time and by circumstances" (p. 191/1855), when Sophia nurses him following the brutal shipyard beating. The significance of women and children to Douglass' achievement of literacy is obscured by Andrews' focus on male conflict in his introduction to *My Bondage and My Freedom*, but in the more detailed textual analysis in *To Tell a Free Story*, Andrews' reading of the lesson Douglass ultimately learns from Hugh Auld's intervention is sensitive to the maternal:

[Young] Fred realises that knowledge and the expanded awareness that accompanies it constitute "the direct pathway from slavery to freedom". It also becomes clear to the boy that this pathway to knowledge leads diametrically away from home... It was not in the boy's nature to spurn his petted status under Sophia Auld and, by defying the paternal edict, to be cast out of yet another maternal Eden, as it were, for the forbidden fruit of knowledge. The more light that reading cast on his consciousness, the more distressed and tormented the black boy became. "Too thoughtful to be happy", Douglass says that he "almost envied [his] fellow slaves their stupid contentment". They remained inside the circle of unconscious contentment that paternalism reserved for any slave who was willing to accept that as his home. Young Frederick had taken his first willed step outside (24).

From this "first willed step outside", to his split from William Lloyd Garrison, Douglass' life as presented in *My Bondage and My Freedom* substantiates Andrews' reading of a series of male conflicts which lead Douglass from "the prisons of both individualism and authoritarianism" to "a truly communal Afro-American home" (25). Following the gradual but inevitable estrangement between Douglass and Sophia, Douglass' life becomes increasingly insecure, a measure, perhaps, of the distance which slavery has imposed between Douglass, on the verge of manhood, and his childhood in Tuckahoe. The drama of Douglass' journey from Baltimore, through "hell" at Covey's farm, the "heaven" of Freeland's farm, and ultimately to freedom, is played out among other men. Douglass' conversion to Christianity, shortly after the abrupt end

put to his reading lessons, is facilitated by a wise old black man, "Uncle Lawson", in my mind the first father figure to emerge as significant in *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Two other men, the white Mr. Covey who almost kills Douglass, and Sandy Jenkins, the black "conjure man" who enables Douglass to defend himself against Covey, are significant at a crucial transitional point in Douglass' life; the predominantly male community at Freeland's farm is the 'hot-house' in which the "vulnerable seedling" establishes itself as leader and teacher. The male orientation of this period of Douglass' life is reinforced by Douglass' self-presentation as picaresque disrupter and trouble-maker (26). Andrews is correct to point out that

the repeated ironic reversals in [Douglass'] quest for freedom had taught him the primary necessity of distinguishing between true and false community as the basis upon which real as opposed to delusory freedom depended. Thus, the pattern of his life in his second autobiography reflects his realisation that any ascendant Afro-American needed a communal anchor before he or she could attain a truly liberating identity as both an individual and as part of a larger social whole (27)

In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, the initial euphoria experienced by Douglass in New York as a newly self-emancipated fugitive, is quickly superseded by loneliness and desolation. Douglass observes "I was not only free from slavery, ^{but} I was free from home, as well" (p. 207/1855). In freedom, Douglass is disconnected from the supportive context of black friends in Baltimore, and prior to that, his brother slaves at Freeland's farm, but home cannot be seen only in terms of these fraternal contexts, as I hope this chapter establishes. The Sabbath schools can be seen rooted in maternal contexts: Betsy Baily's home, where she protected the "seedling", ensuring the promise of its potential; the miracle of Harriet Baily's ability to read; Sophia Auld and children such as "Mas' Daniel", Tommy, and the Baltimore boys, all of whom signify human possibility and potential unspoiled by slavery. Literacy is clearly rooted in an emotional as well as an intellectual realm, defined as much by a 'female' domestic orientation, as by a 'male' public orientation. I have argued, drawing on the image of the sweet potato seedling, that maternal relationships in *My Bondage and My Freedom* can be seen as a "communal anchor" absolutely crucial to Douglass' self-identification "both as an individual and as part of a larger social whole". Douglass' treatment of his maternal grandmother, his mother, white women whom he viewed as maternal figures, as well as spirited slave women often identified as aunts and cousins, are very much a part of the

"truly communal Afro-American home" imagined in *My Bondage and My Freedom*.

I am not arguing that the maternal displaces, or is more important than, the paternal or fraternal dynamic privileged by Andrews, but I think the identification of the maternal as significant in *My Bondage and My Freedom* makes problematic a reading which isolates and privileges dimensions of black community on the basis of gender. As I pointed out in chapter five, distinguishing texts on the basis of gender must be part of a larger critical endeavour which recognises, in McDowell's words, "countless thematic, stylistic, and imagistic parallels", and explores the ways in which "these commonalities are manifested differently in Black women's writing and the ways in which they coincide with writings by Black men" (28). Comparative textual analysis of *My Bondage and My Freedom* and *Incidents*, examples of which can be found throughout this study, reveals not only commonalities and differences, but also informs a new understanding of the relationship of the 1845 *Narrative* to the 1855 text. The maternal is distinct, but not isolated^{from} or necessarily more important than, the paternal and fraternal in *My Bondage and My Freedom*. The characterisation of important black father figures, and the treatment of the slaves' wild songs in *My Bondage and My freedom* demonstrate this.

Like Betsy Baily, "Uncle Lawson", whom Douglass also refers to as "Father Lawson", protects and guides Douglass. At a time in his life when Douglass is "distressed and tormented", Father Lawson provides a context of hope in which Douglass' newly acquired literacy skills can be rooted in a system of meaning and in meaningful activity. Lawson displaces a white preacher as source of religious instruction, substantiating Dixon's reading of the conversion of Christianity by slaves into a system of meaning that speaks directly to their own needs, both earthly and heavenly. Douglass writes that the Reverend of the Episcopal Method church, "Mr Waugh, [came] to our house, and gave me an opportunity to hear him exhort and pray. But my chief instructor, in matters of religion, was Uncle Lawson. He was my spiritual father; and I loved him intensely, and I was at his house every chance I got"(p. 106/1855). Below, the "intense love of knowledge" which Lawson "fanned... into a flame" suggests one way in which Harriet Baily remained a guiding presence in her son's life:

The good old man had told me, that "the Lord had a great work for me to do"; and I must prepare to do it; and that he had been shown that I must preach the gospel. His words made a deep impression on my mind, and I verily felt that some such work was before me, though I could not see *how* I should ever engage in its performance...The advise and suggestions of Uncle Lawson, were not without their influence on my character and destiny. He threw my thoughts into a channel from which they have never entirely diverged. He fanned my already intense love of knowledge into a flame, by assuring me that I was to be a useful man in the world (p. 106/1855)

As the black elder who envisages Douglass performing great and useful work, Lawson also can be seen to supplant William Lloyd Garrison as the adult male mentor who defines for Douglass the shape of his future and his role as race leader. When Douglass becomes teacher and leader of his brother slaves on Freeland's farm, he views himself as fulfilling Lawson's vision: "Father Lawson's solemn words, of what I ought to be, and might be, in the providence of God, had not fallen dead on my soul" (p. 168/1855). This is particularly clear when Douglass seeks to persuade his fellow slaves to run away with him: "The fact is, there I began my public speaking. I canvassed, with Henry and John [brother slaves at Freeland's farm], the subject of slavery, and dashed against it the condemning brand of God's eternal justice, which it every hour violates. My fellow servants were neither indifferent, dull nor inapt... 'Show us *how* the thing is to be done', said they, 'and all else is clear' " (p. 168/1855). Andrews' reading of Douglass as a Promethean figure at this point in the story, should be mentioned, since it is linked to Douglass' role as teacher and leader of his fellow slaves at Freeland's farm and, I believe, can be linked to maternal dimensions in *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Andrews quite correctly views Douglass as presenting "his reader with an image of himself as both savior and devil whose gospel threatens order throughout the plantation, whose leadership is shot through with the motives of hatred and the methods of violence, and whose unshakeable pride refuses to accept any status or seek any outside justification that conflicts with the desire of self" (29). Douglass calls attention to point of view in restoring and revising female presence in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, involving the reader in the process of constructing and deconstructing the characters and events of the autobiography. Similarly, "the promethean metaphor" involves the reader in the autobiographical act. The freedom Andrews identifies "to move back and forth across the margin" brings to my mind Douglass' use of point of view as a camera lens in "the woods

between Tuckahoe and Wye river", a magical place of transition, returned to, in order to begin again. Giving his reader the "choices... the black autobiographer traditionally had to make", we are encouraged to read Douglass in a way that James Matlock did not:

When he turns the savior inside-out to reveal the devil to us, he becomes another manifestation of the trickster, refusing to identify himself wholly or finally with either the insider or outsider but only with the freedom to move back and forth across the margin. There is no way to undo this Douglass-doubling short of making an arbitrary choice ourselves between the savior / satan alternatives that define the poles of interpretation of the Prometheus figure. In offering us this choice, Douglass turns the tables on his readers and gives them the same untenable choices between binary oppositions that the black autobiographer traditionally had to make... Not to accept Prometheus as ^{the} metaphor of Douglass' marginality during his transition from slave to freeman is to restrict the potential 'emergent meanings' of this very manoeuvrable figure... (30)

Similarly, not to accept the significance of the maternal drawn attention to through point of view in *My Bondage and My Freedom* as a significant revision of the 1845 *Narrative*, "is to restrict the potential emergent meanings" of the second autobiography.

Like Father Lawson, Sandy Jenkins is a father figure seen to assume roles in relation to Douglass as protector and guide first fulfilled by Betsy Baily, though as Andrews points out, "[Lawson] affiliates himself with the power of the Christian God and [Jenkins] with the potency of the African supernatural" (31). Douglass describes Sandy Jenkins as a well-known and respected figure in the black community, much like Betsy Baily. Jenkins is "a man as famous among the slaves of the neighborhood for his good nature, as for his good sense" (p. 146/1855). Like Betsy Baily, Sandy Jenkins has a special relationship with the natural world. He appears to perform miracles and is known and respected for doing so. Douglass provides more than one interpretation of Sandy's powers, just he gives two explanations for his grandmother's "good luck":

Grandma was likewise more provident than most of her neighbors in the preservation of seedling sweet potatoes, and it happened to her... to enjoy the reputation of having been born to "good luck". Her "good luck" was owing to the exceeding care which she took in preventing the succulent root from getting bruised in the digging, and in placing it beyond the reach of frost, by actually burying it under the hearth of the cabin during the winter months (p. 28-9/1855).

At one level, we see Douglass displacing "good luck" with skill to account for Betsy Baily's abilities, but if Douglass only intended to illustrate the skill, why mention the reputation of "good luck" at all? I think that Douglass intentionally provides his reader with alternative contexts of interpretation, and in the example of both his grandmother and Sandy Jenkins, the alternative context is rooted, like the slaves' songs, outside of the paternalistic web of slavery, in black slave community informed by African cultural practice. Douglass' account of fortuitously meeting Jenkins in the woods following Douglass' brutal beating by Covey is intriguing at a number of levels, particularly the double interpretations of Sandy and of his skills. In 1845, Jenkins is presented simply as superstitious, but in 1855 he is both a religious man and a conjurer: "I found Sandy an old adviser. He was not only a religious man, but he professed to believe in a system for which I have no name. He was a genuine African, and had inherited some of the so called magical powers, said to be possessed by African and eastern nations" (p. 146-7/1855). Like the deep meaning of the slaves' songs, Douglass has "no name" for the beliefs which Sandy holds. In the 1845 account, this ambiguity is dismissed in a footnote which assigns beliefs outside of a Christian framework to the realm of ignorant superstition. In 1855, ambiguity remains an essential characteristic of the encounter with Sandy and is emphasised by double meanings. To ensure that Douglass survives his return to Covey's farm, Jenkins gives Douglass a root with protective powers: "He told me that he could help me; that, in those very woods, there was an herb... possessing all the powers required for my protection" (p. 147/1855). The root is considered by Douglass in two religious contexts-- as part of an African system, and, in Christian terms, as sinful-- and it is also placed in contrasting contexts of the rational and the mysterious. In describing Jenkins' own description of the roots, Douglass writes, in parenthesis, "(I put his thoughts in my own words)", and develops the contrast between what is rationally understood and what is intuitively grasped on the basis of faith :

It was beneath one of my intelligence to countenance such dealings with the devil, as this power [of the root] implied. But, with all my book learning-- it was really precious little-- Sandy was more than a match for me. "My book learning had not kept Covey off", said Sandy (a powerful argument just then), and he entreated me, with flashing eyes, to try this (p. 147/1855)

Douglass presents a number of points of view of the root, and associates himself, in ambiguous terms, with Sandy: "I saw in Sandy too deep an insight into

human nature, with all his superstition, not to have some respect for his advise; and perhaps, too, a slight gleam or shadow of his superstition had fallen upon me" (p. 147-8/1855). Ironically, ambiguity remains the only 'fixed' quality of the root, and by extension, of Sandy. When Douglass returns to Covey's farm, he is amazed to be greeted by an apparently pacified Covey, and provides two explanations:

this extraordinary conduct of Covey, really made me begin to think that Sandy's herb had more virtue in it than I, in my pride, had been willing to allow; and, had the day been other than Sunday, I should have attributed Covey's altered manner solely to the magic power of the root. I suspected, however, that the *Sabbath*, and not the *root*, was the real explanation (p. 148/1855)

As in the description of Betsy Baily's "good luck", Douglass' own good luck is attributed not only to the rational, but^{also} to the possibilities of meaning outside of the rational. In this case, Douglass hints that swallowing his pride and accepting the wise counsel of an elder was important to his good fortune. When Covey does attempt to beat Douglass the following day, it is Douglass who beats Covey: "I now forgot my *roots* and *stood up in my own defence*"(p. 149/1855), with the tacit support of other slaves, Bill and Caroline, who refuse to help Covey subdue Douglass: "We were all in open rebellion, that morning" (p. 151/1855). In the battle, Douglass acts against his master and is supported by other slaves-- the root has been a catalyst enabling Douglass to reconnect with other black people so that he may assert himself against almost certain death at the hands of Covey. In looking back on the epic battle between himself and Covey, through which Douglass regains his self-respect and determination to pursue freedom, Douglass does not provide the reader with a rational explanation of how he was able to strike Covey without being publicly whipped as a consequence. Just as his explanation for Covey's pacifism on Sunday does not rely solely on the rational, neither does his explanation for his triumph over Covey: "the reader will be glad to know why, after I had so grievously offended My Covey, he did not have me taken in hand by the authorities...I confess, that the easy manner in which I got off, was, for a long time, a surprise to me, and I cannot, even now, fully explain the cause" (p. 152/1855). Douglass does "venture to suggest" that Covey did not pursue the matter in public because his reputation as a "nigger breaker" would hardly be enhanced if the community knew "he had been mastered by a boy of sixteen" (p. 152/1855), but the truth of this explanation in no way undermines the essentially mysterious, enabling power which Sandy represents.

Douglass' associations with both Betsy Baily and Sandy Jenkins are thus seen to be "full of advantage"; through respected black elders, Douglass is grounded in family and community and this renews Douglass' faith in himself, resurrected after six months of persecution at Covey's farm.

Father Lawson and Sandy Jenkins suggest the fluid boundary between the 'maternal' and fraternal in the world of *My Bondage and Freedom*. While both men undoubtedly are important father figures to Douglass, as black elders who teach Douglass ways of seeing and interpreting, they perform a function similar to that of women such as his grandmother and mother, Betsy and Harriet Baily. Black community is neither maternal nor fraternal, but both, informed as much by the ideals of a domestic haven such as that enjoyed by Douglass in his grandparents' Tuckahoe cabin, as it is by the ideal brotherhood enacted in the Sabbath schools where Douglass is teacher and leader of beloved brother slaves. As respected and powerful elders Betsy Baily, Father Lawson and Sandy Jenkins are as much African as they are American. Africa and African peoples in America are prominent in *My Bondage and My Freedom* and substantiate Gates' observation, quoted in chapter two, that "the full erasure of traces of cultures as splendid, as ancient and as shared by the slave traveler as the classic cultures of traditional West Africa would be extraordinarily difficult... Inadvertently, African slavery in the New World satisfied the preconditions for the emergence of a new culture, a truly Pan-African culture fashioned as a colourful weave of linguistic, institutional, metaphysical and formal threads" (32). In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass mentions African dialect (p. 52-3/1855) and he demonstrates the good manners of slaves and respect for elders (p. 49/1855). I have suggested that Betsy Baily and Sandy Jenkins can be seen as respected elders in touch with nature and able to work 'miracles'. Perhaps the most intriguing manifestation of the "colourful weave" that is Afro-American culture, is slave song, the expressed soul of black community and the fullest expression of the process of rememory in *My Bondage and my Freedom*.

CONCLUSION

Unlike the 1845 *Narrative*, in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass includes slave songs in the body of the text. Here, their presence might be seen to destroy the mystery of "the slaves' wild songs" conveyed so beautifully in 1845. In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, the words of slave songs are recorded in chapter

eighteen which describes the "jubilee beating" at Christmas, and song is present in chapter nineteen where the runaway plot of the Freeland slaves is described. Does the presence of the songs in *My Bondage and My Freedom* amount to nothing more than trivia in a boring, re-telling of Douglass' life? If the 1845 text is read as precursor to the 1855 text, then the mere presence of the words of the songs in *My Bondage and My Freedom* is significant, for Douglass is no longer "within the circle", essentially cut off from, though moved by, the slaves' song. By 1855 Douglass has become singer as well as listener, *creating* as participant in a collective, as well as *listening to and commenting on* black creative expression. Unlike the 1845 *Narrative* where Christmas festivities for slaves are described solely in terms of white exploitation of slave leisure-time, in 1855, "the fiddling, dancing and 'jubilee beating' was going on in all directions" (p. 155/1855). Douglass describes the instruments "played so easily" by the "performer [who] improvises as he beats, and sings his merry songs, so ordering the words as to have them fall pat with the movement of his hands" (p. 155/1855):

"We raise de wheat,
 Dey gib us de corn;
 We bake de bread,
 We sif de meal,
 De gib us de huss;
 We peal de meat,
 De gib us de skin,
 And dat's de way
 Dey takes us in.
 We skim de pot,
 Dey gib us de liquor,
 And say dat's good enough for nigger.

Walk over! walk over!
 Tom Butter and de fat;
 Poor nigger you can't get over dat;
 Walk over!" (155) (33)

One senses in the 1855 description of the jubilee beat an essentially picaresque performance, functioning in terms similar to those used by Mikhail Bakhtin to describe medieval European carnival: "as opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from prevailing truth and form of the established order... Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalised and completed" (34). In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, black

people are shown to set their own rhythm and their own pace: chapter eighteen describes the gross exploitation of slave culture, but unlike the 1845 account, the description of slave holidays is disrupted by the words of a slave song. The larger context in which the jubilee beat occurs is corrupted by the underlying objective of masters who encourage drunken, disorderly behaviour in order to create in the slaves disgust in the freedom of holiday respite. But the slaves' jubilee beat is not corrupted by the larger context of exploitation, as the words to the slaves' song, commenting on the white man's exploitation of black labour, demonstrates. The songs are sacred to those who sing and understand them, despite the fraudulent context of the jubilee beat, a slave celebration which is misunderstood by whites as a sign of contentment in slavery. Douglass comments on the song whose words he has set down, "this is not a bad summary of the palpable injustice and fraud of slavery" (p. 155/1855). In *Our Music is No Accident* (1988), Kalamu ya Salaam describes his own gradual process of realisation that jazz is sacred despite its superficial association with less than sacred contexts and activities:

At the core of our music, even under layers of filth and commercialization, there is a creative heartbeat that edifies and uplifts a sense of self and community, of talent and worth, of life. Even as it shakes and shimmies, does the funky butt, cocks its leg, flashes its breasts or grinds its pelvis, even then there is still, deep inside, something sacred happening in the music (35)

Like Douglass, Kalamu ya Salaam undergoes a journey from inability to hear his people's music-- "For a long time I, like many others, misunderstood the origins of what I heard"-- to realisation of the essential significance of black creative expression: "Our music is how we sound when we innovatively squeeze every ounce of joy we can out of the sorrow of neo-New Orleans slavery" (36). Like the jubilee beat during Christmas festivities, Douglass includes words of slave song in chapter nineteen where they embody the black community's ability to communicate covertly as Douglass' use of "double meaning" below, clearly suggests. Douglass describes himself and the men at Freeland's' farm as they anticipate their flight from slavery, calling attention to "double meaning" in songs which celebrate arrival in the promised land :

A keen observer might have detected in our repeated singing of

*"O, Canaan, sweet Canaan,
I am bound for the land of Canaan"*

something more than a hope of reaching heaven. We meant to reach the north-- and the north was our Canaan--

"I thought I heard them say,
There were lions in the way,
I don't expect to stay
Much longer here
Run to Jesus-- shun the danger--
I don't expect to stay
much longer here"

was a favourite air, and had a double meaning (170) (37)

Community becomes an active verb in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, just as Kalamu ya Salaam describes the present-day New Orleans black community gathering together to play and listen to jazz; "In the beginning, the music was all about hooking us up. Jazz was the shine and glue of all our social functions... Black folk would meet to community with each other, and all of our indigenous and essential communions involve our music" (38). By 1855, Douglass has accepted the slaves' wild songs as part of his life, his identity, his expressive heritage. Slave song becomes a metaphor of the autobiographical act, as Douglass returns to the magical wood to begin again the journey of his life. Sherley Anne Williams has observed that "until we [black Americans] know the blues... we will not know ourselves... [The blues] is a ritualized way of talking about ourselves and passing it on" (39). Thus, *My Bondage and My Freedom* is "much less static and situated", to return to McDaniel's description of personal narrative, than conventional assumptions about this text, and slave narrative generally, would have us believe. The limitations of Olney's rigid systematisation of slave narrative as a static artefact of a by-gone political/moral crusade, is once again evident when we consider the process of revision which Douglass brings into focus in *My Bondage and My Freedom*.^{This} process returns the famous fugitive to his life in slavery, and presents him with the opportunity to tell a story that is "neither this nor that, and yet is both": *My Bondage and My Freedom* will tell the same story as, and yet be different from, the first autobiography. While Douglass' 1845 and 1855 narratives are different from each other, both autobiographies meet the author's need, at different times in his life, to bring the past and present self "into some pattern of a coherent whole" (40). We see that Douglass, as narrator of *My Bondage and My Freedom*, took pleasure and interest in the *processes* of revision which restored his grandmother and his mother to the early chapters of his life and transformed the ways in which he viewed his life. In *My Bondage and My Freedom*,

Douglass is able to show us this process because he has gone beyond the initial, painful stages of rememory, where Toni Morrison positions her protagonist, Sethe in *Beloved*. Douglass is able to reveal the process of rememory in point of view and slave song because he has triumphed in the struggle of self-representation, a painful battle which structures the world of Sherley Anne Williams' protagonist Dessa Rose in her novel *Dessa Rose*.

We are... a nation of dancers, singers and poets

--Olaudah Equiano

I knew what I did, and I did it with deliberate calculation

--Harriet Jacobs

I was not only free from slavery, I was free from home as well

--Frederick Douglass

CHAPTER VII UNFINISHED JOURNEYS:

BELOVED AND DESSA ROSE

Two fictional narratives of slavery (1), *Dessa Rose* and *Beloved*, complete this study, *Unfinished Journey*⁵: *Narratives of Slavery from Olaudah Equiano to Toni Morrison*. As I have tried to demonstrate in previous chapters, both *Dessa Rose* and *Beloved* draw imaginatively on the slave narrative tradition, on at least two levels. At one level, slave narrative can be seen to contextualise *Beloved* and *Dessa Rose* by rooting these novels in a specific historical context, and by providing a precedent for 'storying' experiences of slavery from the point of view of slaves. Thus, the slave narrative, as historical and creative precedent, establishes a specific context informing both Sherley Anne Williams' use of competing narrative voices in *Dessa Rose*, and Toni Morrison's characteristic "spiral" narrative style, which conveys the trauma of rememory for the ex-slave. While at one level slave narrative provides historical and creative context for the novels, at another level, *Dessa Rose* and *Beloved* can be seen to comment on the slave narrative tradition. By focussing on the structure of *Dessa Rose* in this chapter, I hope to show the ways in which Sherley Anne Williams reveals her protagonist's journey to self-knowledge, and how that journey comments on a number of the themes and dilemmas which have emerged in this study as significant in slave narrative, particularly the primacy of the black community, and relationships both within the black community, and between it and dominant white society. As we shall see, *Beloved* also engages these dimensions of experience in slavery, but Morrison's characteristic narrative style

directs our attention to the impact of slavery, and her characters' responses to the trauma of slavery. While both *Dessa Rose* and *Beloved* focus specifically on female experience in slavery, and can thus be seen to challenge, in Deborah McDowell's words, the "sacred text" of slavery (2), we have seen in previous chapters of this study that the slave narrative tradition contains within it its own 'challenge', performed by eighteenth century and female narratives, usually marginalised in definitions of slave narrative. As I have argued, narrators such as Equiano and Jacobs cannot be fully accounted for within narrow critical parameters which establish as representative the nineteenth century male text of slavery. Also, we have observed in Douglass' *My Bondage and My Freedom*, the deconstruction of the sacred text of slavery as represented by Douglass' 1845 *Narrative*. In the context of this study then, both *Dessa Rose* and *Beloved* can be seen not only to challenge the "sacred text of slavery", but also to draw from, and validate, the wider parameters of the slave narrative tradition explored in this study.

Differences between *Dessa Rose* and *Beloved* are significant, despite their similarities contextualised in the slave narrative tradition. Linda Opyr observes that the "mythic dimension... sets [Toni Morrison's novels] apart from the novels of other black women" (3). What Margaret McDowell refers to in Morrison's work as the "sense of enlarged time, of myth, and of prophecy" (4), suggests a basis of difference between *Beloved* and *Dessa Rose*. In her interview with Claudia Tate, Sherley Anne Williams reflects on different themes she sees as characteristic of black men's and women's writing. Williams observes that Toni Morrison tries to treat both the "small themes-- the particular relationship", characteristic of black women's writing, and the "representative or ^{the} big themes", which Williams identifies with black male writers (5). In the Tate interview, Williams expressed doubt about "that whole mythic element in [Morrison's novels]... I think novels work best on the real, intimate level" (6). A more precise meaning of Williams' badly expressed opinion which privileges "the real, intimate level" will be made apparent by exploring the blues idiom in *Dessa Rose*. In my reading of *Dessa Rose*, I hope to make clear that Williams' preference for domestic detail and ^{the} "particular relationship" does not prevent her novel from working at a mythic level. Similarly, the "representative or big themes" which emerge as dominant in *Beloved* will be observed rooted in specific historical context, and given meaning through specific relationships and actions. Williams does not reject "that whole mythic element", and her

comments about Morrison's approach can be seen to illustrate artistic difference as a dimension of the treatments of slavery in *Beloved* and *Dessa Rose*. Williams appreciates the value of different artistic approaches, a perspective made clear in her expressed respect for other black women writers viewed as pioneers of "uncharted territory":

When I read Toni Morrison's and Alice Walker's novels, there is a sense of discovery, a sense that this is uncharted territory... It is their unique storytelling ability; it takes us somewhere in literature we may not have been before (7)

Artistic difference, as represented by contrasts between *Beloved* and *Dessa Rose*, suggests the tensions at the heart of slave narrative, between its outward, public thrust, and participation in a political/moral crusade, and its inward orientation, as a vehicle for expression of a personal, autobiographical journey. This tension does not describe a schizophrenic division at the heart of the slave narrative tradition, but rather, it affirms the liminality of slave narrative, "neither this nor that, and yet both" (8). By focussing on the structure of *Dessa Rose*, that novel can be seen to explore relationships brought into focus when the ex-slave becomes "a sharer in the general public discourse about slavery" (9). *Dessa Rose* also will be shown to accentuate and probe relationships brought into focus primarily in female dramas of slavery. By focussing on narrative technique in *Beloved*, the psychological and emotional trauma of rememory will be observed to bear witness to the complex emotional and psychological dramas which necessitate strategic voice in slave narrative, resulting in the profound importance of silence in slave narrative. My aim in concluding this study with readings of *Dessa Rose* and *Beloved* is not to quarantine these novels and isolate them on the basis of differences, any more than it is to simply demonstrate similarities as narratives of slavery. The salient differences between "the real, intimate level" of *Dessa Rose*, and the "timelessness" of *Beloved* are observed in this chapter, but so are marked similarities which also establish links between the novels and the slave narrative tradition.

As I made reference to in the discussion of slave song in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Sherley Anne Williams views the blues tradition as black creative presence and continuity in history. As such, the blues idiom brings into focus links with slave narrative that can be observed at number of levels in *Dessa Rose*. In the Tate interview, Sherley Anne Williams stated:

I use blues to refer to a body of continuous expression that encompasses popular Afro-American music, so that at any given time whatever is popular among black people can be found in that mass of songs and instrumentation. In blues there is some kind of philosophy, a way of looking at the world... The blues records of each decade explain something about the philosophical basis of our lives as black people. If we don't understand that as so-called intellectuals, then we don't really understand anything about ourselves. Blues is a basis of historical continuity for black people. It is a ritualized way of talking about ourselves and passing it on (10)

The blues idiom is a central dynamic shaping *Dessa Rose*. This can be observed in the use of dialect, slave song and intimate relationships in the novel, suggesting Williams' debt to her mentors, Zora Neale Hurston and the great blues singer, Bessie Smith (11). Dessa's journey from slavery to freedom, like those of Equiano, Douglass and Jacobs, is experienced at a number of levels: Dessa undergoes the physical journey from slavery to freedom, the events of which we discover through italicised flash-backs, and through the partial information conveyed by different narrators in the novel; Dessa also experiences an inner, contemplative, 'autobiographical' journey, looking back to the painful past and through that process, learning to live with, and articulate the past, and consequently the present; and, Dessa undergoes a rite of passage, and 'comes of age' as a woman, a journey linked to the resolution of conflicts between black and white women in slavery. It is the autobiographical journey which Dessa undergoes, and her rite of passage as a woman, which will be shown to convey mythic dimensions in *Dessa Rose*. As "a ritualised way of talking about ourselves and passing it on", the blues idiom enables Dessa by the end of the novel to transcend the specificity of her experience in slavery as a black woman. As in the narratives of Equiano, Jacobs and Douglass, Dessa's journey from slavery to freedom is rooted in a sustaining black community. The blues idiom grounds Dessa's multi-leveled journey, providing coherence and unity specifically in the realm of black community. For example, the novel, which opens with a Prologue, is initially set in the slave quarters where Dessa lives with her mother and siblings. The Prologue establishes the primacy of black community borne out in the novel, while the blues idiom identifies that community in specific terms. If we appreciate the mythic quality of music, particularly the way in which the blues has established and defined, since slavery, many of the black community's heroes, such as Bessie Smith, then we may observe that in specifying the black community, the blues idiom also provides a vehicle for transcending the particular as "a ritualized way of talking

about ourselves and passing it on". The first words of the Prologue, given below, are song fragments, interspersed with Dessa's thoughts. An intimate tone is established by the song which Kaine, Dessa's lover, sings, and by Dessa's response to hearing the song. One senses a close knit community in the jovial conversation among slaves which follows Kaine's arrival in the quarters. The love between Kaine and Dessa is made explicit at the end of the Prologue which describes their love making. The novel begins:

Someone...

"Hey, hey..."

coming down the Quarters.

"...sweet mamma."

Kaine, his voice high and clear as running water over a settled stream ^{bed,} swooping to her, through her... He walked the lane between the indifferently rowed cabins like he owned them...

"Say hey now, hey now--"

Even without the banjo banging against his back--she would have known him

"Dessa da'ling..." (p. 11)

Italicised sections of the novel, such as the Prologue, Epilogue and other sections within the main text, develop the events of Dessa's past and *contrast* with versions of Dessa's story put forward by a white male and a white female narrator, to be discussed. The division of the novel into clearly identifiable sections, denoting different voices, and signalling shifts from the past to the present, emerges as significant in relation to slave narrative. Through variation in type face, and the use of different narrators, Williams sets up an explicit contrast between the world of the slaves, which is developed in fine detail, and the white world, also given some depth, particularly through the treatment of the white woman, Rufel Sutton. As we shall see, the relationship between black and white domains of experience is, as demonstrated in slave narrative, more complex than the structure of *Dessa Rose* might at first suggest. The structure of *Dessa Rose* will be shown to bring into focus Dessa's position as a member of ^{the} of black community, and as a marginal figure in the white world, engaging in an innovative way, levels of conflict which we have observed in the

narratives of Equiano, Douglass and Jacobs, as they became "sharers in the general, public discourse about slavery".

The recurrent image of hair braiding in *Dessa Rose* might be seen as a metaphor of the black community in the novel, which identifies and establishes black people as individuals, valued as members of the community. Unlike Morrison's treatment of black community to be discussed, hair braiding rituals in *Dessa Rose* convey the harmonious, integral relationship of the individual within her community. In the Epilogue, Dessa Rose recalls hair braiding as an important ritual of her youth. In the passage below, Dessa's memory of her life before she "was sold away from home" is designated by italicised type, and is triggered by, and neatly woven into, the hair braiding occurring in the present, signalled by normal type:

I missed this when I was sold away from home.--"Turn your head, honey; I only got two more left to do."--The way the womens in the Quarters used to would braid hair. Mothers would braid children heads-- girl and boy-- until they went into the field or for as long as they had them. This was one way we told who they peoples was, by how they hair was combed. Mammy corn rowed our hair-- mine and Carrie's-- though she generally wore plaits herself... My fingers so stiff now, I can't do much more than plait, but I learned all kinds-- corn row, seed braid, chain, thread wrap. After we got up in age some, girls would sometimes gather and braid each other's heads...Child learn a lot of things^{sching} between some grown person's legs, listening at grown peoples speak over they heads. This is where I learned to listen, right there between mammy's thighs, where I first learned to speak, from listening at grown peoples talk...(p. 234)

We have observed in slave narrative treatments of black female presence, and of childhood, ^{which} convey experiences of membership in a sustaining black community. The image of hair braiding above suggests the focus on black women's realities in slavery, as other examples from the novel will show. Williams' use of dialect, song and intimate relationships can be seen to draw from a specifically female domain of experience inscribed in the "classic blues". Doris Davenport observes that Sherley Anne Williams

appropriates not just any blues, but the "classic blues" as performed by Bessie Smith. Bessie's songs and lyrics provide Williams with a way to utilise the blues to her own end, even as Bessie Smith (as much as Zora Neale Hurston) provides [Williams with] greater access to a use of black female culture (12)

Drawing on other critical work, Davenport establishes a specifically female identity of classic blues: "classic blues singers such as Ma Rainey [Bessie Smith's mentor] focussed almost exclusively on love. Since the singers were mainly black women, the classic blues present a specifically female point of view" (13). In *Dessa Rose*, intimate relationships include loving, sexual relationships between men and women, such as Kaine and Dessa in the Prologue to the novel, and the sexual relationship which develops between the white woman Rufel, and the ex-slave, Nathan, discussed in chapter three of this study. In Part Three of *Dessa Rose*, the intimate relationship which develops between Dessa and another fugitive, Harker, specifies through "the real, intimate level" an important point in Dessa's journey to freedom, when she learns to trust the white woman, Rufel Sutton. Another dimension of intimacy is friendship, for example, between the slave women in the quarters braiding each other's hair, but also the friendship which develops between Dessa and Rufel by the end of the novel. In Dessa's relationship with Harker, we observe both sexual intimacy and friendship as the basis of the bond between them. While sexual intimacy sung in the classic blues, and treated explicitly in *Dessa Rose*, is not a feature of slave narrative, we have observed in the narratives of Equiano, Jacobs and Douglass, aspects of non-sexual intimacy, particularly between the narrators and their mothers and grandmothers, and surrogate paternal and maternal figures. Friendships in childhood and adult life also may be seen as a dimension of intimacy in slave narrative.

Claudia Tate describes Sherley Anne Williams' *The Peacock Poems* (1975) as focusing

on the black woman blues theme, in which 'the blues' is a term representing complicated despairing emotions out of which a catharsis may occur, giving rise to a new determination to survive with pride and dignity (14)

This cathartic process is a significant dimension of the characterisation of Dessa Rose, and, as we shall see, suggests how the blues idiom both specifies and transcends "the real, intimate level" of experience foregrounded in *Dessa Rose*. Dessa's journey from slavery to freedom will necessitate her coming to terms with painful loss: the loss of Kaine, killed by his master after Kaine strikes him for damaging Kaine's banjo, and Dessa's separation from her family, after Dessa is sold away. Dessa is sold because she attacks the wife of the man who kills Kaine, after the wife accuses Dessa of carrying the master's child. With Kaine

dead, his banjo smashed, and Dessa's love for Kaine belittled by the paranoid accusations of a white woman, Dessa attempts to strangle the woman. As a result, Dessa is whipped "about her private parts", and becomes one of a number of slaves in a coffle, bound for market to be sold. These events are linked to the blues idiom; Kaine is killed when he defends his great passion, that which places him within the community, his banjo; Dessa is sold when she defends the essential meaning of her unborn child as a product of the loving relationship she enjoyed with Kaine. Kaine's death and Dessa's sale result from fundamental attacks on the very fabric of the black community as Williams defines it. The blues idiom is privileged as significant in my reading of *Dessa Rose*, not simply because of the obvious "historical continuity" between the novel and representations of black community and slave song in slave narrative, but because the blues idiom is linked to the way in which Williams positions and constructs *Dessa Rose*. The blues idiom forms a "basis of historical continuity" within the novel, which foregrounds the black community as a source of support and subversive power. While the Prologue to *Dessa Rose* is revealed to be Dessa's bitter-sweet memory of loved ones lost to her since her sale, the rest of the novel activates a context of black support and care which enables Dessa to undergo a cathartic process of healing in order to accept her losses, and to know herself.

In both *Dessa Rose* and *Beloved*, black communities ^{are} shown to be a vital context in which black people, enslaved or free, may find sustenance and a source of empowering identity. While ^{the} black community in *Dessa Rose* is a wholly positive, supportive and empowering context, always present for Dessa, despite moments in Dessa's journey when she perceives herself to be isolated and alone, in *Beloved* the black community is characterised in more complex terms, drawn on as both a negative and a positive force in the lives of Toni Morrison's characters. This is illustrated in the privileged position of conflict as a necessary dimension of human experience, imbuing all of Morrison's novels with a "mythic dimension" that sets them apart from the work of other black women writers. By emphasising such tensions, we observe Barbara Christian's comment that Morrison's novels "emanate a feeling of timelessness even as they are so pointedly concerned with the specificity of her character's communities" (15). In an interview with Mari Evans, Toni Morrison observed: "There is ^a conflict between public and private life, and it's a conflict that I think ought to remain a conflict. Not a problem, just a conflict" (16). Morrison

illustrates this view with reference to "the autobiographical form". Morrison's designation of the autobiographical form as "classic in Black American literature" can be seen as an implicit acknowledgement of the slave narrator's declaration of presence, "I Was Born", which inscribes both unique identity and representative status, affirming membership in "the tribe". More importantly, Morrison focuses on the *necessity* of the conflict between the individual and the group, an implicit recognition of the liminality of slave narrative as both solitary *and* representative expression, suggesting the personal and public levels contained in slave narrative, and the resulting tensions which give rise to basic dilemmas at the heart of slave narrative :

The autobiographical form is classic in Black American literature because it provided an instance in which a writer could be representative, could say, 'My single solitary and individual life is like the lives of the tribe; it differs in these specific ways, but it is a balanced life because it is both solitary and representative' (17)

In her novels, Toni Morrison can be seen to bring into focus the conflict between the individual and ^{her} community from a black female point of view. In *Beloved* the protagonist is a black woman, Sethe, who occupies a position of conflict as a pariah figure. As we shall see, Morrison explores through Sethe-as-pariah the complicated and problematic relationship of the past and present, a major theme in the novel. Margaret McDowell's observations below contextualise the black woman as pariah in Toni Morrison's experiences among the "superwomen" of her own family and of black history (18). Like Dessa Rose, who comes to life in a context of "historical continuity" informed by the blues idiom, Sethe's characterisation is rooted in "the specificity of [Morrison's] characters' communities". Like Harriet Jacobs' self-portrayal, and Sherley Anne Williams' protagonist, Toni Morrison portrays Sethe as a "strong woman" who is compelled, by slavery and for the sake of her children, to "transcend [her] outward limitations". Margaret McDowell observes that Toni Morrison

feels a special debt to what she calls the "superwoman" in the family and in the history of American blacks, women who were not only slaves or pioneers, but who transcended their outward limitations. She recalls with a kind of awe her grandmother coming from Alabama to Ohio with seven children and only fifteen dollars, but knowing surely that she was doing the necessary thing, because she was fleeing the likelihood of death for members of the family if they stayed in the South. Morrison expects to repay her debt to this heroic ancestor by creating strong women in her novels (19)

Like *Dessa Rose*, *Beloved* is rooted in an actual historical event. The slave woman Margaret Garner, and Garner's harrowing journey to freedom with her four children, provided the inspiration for *Beloved*. Morrison has stressed the creative process in accounting for the historical roots of *Beloved*, and describes how she "did a lot of research about everything else in the book--Cincinnati, and abolitionists, and the underground railroad-- but I refused to find out anything about Margaret Garner. I really wanted to invent her life" (20). What seems to have been of particular interest to Morrison is the power of mother-love represented by the slave woman Margaret Garner, who, like Harriet Jacobs and Toni Morrison's grandmother, "did the necessary thing", despite inevitable risks and hardships, and as a result, "transcended [her] outward limitations". Morrison has commented that Margaret Garner

did something during slavery-- she was trying to be a parent and a mother and have something to say about her children's lives in a slave system that said "you are not a parent, you are not a mother, you have nothing to do with your children" (21)

The dilemmas faced by the slave woman who wanted "to be a ^{parent and a} mother and have something to say about her children's lives", in a system that denied her that right, sets in motion the basic terms of conflict in *Beloved*. This conflict is explored through Sethe's act of infanticide, and the repercussions of it. While both Dessa and Sethe are supported by the black community in their escapes from slavery and their journeys to freedom, Sethe, unlike Dessa, will confront the impact of slavery, and the difficulties of freedom, alone, estranged from the black community. Having enjoyed "twenty-eight days of happiness" at her mother-in-law's Cincinnati home, following her harrowing escape with her children from the Sweet Home farm in Kentucky, Sethe sets out to kill all her children when Schoolteacher arrives unexpectedly to return Sethe and her children to slavery. Sethe manages to kill one baby daughter before she is restrained, and jailed for three months. Sethe's "twenty-eight happy days" within the folds of the black community prior to the killing, are followed by "eighteen years of disapproval and a solitary life" which result from what Morrison has described as Sethe's "ultimate act of motherhood":

The twenty-eight days of having women friends, a mother-in-law, and all her children together; of being part of a neighborhood; of, in fact, having neighbors at all to call her own-- all that was long gone and would never come back. No more dancing in the Clearing or happy feeds. No more discussions, stormy or quiet, about the true meaning of the Fugitive Bill, the Settlement Fee, God's Ways and

Negro pews; antislavery, manumission, skin voting, Republicans, Dred Scott, book learning, Sojourner's high-wheeled buggy, the Colored Ladies of Delaware, Ohio, and the other weighty issues that held them in chairs, scraping the floorboards or pacing ^{them} in agony or exhilaration. No anxious wait for the *North Star* or news of a beat-off. No sighing at a new betrayal or handclapping at a small victory.

Those twenty-eight happy days were followed by eighteen years of disapproval and a solitary life (p. 173)

In Morrison's novels, her black women protagonists must struggle within and against "the tribe". While black community is a fundamental source of individual black identity rooted in black history, the conflicts which Morrison foregrounds in *Beloved* transcend the specificities of black community. Opyr observes that

the conflicts are not easily resolved in [Morrison's] fiction. Both the pariah and her community pose threats to the existence of each other. The community threatens to stifle the pariah's creativity and selfhood, while the pariah endangers the customs and values the community seeks to preserve... The stakes are high in these conflicts; the struggles are mythic (22)

Beloved explores the far reaching implications of Sethe's act of infanticide, symbolised by the tree-shaped scar on Sethe's back, and the resulting estrangement between Sethe and her children, and between Sethe and the black community, ^{conflicts} which result in "eighteen years of disapproval and a solitary life". Stamp Paid and Ella are "ancestor figures" who perform a choric function in *Beloved*, establishing in this novel a pattern characteristic of Morrison's other work. Ancestor figures comment on events in the novel, and provide not only "historical continuity" rooted in the black community, but also establish a link between black and classical literary traditions, both of which inform Morrison's work. As Margaret McDowell observes, in Morrison's

attempt to connect her novels with folk history and with classical drama, she... is searching for a perspective that comes with a sensitivity to the past of her race and to literary tradition... She often uses an older character-- an ancestor figure-- in her novels to convey such a sense of enlarged time, of myth, and of prophecy, and this figure is a unifying influence in her novels as a voice throughout, embodying a choric and charismatic wisdom (23)

It is Stamp Paid who relates the process of estrangement between Sethe and the black community, and Ella who puts into perspective the act of infanticide from the community's point of view. Both of these characters are linked to a third

ancestral figure, Baby Suggs, Sethe's mother-in-law, who was, prior to the killing, a respected spiritual 'leader' of the black community, preaching spontaneous sermons in "the Clearing", and whose home was a station on the underground railroad, thus making it a centre of the black community. Stamp Paid's memories reveal the effect of the killing on Baby Suggs, who is defeated by the realisation that any white man can enter her yard, as Schoolteacher does, and make a mockery of the freedom she so cherishes. She renounces her role as "Baby Suggs, holy" and withdraws from the world. After Baby Suggs' death, Sethe's pride, and the disapproval of the black community, combine to isolate Sethe and her three remaining children at "124"^{124 is} Baby Suggs house, where Sethe lives with her children in complete isolation from the black community that once looked to the house and its inhabitants as a source of strength, guidance and support. 124 is haunted, as the opening of the novel, given below, suggests. It emerges in the novel that the "spiteful" ghost haunting 124 is the spirit of the daughter, Beloved, whom Sethe killed eighteen years prior to the opening of the novel:

124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children. For years each put up with the spite in his own way, but by 1873 Sethe and her daughter Denver were its only victims. The grandmother, Baby Suggs, was dead, and the sons, Howard and Buglar, had run away by the time they were thirteen years old-- as soon as merely looking in a mirror shattered it (that was the signal for Buglar); as soon as two tiny hand prints appeared in the cake (that was it for Howard).(p.3)

Stamp Paid remains compassionate toward Sethe, though Sethe's pride prevents him from being able to demonstrate his friendship. As Stamp Paid tells Paul D, who leaves Sethe when he discovers she killed one of her children, "She ain't crazy. She love those children. She was trying to out hurt the hurter" (p. 234). When Ella learns that the spirit of Sethe's dead daughter has returned from the other side, housed in the body of a young woman who threatens the lives of Sethe and Denver, Ella puts into perspective the black community's response to Sethe's act of infanticide. Ella's response also suggests that, despite the estrangement between Sethe and the black community, Sethe has not been abandoned. As we shall see, it is Sethe's daughter Denver who leaves 124 and forms a bridge between Sethe, locked into the past, and the community, needed in order to enter and live in the present:

She understood Sethe's rage in the shed twenty years ago, but not her reaction to it, which Ella thought was prideful, misdirected and Sethe

herself too complicated... Whatever Sethe had done, Ella didn't like the idea of past errors taking possession of the present. Sethe's crime was staggering and her pride out stripped even that; but she could not countenance the possibility of sin moving on in ^{the} house, unleashed and sassy. Daily life took as much as she had. The future was sunset; the past something to leave behind. And if it didn't stay behind, well, you might have to stomp it out. Slave life; freed life-- every day was a test and a trial. Nothing could be counted ^{in a world} on where even when you were a solution you were a problem. (p. 256)

At the end of the novel, Ella and other black women of the community gather, approach 124, and "stomp out" Beloved, freeing 124 of the ghost of the past.

While Stamp Paid and Ella provide points of view of the black community in response to Sethe's act of infanticide, the inter-connected memories of Sethe, Paul D and Denver convey the pervasive and profound impact of the event from multiple points of view. Like Williams, Morrison draws on intimate relationships to explore the experience of slavery from a black point of view, though often it is the *lack* of intimate relationships which conveys information about characters, and the difficult pasts with which they must come to terms. When Paul D arrives at 124, his presence temporarily suppresses the "spiteful" ghost, suggesting the hope which Paul D represents in the novel, as an opportunity for Sethe to re-engage with the black community, through a loving relationship which will demand investing trust and faith in the future. Because Sethe and Paul D were slaves together at Sweet Home, his arrival at 124 eighteen years after their shared experiences in slavery, sets in motion his own and Sethe's emotional and psychological journeys linked to the past. Paul D and Sethe elicit Sweet Home and other past memories from each other. Paul D is able to provide an explanation for why another Sweet Home slave, Sethe's husband Halle, did not meet Sethe at the appointed time to escape from Sweet Home. This information triggers memories which Sethe has buried very deeply indeed, and as these painful fragments emerge, Sethe begins to cautiously consider the possibility of a new life with Paul D. Sethe's impact on Paul D opens the "tobacco tin" in his heart, where Paul D has buried all instincts to connect emotionally. Sethe represents an opportunity for Paul D to quit his life of wandering; though Paul D is not estranged from the black community, he is unwilling, indeed, unable, to form intimate relationships. Sethe's daughter Denver is affected by the arrival of Paul D, which reveals her intense loneliness as a result of seclusion from the world outside of 124. She resents the presence

of this man who scares away the ghost whom Denver knows to be her sister, and cherishes. In Denver we observe the debilitating affect of isolation, and the fear and resentment, as well as dependency, she feels toward her mother.

It is Morrison's technique as a writer which evokes the emotional and psychological states of her characters, making the impact of the past on Sethe, Paul D and Denver the focus of the novel. *Beloved*, like Morrison's other novels, demonstrates Morrison's interest in storytelling, and her desire to render in written language the loose structure and archetypal themes of orally transmitted stories, "to make the story appear oral, meandering, effortless, spoken", as Morrison herself describes it (24). In *Beloved*, the "holes and spaces" in the language described by Morrison below, convey the significance in *Beloved* of the absence of sustaining relationships in the lives of Sethe, Paul D, and Denver. The "holes and spaces" in the language take on added significance in light of the silent spaces characteristic of slave narrative:

The language has to be quiet; it has to engage your participation. I never describe characters very much. My writing expects, demands participatory reading, and that I think is what literature is supposed to do... The reader supplies the emotions. The reader supplies even some of the color, some of the sound. My language has to have holes and spaces so the reader can come into it (25)

Morrison's technique weaves narrative threads in a complex pattern *where* the "holes and spaces" are as important as the threads which connect to form 'the story'. While Morrison's reflections below were made prior to the publication of *Beloved*, I think they describe The web-like quality of *Beloved* which results from revealing ^{past} events through the fragmented memories of the characters. Since nothing in *Beloved* is fully revealed through a single character's memories, the reader "can't see the contours all at once", and is thus unable, like the characters in the novel, to fully grasp the present, or comprehend the possibilities of the future. "To me", Morrison has said,

every life...has a rhythm, a shape-- there are dips and curves as well as straightaways. You can't see the contours all at once. Some very small incident that happens today may be *the* most important event that happens to you this year, but you don't know that when it happens. You don't know it until much later. I try to reflect this awareness in my work (26)

It is difficult to extract passages from the novel because of the way in which Morrison fashions language so that "the story appears oral, meandering, effortless, spoken". The web-like quality of narration presents a seamless whole in which any details extracted are dependent on many other small, narrative threads. For example, the passage given below occurs early in the novel, before any context has been established which might make sense of disconnected images of "the men coming to nurse [Sethe]^{or of}", "her back where the skin buckled like a washboard", or "the ink". The events which connect these images are later established in relation to Sethe's escape from Sweet Home, barefoot and pregnant, during which she gives birth to Denver, before crossing the Ohio River to freedom. But the identity of Sweet Home, and its significance in relation to Sethe's act of infanticide, are revealed gradually, emerging in fragments from Sethe's memories. In this way, Morrison's technique foregrounds the *process* of memory, rather than events remembered: "[Sethe] worked hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe. Unfortunately her brain was devious". The significance of the technique comes into focus in relation to silent spaces in slave narrative which convey unspeakable events of the past, or emotional trauma re-experienced through 'storying' the painful past. The passage given below is rendered more complex by the profusion of natural imagery recurrent in the novel, conveying the "timelessness" of *Beloved*:

Her memory of Bulgar was fading fast. Howard at least had a head shape no body could forget. As for the rest, she [Sethe] worked hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe. Unfortunately her brain was devious. She might be hurrying across a field, running practically, to get to the pump quickly and rinse the chamomile sap from her legs. Nothing else would be in her mind. The picture of the men coming to nurse her was as lifeless as the nerves in her back where the skin buckled like a washboard. Nor was there the faintest scent of ink or the cherry gum and oak bark from which it was made. Nothing. Just the breeze cooling her face as she rushed toward water. And then sopping the chamomile away with pump water and rags, her mind fixed on getting every last bit of sap off-- on her carelessness in taking a shortcut across the field just to save half mile, and not noticing how high the weeds had grown until the itching was all the way to her knees. Then something. The splash of water, the sight of her shoes and stockings awry on the path where she had flung them: or Here Boy lapping in the paddle near her feet, and suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes...in shameless beauty. It never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too. Fire and Brimstone all right, but hidden in lacy groves. Boys hanging from the most

beautiful sycamores in the world. It shamed her-- remembering the soughing trees rather than the boys. Try as she might to make it otherwise, the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forgive her memory for that (p. 6)

While the opening of the novel names Sethe's sons, Howard and Buglar, we learn much later that the boys hanging from the trees, described above, are not Sethe's sons, but rather, an image remembered in relation to Sethe's escape from Sweet Home. The narrative 'circle' which links "boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world", to the fading memory of Sethe's sons at the beginning of the passage, dramatises the process of rememory, and the power of the past to intervene in, and distort, the present. In Toni Morrison's technique of unfolding *Beloved*, one may observe a fundamental resonance with strategic voice in slave narrative. Morrison's style in *Beloved* seems ideally suited to explore the emotional impact of slavery. Morrison's technique enables us to view this novel as articulating the untold story implicit in the silent spaces of *Incidents*, between Jacobs' characteristic strong, steady voice, and her use of a masked, rhetorical voice; *Beloved* may be seen as an exploration of the kind of trauma signified by maternal absence in Douglass' 1845 *Narrative*; *Beloved* can be seen to probe the inevitable emotional cost of silence which confronts Equiano as a young slave in a strange, new world, cut off from his people. Unlike *Dessa Rose*, where shifts from italicised to standard type signal a shift from Dessa's memories of her past, to events in the present, Morrison does not 'help' the reader distinguish between past and present events. It is only when Sethe sees Paul D sitting on her porch that the passage quoted above begins to come into focus, and the reader appreciates the fluid boundary between events of the present, and fragmented memories of the past:

When the last of the chamomile was gone she went around to the front of the house, collecting her shoes and stockings on the way. As if to punish her further for her terrible memory, sitting on the porch not forty feet away was Paul D, the last of the Sweet Home men. And although she could never mistake his face for another's, she said, "Is that you?" (p. 6)

Between the contexts of caring black community established in the Prologue and Epilogue of *Dessa Rose*, the bulk of the novel presents Dessa's journey from slavery to freedom as a series of "warring texts" which compete to claim the 'true' story of Dessa Rose. Three titled sections, and italicised text denoting Dessa's inner thoughts, call attention to the structure of the novel, and comment on the dilemmas posed by each section of the novel. While the blues

idiom permeates each section of *Dessa Rose*, providing unity and grounding in the black community, the structure of the novel sets in motion a series of conflicts or dilemmas that can be seen to speak to central dilemmas dramatised in slave narrative. In the Author's Note that precedes the text of *Dessa Rose*, Sherley Anne Williams locates her novel in historical events she first encountered in Angela Davis's "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves" (1971) (27). This historical context suggests the rationale for the structure of the novel, and the significance of the conflicts it sets in motion:

Dessa Rose is based on two historical incidents. A pregnant ^{black}woman helped to lead an uprising on a coffle (a group of slaves chained together and herded, usually to market) in 1829 in Kentucky. Caught and convicted, she was sentenced to death; her hanging, however, was delayed, until after the birth of her baby. In North Carolina in 1830, a white woman living on an isolated farm was reported to have given sanctuary to runaway slaves... How sad, I thought then, that these two women never met (p. 5)

Dessa Rose is the story of ~~these~~ two women, the slave Dessa Rose, and the white woman Rufel Sutton, brought together through Williams' skill as a writer. Dessa Rose is the pregnant slave woman who, in Part One of the novel, is interviewed by Adam Nehemiah for his book about slave rebellions. Through Nehemiah's interviews, and through Dessa's memories of the events which lead to her presence on the coffle, and her role in the uprising, Dessa's often painful memories of her family, her slain lover Kaine, and her identity as a field labouring slave, begin to emerge. These memories, in italicised type, are separated from Nehemiah's text, which is presented as dated journal entries recording his impressions of Dessa, and of slavery in general. Parts Two and Three of the novel narrate Dessa's escape from Sheriff Hughes' cellar, the birth of her son, and her experiences at The Glen, the "isolated farm", where the white woman Rufel Sutton provides "sanctuary to run-away slaves". Unlike the historical incident which gave rise to *Dessa Rose*, in Williams' novel, the pregnant slave woman, Dessa, is rescued, and convalesces at the white woman's farm, where the events of Part Two take place. Dessa's past continues to surface in Parts Two and Three, as does Rufel's past, but it is the difficult present and unsure future for both women which the novel foregrounds in these sections. The relationship between Dessa and Rufel takes the reader, in Michele Wallace's words "some place she is not accustomed to going, some place historical scholarship may never take us-- into the world that black and white women shared in the antebellum South" (28). While *Incidents*

can be seen to provide historical context which validates the initial conflicts between Dessa and Rufel, *Dessa Rose* is an imaginative exploration of the possibilities of relationship between black and white women in the context of slavery.

It is important to point out that Dessa Rose is not presented as a fictional slave narrator, confronted by the white establishment in the form of sponsors, like William Lloyd Garrison or Harriet Beecher Stowe, or by the demands of a reading audience. While the Epilogue establishes that Dessa, in old age, narrates her story to her son who writes it down, it is the structure of *Dessa Rose* which activates the dilemmas explored particularly in chapter one of this study. In the Author's Note to *Dessa Rose*, Sherley Anne Williams draws directly on the slave narrative tradition and establishes the significance of the structure of the novel narrated in Part One by Adam Nehemiah, then Rufel Sutton in Part Two, and finally by Dessa Rose:

I admit also to being outraged by a certain, critically acclaimed novel of the early seventies that travestied the as-told-to memoir of slave revolt leader Nat Turner. Afro-Americans, having survived by word of mouth-- and made of that process a high art-- remain at the mercy of literature and writing; often, these have betrayed us (p. 5)

The titles of the three sections of the novel reflect the perspective of different narrators and their "warring texts" of slavery. Part one, entitled "The Darky", is narrated by a white male, Adam Nehemiah, also referred to by Dessa Rose as "teacherman". As Deborah McDowell observes, the title "The Darky" is "a generic, gender-neutral classification of slaves" (29), and as such comments on Nehemiah's distinct point of view and the limitations of his perspective. In *Beloved* the character Schoolteacher embodies the power represented by Adam Nehemiah in *Dessa Rose*. Like Nehemiah, Schoolteacher is writing a book about slavery; like Nehemiah, Schoolteacher is a definer, and his power is explicitly linked to the written word. In *Beloved*, Schoolteacher is denied full presence because the presentation of him is rendered through Sethe's and Paul D's fragmented memories of him. The most powerful actor in the drama of slavery is presented through the point of view of the marginal and less powerful. We know only what the memories of Sethe and Paul D reveal about Schoolteacher-- disconnected, fragmented images which do not form a coherent picture of Schoolteacher until well into the novel. By mediating the presence of the definer through the minds of those whom Schoolteacher sought

to define, Morrison establishes the primacy of black perspectives of slavery. The fragmented presence of Schoolteacher not only testifies to the primacy of black point of view in *Beloved*, it also testifies to the shattering impact of the definer on the ex-Sweet Home slaves. We begin to place the disparate images early in *Beloved* when Sethe explains to Paul D that the tree-shaped scar on her back is the result of a whipping which followed Schoolteacher's nephews' assault on Sethe, a heavily pregnant, nursing mother. Sethe tells Paul D, "they stole my milk", while Schoolteacher recorded the event, using ink made by Sethe. Prior to the nursing incident and the whipping which followed, Sethe is horrified when she over-hears Schoolteacher instructing his nephews in a lesson which involves listing Sethe's characteristics, human qualities in one column, animal characteristics in another (p. 193-5). This is a recurrent rememory in Sethe's mind, and compels Sethe to "transcend her outward limitations" and escape slavery with her children: "nobody on this earth, would list her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper. No. Oh no" (p. 251). Similarly, Paul D is haunted by Schoolteacher's power to define him. "Schoolteacher changed me. I was something else and that something was less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub" (p. 72). Paul D's sense of self is profoundly threatened by the realisation that there is essentially no difference between Schoolteacher, and Mr. Garner, the 'good master' whom Schoolteacher replaces:

At the peak of his strength, taller than tall men, and stronger than most, they clipped him, Paul D. First his shot gun, then his thoughts, for schoolteacher didn't take advice from Negroes. The information they offered he called backtalk and developed a variety of corrections (which he recorded in his notebook) to reeducate them...

For years Paul D believed schoolteacher broke into children what Garner had raised into men... Now, plagued by the contents of his tobacco tin, he wondered how much difference there really was between before schoolteacher and after. Garner called and announced them men-- but only on Sweet Home, and by his leave. Was he naming what he saw or creating what he did not ? (p. 220)

Sethe's and Paul D's rememories root the presence of Schoolteacher in their minds, and convey the enormous impact Schoolteacher has had on both of them: Schoolteacher has been internalised and as such threatens to define Sethe and Paul D, even in freedom. It is not Schoolteacher's presence, but rather, his impact, that the novel foregrounds through narrative technique.

Unlike Schoolteacher, ^{in *Dessa Rose*} Nehemiah does not penetrate the slaves' inner world. When Dessa thinks about the confrontation between Kaine and the white man who kills him, she imagines them as equally dangerous, though not equal in power: "white men existed because they did; Master had smashed the banjo because that was the way he was, able to do what he felt like doing. And a nigga could, too. That was what Kaine's act said to her. He had done; he was" (p. 58). The structure of *Dessa Rose* foregrounds the *conflict* between the definer and the defined, rather than the emotional and psychological *impact* of being defined. Nehemiah cannot comprehend Dessa Rose because she is hopelessly other to Nehemiah's perspective of the world. Nehemiah's inability to see or understand Dessa is only partly due to his conventional assumptions about black people, signalled by his use of "darky", "nigger" and the recurrent association he makes between slaves and animals, to be bought, used and sold. Nehemiah also is circumscribed by Dessa's protective guise of silence (interpreted by Nehemiah as stupidity), and of trickster-like behaviour performed by the slaves at Sheriff Hughes' farm, where Dessa is being held until the birth of her baby. *Dessa Rose* is a brilliant fictional study of a female slave who "closes the door", to draw on Martin Jackson's phrase, driving Nehemiah to distraction. Nehemiah observes that Dessa

answers questions in a random manner, a loquacious, roundabout fashion-- if, indeed, she can be brought to answer them at all. This, to one of my habits, is exasperating to the point of fury (p. 23)

It is significant that in Nehemiah's section, Dessa is consistently presented in shadow, suggesting different dimensions of invisibility. On the one hand, shadow imagery renders Dessa invisible, and thus powerless, in the white male text of slavery, enacting the historical position of the silenced, invisible black woman. On the other hand, the shadows which conceal Dessa encode the essentially subversive posture of invisibility for those defined as peripheral. This doubleness associated with invisibility has been observed throughout this study, as a survival mechanism of the black community in slavery, and as a strategic device in writing about slavery. Jacobs' self-incarceration, and the silent spaces in her narrative, as well as the treatment of slave song in both Douglass autobiographies, are salient examples.

Nehemiah's misreading of the songs sung by Hughes' slaves is rooted in racist assumptions about black people, but it is also the result of the inherently masked subversive content of the songs. Nehemiah observes that the slaves' song is

"only a quaint piece of doggerel which the slaves cunningly adapt from the scraps of scripture they are taught", and he misunderstands the relationship between the words and melody of the slaves' "cunning" song. While Nehemiah observes that "the words seemed to put new life into an otherwise annoying melody" (p. 52), it is of course, the slaves' own tunes and rhythms which "give life" to "scraps of scripture". In Douglass' words, the slaves' songs communicate "meanings known only to themselves". The specific function of slave song in Part One of *Dessa Rose* represents the subversive nature of the trickster tradition in slave culture, where the folk tales and spirituals "constituted an intragroup lore which must have intensified feelings of distance from the world of the slaveholder" (30). That distance is encoded in the structure of *Dessa Rose*, externalising Nehemiah, who cannot have the shattering affect on *Dessa Rose* which Schoolteacher has on Sethe and Paul D. While Morrison's technique of unfolding *Beloved* through the memories of ex-slaves accounts for emphasis on Schoolteacher's impact, the structure of Part One of *Dessa Rose* externalises Nehemiah, placing him in a position of conflict which circumscribes his power: his journal entries are separate from *Dessa's* thoughts, distinguished by italicised type, and from the slaves' songs, the words of which are often given. Nehemiah proves no match for the sullen, shadowy *Dessa Rose*, or for the singing slaves on Hughes' farm.

As a result of Nehemiah's inherent and imposed limitations as a narrator of slavery, the slaves on Hughes' farm are able to communicate through song their plan to rescue *Dessa* from the cellar, and from execution. Prior to the escape, *Dessa Rose* is not at first aware of the presence and tacit support of other slaves. Chained in Hughes' cellar, visited by a prying, annoying white man, *Dessa* is consumed by grief, her memories and dreams dominated by images of the family and lover she has lost:

Misery had come upon her in shuddering waves she hoped would kill her; and the dreams. She had paced restlessly, the chain that held her to the stake in the middle of the dirt floor clanking behind her. Sometimes she lay listlessly on the pallet or sat against the wall behind the dull sunlight that entered through the tiny window. Always, whether her eyes were open or closed, Kaine walked with her, or mammy. Jeeter tugged at her head-rag or Carrie Mae frowned her down about some little foolishness. Aunt Lefonia, Martha-- they sat with her in the cellar. She grieved in this presence... (p. 53-4)

But Dessa gradually realises that the slaves on Hughes' farm are present, for her and with her. The slave woman Jemina "came to see [Dessa] almost every night, often bringing some special fixings from the white folks' supper table... At first, in her misery, Dessa hadn't understood why the house servant would take such risks for her... Jemina's kindness eventually penetrated her despair" (p. 54). The songs sung by the slaves on Hughes' farm also gradually filter into Dessa's consciousness where memories of Kaine's song dominate Dessa's thoughts of her lost past. The presence of song in a new context of black community eventually liberates Dessa's mind from the past, just as the singing slaves on Hughes' farm break into Dessa's cell and rescue her from a fate that ties her to her past. The slave songs of the past, remembered in relation to Kaine, and the songs of the present, establish the blues idiom as an "historical continuity" grounding Dessa's despair, and her triumph over it, in a context of black community: "Dessa knew herself to be enveloped in caring" (p. 59). Because of the unifying force of the blues idiom, establishing the immediacy and primacy of black community, the past cannot be seen to threaten the present as it does in *Beloved*. As the shattering, pervasive impact of Schoolteacher suggests, the fluid boundary between the past and the present creates a much more complex and threatening problem for ex-Sweet Home slaves, haunted by the emotional and psychological impact of slavery. In the passage below, Sethe's discussion with her daughter, Denver, suggests the fluid boundary between past and present, and the threat which Sethe's past in slavery at Sweet Home--"where I was before I came here"-- poses, even to Denver. While Dessa is released from despair rooted in the past by the presence and agency of the black community, in *Beloved*, the complex relationship between the past and the present transcends the historical context of slavery. In the passage below, Sethe contemplates time, experienced as the threat of the past in the present:

I was taking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was just my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place-- the picture of it-- stays^{and} not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened."

"Can other people see it?" asked Denver.

"Oh, yes, Oh yes, yes, yes. Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it's you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else. Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away. Even if the whole farm-- every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there-- you who never was there-- if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. So, Denver, you can't never go there. Never. Because even though it's all over-- over and done with-- it's going to always be there waiting for you. That's how come I had to get all my children out. No matter what".

Denver picked her fingernails. "If it's still there, waiting, that must mean that nothing ever dies".

Sethe looked right in Denver's face. "Nothing ever does," she said. (pp. 35-6)

In *Beloved*, the return of Sethe's dead daughter housed in the body of a young woman, Beloved, initiates the painful process of rememory which sets in motion the inner journeys of Sethe, Denver and Paul D, to understand the past represented by Beloved, and to put the past in its place, so that each may begin to live in the present. Sethe's need to account for her actions, Denver's loneliness, and Paul D's arrival at 124, elicit the return of Beloved. In the delicately interconnected psychological and emotional journeys of each of these characters, we observe Toni Morrison's comment that "all the books I have written deal with characters placed deliberately under enormous duress in order to see^{or} what they are made" (31). In *Dessa Rose*, the painful events of the past are dead, but the significance and meaning of Dessa's lost family and lover inform the present through the blues idiom. Dessa is consumed by grief in Part One of the novel, but she is rescued, emotionally and physically, from the painful and debilitating burden of losses suffered in the past. In Part Three of *Dessa Rose*, Dessa reflects back to her incarceration in Hughes' cellar, and is able to put the past to rest in a way that Sethe is unable to, at least not until the end of *Beloved*, when the possibility, not the inevitability, of emerging from the haunting past, is established. Unlike Sethe's past which literally haunts the present, Dessa "accepted that everyone I loved was gone. That life was dead to me; I'd held the wake for it in that cellar. Yet and still, I was alive" (p. 197). The blues idiom specifies a mode of surviving and transcending the past so that Dessa cannot be defined solely in terms of her past, as a generic representation of slavery in Nehemiah's text of slavery. Furthermore, the blues idiom empowers black

characters, enabling them to struggle, in the present, against the obstacles foregrounded by the structure of the novel. We have observed this life-affirming quality of *Dessa Rose* as fundamental to slave narrative, despite the traumatic events recorded in the slaves' accounts. *Beloved*, as the incarnation of the past, threatens to trap Sethe, Denver and Paul D in a past where the trauma of loss is potentially overwhelming, and threatens to circumscribe and ultimately define the present, which can only be endured. Strategic voice in slave narrative is testimony to the presence of the painful past which remains alive in the form of silence spaces, and omission of details which the adult narrator can only treat obliquely.

Part Two of *Dessa Rose*, entitled "The Wench", is narrated by the white woman Rufel, whose isolated farm, The Glen, is a sanctuary for run away slaves, more out of necessity, since Rufel's husband disappeared, than out of any sense of moral conviction on Rufel's part. Dessa arrives at The Glen with Cully and Nathan, the two slaves who survived the uprising on the coffer, and who help rescue Dessa from Hughes' cellar. As Dessa convalesces in Rufel's bed after the birth of her son during her journey, Rufel sits in the bedroom, day-dreaming, talking to herself, and tending her own baby, Clara, and Dessa's new born son. In *Dessa Rose*, as in *Incidents*, the image of breast-feeding conveys both the positive potential of 'foster-sisterhood', as well as the divisions in the sisterhood between black and white women. While the friendship which eventually emerges between Dessa and Rufel establishes an optimistic vision of sisterhood at the end of *Dessa Rose*, Rufel's text of slavery establishes the distance between Rufel and "the wench" who arrives at her farm (32). Sherley Anne Williams reverses the normal roles of black and white women in the "sacred text of slavery" and presents an image of Rufel nursing Dessa's son, perceived as a fundamental threat by Dessa Rose:

Dessa knew the white woman nursed her baby; she had seen her do it. It went against everything she had been taught to think about white women but to inspect that fact too closely was almost to deny her own existence (p. 117)

In *Dessa Rose*, breast feeding functions specifically, in relation to conflicts at the heart of multiracial sisterhood, while in *Beloved*, breast feeding transcends this "real, intimate level", particularly since it is not presented in relation to white women, but rather, white men as representatives of a slave system which denies Sethe's right to nurture her children. Sethe exercises her right to protect her

children by killing one of them, thus linking the mother-child bond signified in breast feeding, to an act of 'mother love' which can only be understood as such through an appreciation of the emotional and psychological impact of slavery. Rufel's rationale for nursing the black baby establishes the schisms in sisterhood which divide black and white women, particularly her use of "darky" and her feeling of "mortification". But the act of nursing Dessa's infant, and "the wonder she felt at the baby" also suggests motherhood as common ground between Rufel and Dessa, which could form the basis of mutual understanding and respect:

Rufel had taken the baby to her bosom almost without thought, to quiet his wailing... The sight of him so tiny and bloodied had pained her with an almost physical hurt and she had set about cleaning and clothing him with a single-minded intensity...

Still, she had felt some mortification at becoming wet nurse for a darky. She was the only nursing woman on the place, however, and so continued of necessity to suckle the baby. Whatever care she might have had about the wisdom of her action was soon forgotten in the wonder she felt at the baby (p. 101-2)

Both Rufel and Dessa must travel some distance before they can recognise, let alone act upon, any common ground they share as women. The conflict which sets in motion the re-visioning journeys of each woman focuses on the figure of Mammy, the name by which Rufel refers to her personal servant, Dorcas, who died some months prior to Dessa's arrival at The Glen. Like Dessa, Rufel is a young single mother, grieving over personal loss. Mammy also is the name by which Dessa knows her own mother. Though both Dessa and Rufel know they are arguing about two different people, they persist in leveling accusations at each other, Dessa accusing Rufel of not really knowing Mammy, and Rufel insisting, shouting, "I do-- I do". Dessa explodes:

"Your 'mammy'...Your 'mammy'!". No *white* girl could ever ^{have} taken her place in mammy's bosom; no one. "You ain't got no 'mammy,'" [Dessa] snapped... "You don't even ^{no} know mammy's name. Mammy have a name, have children."

"She didn't." The white woman, finger stabbing toward her own heart, finally rose. "She just had me! I was like her child".

"What was her name then?" Dessa taunted. Child don't even ^{must} know it's own mammy's name. What was mammy's name?" (p. 118-19)

Like the breast feeding image, the mammy conflict dramatises the distance between the two women, but it also sets in motion the liberation of Rufel and Dessa Rose from their stereotyped roles in Rufel's text of slavery. Rufel is compelled by Dessa's taunt, "what was mammy's name?", to remember the name, Dorcas, and in so doing, to give her relationship to Dorcas concentrated thought. This is a painful though constructive process: Rufel sees, for the first time, her own ambiguous position in a society which disempowers her as a woman, but which confers authority upon her on the basis of her skin colour. While Rufel feels that "the wench had taken her beloved Mammy and put a stranger in her place" (p. 128) , and that her own ignorance about Dorcas "was worse than grief" (p. 129), Rufel begins to attempt to *see* Dorcas, and her realities as a black woman: "Had Mammy had children, Rufel wondered, suckled a child at her breast as she did the wench's, as she did her own?" (p. 128). Despite distance implied between Rufel and Dorcas in the name 'mammy', the relationship between the two women is not revealed to be entirely false or empty:

Rufel still felt some resentment that the wench had destroyed her comfortable, and comforting, image of Mammy, but she no longer held that silly argument against the wench. However hateful and spiteful the wench had been, she couldn't change the way Mammy had cared for Rufel. Even if Mammy herself had been spiteful, bitter, secretly rebellious, Mammy, through caring and concern, had made Rufel hers, had laid claim to her affections. Rufel knew this ^{as} love. She would have said as much, but the wench's stiff civility made her hesitant to reopen the subject (p. 147)

The mammy conflict sets in motion a different process for Dessa Rose, who is confronted, by the white woman's claim on mammy, with the realities of loss suffered by Dessa's mother in slavery. Though Rufel storms out of the room accused of not knowing Mammy's name, Dessa continues to vent her rage in an angry, painful naming of lost brothers and sisters:

Even buried under years of silence, Dessa could not forget. She had started on the names of the dead before she realized ^{that} the white woman had gone...

"Jeffrey died the first year she come to the Reeves plantation; Caesar, two years older than Carrie: head kicked in by a horse he was holding for some guest. Carrie was the first child born at the new place to live. Dessa, Dessa Rose, the baby girl."

Anger spent now, she wept. "Oh, I pray God mammy still got Carrie Mae left" (p. 120)

While we have seen in Part One of *Dessa Rose* that the painful past does not threaten Dessa in the way it threatens Sethe in *Beloved*, traumatic loss for Dessa remains "buried under years of silence". Dessa's escape from Nehemiah's text of slavery does not liberate Dessa's voice, though it does liberate her from a context in which it would be impossible for "the darky" to emerge as an individual, and tell her own story. Significantly, in Deborah McDowell's discussion of Part Two of *Dessa Rose*, she quotes from *Beloved*, to convey Dessa's continued difficulties in becoming self-authored: "the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay". However, unlike Sethe, who is isolated from the black community, Dessa's inability in Part Two to share the details of her past with any one, including other black people, does not signify a rift between her and the black community. Images of hair braiding can be identified in Part Two, suggesting the caring context which other fugitives provide for Dessa, and which excludes Rufel:

Once Rufel had entered the bedroom to find Ada combing the wench's hair... Her head rested on Ada's knee as Ada's fingers wove rhythmically through the stubby strands of the girl's hair. They looked so companionable and content that Rufel almost felt an intruder. The moment the darkies became aware of her they started nervously, the wench veiling her eyes and bowing her head, Ada rising clumsily. Almost, Rufel begged pardon for entering her own room (p. 147-8)

While Rufel becomes able to try and appreciate Dessa's circumstances as a black woman, Dessa is initially constrained by understandable distrust of white people generally, but also by a quick temper and truculent nature. A dimension of Dessa's silence in Part Two of the novel is the limited context of experience from which Dessa can draw, to make sense of Rufel, or to break silence, and give voice to events of her past. Dessa "had no words to describe much of what she had experienced, or what those experiences had forced her to see" (p. 55). Dessa's silence is both "an act of resistance", as we have seen in Part One of the novel, and "a means of containing her pain by forgetting the past" (33). While Dessa knew "herself to be enveloped in caring", she can only listen when "the others spoke around the campfire, during the ^{their} days of freedom, about their trials under slavery, Dessa was silent. Their telling awoke no echoes in her mind. That part of the past lay sealed in the scars between her thighs" (p. 59-60). When Dessa does find her voice and shares the events of her past which

resulted in the scars, it is among other black women. But it is not only the black community, and black women in it, which elicit Dessa's account of her journey from slavery to freedom. The structure of the novel also implies that black and white women must confront each other and come to terms with the divisive impact of slavery. In Parts Two and Three we observe mythic dimensions of Dessa's journey from slavery to freedom, in Dessa's 'coming of age' as a woman, and, explicit in Part Three which is narrated by Dessa, her autobiographical journey. In Parts Two and Three, the blues idiom roots Dessa to a specific context, *and* is the vehicle enabling her to transcend the specificity of her own experience.

In Part Three of *Dessa Rose*, Dessa gradually warms to Rufel, but Williams cannot be interpreted as dramatising a conflict-free sisterhood between black and white women. As Deborah McDowell observes, "it makes a difference that one woman is black and the other is white" (34). We observe in Part Three Dessa gradually able to *see* Rufel, not as a generic representation of white people, or as the stereotyped slave mistress, but as a woman who can be trusted as a friend, if not accepted as a 'sister'. In Part Three, Rufel and the fugitive slaves at The Glen embark on "the flim flam trail" in order to make money, which Rufel needs to either maintain or leave The Glen, and which the black men and women need in order to go West, and begin a new life in freedom. Dessa is reluctant to join the scheme which involves Rufel, acting as a slaveowner, selling Nathan, Cully and Harker into slavery, and rejoining the 'runaway slaves' later, at an appointed place, before moving on to another town or plantation, to repeat the trick. Dessa eventually agrees to participate, in the role of servant to Rufel and nursemaid to Rufel's baby, Clara. Dessa agrees to participate in the sham, largely because Dessa's lover Harker, convinces Dessa that Rufel can be trusted. Dessa's realisation that white women, like black women, "are subject to ravishment" (p. 201) occurs after the attempted rape of Rufel in the home of a man with whom Rufel and Dessa stay, the first night they set out on the flim flam trail . The attempted rape, which Dessa witnesses, begins to release Rufel from the position which she holds in Dessa's mind as representative of 'the oppressor'. Dessa is moved by the realisation that Rufel "was as helpless in this as I was, that our only protection was ourselves and each others" (p. 202). Though Dessa does not share intimate details of her life with Rufel, Dessa becomes more relaxed in Rufel's presence, and learns to trust Rufel. Williams seems to suggest that Dessa's journey to self-knowledge

involves both the black and white woman in liberating the 'other' from dehumanising categories, while remaining sensitive to difference. This seems to implicitly value the complexity of relationships between slave narrator and sponsor, and between slave and master or mistress.

A kind of divine justice is performed in Part Three, where we observe the ultimate reversal of the power asymmetry represented by Part One. The black picaresque art of survival becomes a vehicle through which the marginal actors in the sacred text of slavery, "change the joke and slip the yoke". The flim flam trail enacts the subversive potential of humour, trickery and masking. Nehemiah returns in Part Three and threatens to re-enslave Dessa, but he is hopelessly outwitted by picaresque manipulations which 're-write' the gender and race roles assigned in the drama of slavery. As in Part One of *Dessa Rose*, in Part Three, the final confrontation between Nehemiah and Dessa emphasises external struggle, and what one *does*, rather than emotional or psychological responses to the past privileged in *Beloved*. When Dessa is temporarily re-captured by Nehemiah, Rufel is able to rescue her because Rufel, like Dessa, is able to manipulate the conventions of slavery to her own end. Southern convention invoked by Rufel prevents Nehemiah and the sheriff from examining Dessa's scars, which would establish Dessa's identity as the fugitive leader of the coffle up-rising. An old black woman is brought into the jail where Dessa has been placed and is asked to inspect Dessa for the scars "writ about her private parts"; the woman denies their presence. As a white woman, Rufel's *word* substantiates Dessa's claim to be "Miz Lady's" slave, not the slave for whom Nehemiah (Nemi) has frantically searched since her escape:

"Sheriff", Miz Lady [Rufel] say... smiling, holding Clara so Clara could play with his badge, "we just come in from Aikens to meet some hands my daddy sending to help with the harvest. He"-- she looked over her shoulder at Nemi-- "just mistook my girl for someone else"

"You would lie for her, madam?" Nemi ask real sharp.

Well, she drewed up at that; white man ain't posed to call no white lady a lie (p. 227)

As a shadowy "darky", Dessa's identity cannot be specified, which works to her advantage. When Nehemiah reads aloud to the sheriff the 'Wanted' poster-- "dark complexed. Spare built. Shows the whites of her eyes" (p. 222)-- the Sheriff replies, "that sound like about twenty negroes I knows] personally" (p. 222). The

novel ends with Dessa, free, walking by Rufel's side: "We couldn't hug each other, not on the streets... we both had sense enough to know that... but that night we walked the boardwalk together and we didn't hide our grins" (p. 233). This scene at the end of *Dessa Rose* compels Michele Wallace to write: "what finally excites me the most about this novel is its definition of friendship as the collective struggle that ultimately transcends the stumbling-blocks of race and class. If the creative writer can't dream these dreams, who can?" (35). The relationship between *Dessa Rose* and the slave narrative tradition is an essential context in which to appreciate the optimism conveyed by the dream-friendship which emerges between Rufel and Dessa. We observe the complexity of relationships in the slave narrative tradition, affirmed in the conflicts set in motion by the structure of *Dessa Rose*, particularly relationships between black and white women, and those set in motion when the ex-slave becomes a "sharer in the general, public discourse about slavery". In both the slave narrative tradition and *Dessa Rose*, the *process of achievement* is a significant dimension of what may appear to be superficial relationships.

While *Dessa Rose* emphasises external or public power struggles, and processes which resolve such conflicts, *Beloved* focuses on conflicts within individual characters, set in motion by the presence of Beloved, who represents, in Ella's words, the danger inherent in "past errors taking possession of the present". Beloved prevents "the real, intimate level" of connection which Sethe, Denver and Paul D all need in their lives. Beloved creates a false sense of security for Sethe, who realises Beloved is her daughter and is "excited to giddiness by the things she no longer had to remember" (p. 183). Sethe turns away from the possibilities of a life with Paul D and "locks the door", effectively locking herself and Denver into a life defined by the past. Paul D leaves 124, stunned by the knowledge of the infanticide related to him by Stamp Paid. But it is the presence of Beloved which makes Paul D so uncomfortable in Sethe's house that he eventually feels compelled to sleep in the shed, before he departs. Paul D's own past threatens to lock him out of a domestic context in which he could come to terms with painful experience^{of} loss, as does *Dessa Rose* through her relationship with Harker, and with the black community in general, among whom she is able to share her painful memories of slavery. Like Sethe, Denver is overjoyed by the presence of her sister, but Denver begins to realise that Beloved threatens to consume her mother and perhaps kill her. As Beloved grows fat and increasingly volatile, Sethe stops eating and devotes all her energy to feeding

and placating Beloved. Beloved is revealed to be, in Ella's words, "the possibility of sin moving on in... unleashed and sassy". Significantly, Stamp Paid, welcome in all black people's homes, and accustomed to the privilege of entering their homes without knocking, can no longer enter 124, or even bring himself to knock on the door. He circles 124 remembering the days when Baby Suggs was alive and her home was the spiritual centre of the black community. We observe in Stamp Paid's rememories, and his journey around and around the house he can no longer enter, the presence of the black community effectively shut out by Beloved.

It is Denver's journey from 124 that sets in motion the exorcism of the past. The pessimism associated with the defeat and death of Baby Suggs, is revised when Baby Suggs returns from the other side to compel her granddaughter, Denver, into the world:

Denver stood on the porch in the sun and couldn't leave it. Her throat itched; her heart ticked-- and then Baby Suggs laughed, clear as anything. "You mean I never told you ^{no}thing about Carolina? About your daddy? You don't remember nothing about how come I walk the way I do and about your mother's feet, not to speak of her back? I never told you all that? Is that why you can't walk down the steps? My Jesus my"

But you said there was no defense.

"There ain't".

Then what do I do?

"Know it, and go ^{on} out the yard. Go on." (p. 244)

Baby Suggs' questions, "You mean I never told you...", remind Denver of her family history encoded in the stories told over and over through different character s' rememories in *Beloved*. Baby Suggs' questions remind Denver that the real source of connection she needs is not in the past represented by Beloved, but in contexts of family and community represented by the stories of survival that define black familⁱes and communitⁱes in history. Armed with the wisdom of her grandmother, Denver nevertheless enters a dangerous world, but Baby Suggs makes clear that Denver must live in that dangerous world (the world where Dessa confronts Nehemiah, Rufel and herself), not lock the world out. Denver's presence on the road leading away from 124, her willingness to demonstrate need and ask for help, galvanises the ^{local} black community. Food

appears in the yard at 124, with notes indicating to whom the empty plate or basket should be returned. In returning them, Denver meets people, people who in turn learn that Sethe is in a perilous situation. Ella organises the womenfolk who approach 124, pray, shout, and "stomp out" Beloved.

While Denver must leave the porch and go into the world, for her own sake as well as the sake of her mother, Paul D must journey in the opposite direction, from the porch into the domestic realm, to re-connect with Sethe at a "real, intimate level". When Paul D arrives at 124, he sits on the porch; his departure from 124 finds him on the porch of the local church, drinking from a whisky bottle, unable to make sense of the "contents of his tobacco tin", opened and revealed by his reunion and short sojourn with Sethe. Paul D is often presented as a 'porch sitter', a liminal position between home and the road suggesting his disconnection from basic, essential emotional bonds, but also his readiness to form such bonds. This is conveyed by the final scene in the novel, particularly through images of connection, in contrast to abundant images of disconnection and fragmentation throughout the novel. *Beloved* does not conclude with the confidence in the future that marks the close of *Dessa Rose*, but we observe that Denver, Paul D and Sethe have arrived at points in their lives where it may be possible to fashion a livable, satisfying life. Like the "real, intimate level" which distinguishes *Dessa Rose*, *Beloved* ends with an emphasis on intimate relationships as the primary building blocks of a fulfilling life. At the end of *Beloved*, following the womens' exorcism of Beloved, Denver and Paul D meet on the road. Denver is on her way from 124 to work, and tells Paul D, "I think I've lost my mother" (p. 266), suggesting Sethe's shattered inner self, as a result of the encounter with Beloved. Like the pessimistic defeat and death of Baby Suggs, Sethe's apparent defeat at the end of the novel is a bleak perspective of the pervasive and enduring impact of slavery. But this is a possibility at the end of *Beloved* which must be seen in relation to tenuous hope, signalled by Denver's journey into the world beyond 124, and by Paul' D's return to Sethe's house: "now his coming is the reverse of his going... He walks to the front door and opens it" (p. 270-1) Paul D enters 124. His desire to begin a new life with Sethe conveys the *possibility* of transcending the painful past, as Dessa is able to do:

Paul D sits down in the rocking chair and examines the quilt patched in carnival colors. His hands are limp between his knees. There are too many things to feel about this woman. Suddenly he remembers Sixo trying to describe what he felt about the Thirty-Mile woman.

"she is a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order. It's good, you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind."

He is staring at the quilt... He wants to put his story next to hers.

"Sethe", he says, "me and you, we got more yesterdays than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow".

He leans over and takes her hand. With the other he touches her face. "You your best thing, Sethe. You are." His holding fingers are holding hers.

"Me? Me?" (pp. 272-3)

In *Beloved* the closing images of connection-- "the quilt patched in carnival colors", Sixo's image of love gathering him together, Sethe's and Paul D's fingers intertwined-- speak to the *possibility* of a hopeful future in the difficult context of the present. Of the stories which Baby Suggs reminds Denver are her salvation in a dangerous world, one is the story of Denver's birth, told repeatedly by Denver and Sethe in the novel. With the help of a poor, wandering white girl who encounters Sethe in the woods, Denver is born "in the hollows along the riverbank" of the Ohio River, during Sethe's escape from slavery. Born at the edge of the waterway which symbolised for hundreds of American slaves the geographical boundary between bondage and freedom, Denver may be seen at one level to symbolise freedom, and a hopeful future. Morrison's image given below of bluefern spores returns us to Douglass' grandmother, Betsy Baily, nurturer of the sweet potato seedling, an image which I have suggested conveys the pervasive, positive impact of the black community in slavery, as well as the position of the black woman as presence in, and creators of, the slave narrative tradition, figured imaginatively in both *Dessa Rose* and *Beloved*. In the passage below, Morrison presents, through the poetic evocation of the moments following Denver's birth, an image of "spores of bluefern" that may be seen to represent the triumph of freedom as an ephemeral "moment of certainty":

Spores of bluefern growing in the hollows along the riverbank float toward the water in silver-blue lines hard to see unless you are in or near them, lying right at the river's edge when the sunshots are low and drained. Often they are mistook for insects-- but they are seeds in which the whole generation sleeps confident of a future. And for a moment it is easy to believe each one has one-- will become all of what is contained in the spore: will live out its days as planned. This

moment of certainty lasts no longer than that; longer, perhaps, than the spore itself (p. 84)

In *Dessa Rose*, Williams fashions conflicts, the resolutions of which make "it easy to believe each... will live out its days as planned". In *Beloved*, focus on the emotional and psychological impact of slavery suggests that such resolutions, though possible and desirable, can be no more than a "moment of certainty", achieved often at enormous personal cost. Denver's birth can be seen to both validate the burning desire for freedom which animates and gives form to the narratives of Equiano, Douglass and Jacobs, and to transcend the specificity of historical context. The unfinished journeys of slave narrators and their fictional representations in *Dessa Rose* and *Beloved* mark beginnings, not endings. The narratives of slavery central to this study are testimony to the triumph of freedom, "I Was Born"; they also speak to the dilemmas of self-representation for those black men and women who emerge to declare their identity "right at the river's edge", a position of problematic and yet empowering liminality between the threat of the past in slavery, and the "moment of certainty" which freedom promised. In recognising the trauma and human cost of slavery, and the triumph of black agency over the debilitating past, the reader may value narratives of slavery as "seeds in which the whole generation sleeps confident of a future".

NOTES
CHAPTER I

1. Joyce A. Joyce, "The Black Canon: Reconstructing Black American Literary Criticism" in New Literary History, 18/2, (Winter, 1987), pp. 335-343
2. Houston A. Baker, Jr., "Autobiographical Acts and the ^{Voice of the} Southern Slave" in The Slave's Narrative, (eds.), Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., New York, Oxford University Press, 1985, 242-261; p. 253
3. Joyce, "The Black Canon...", p. 336
4. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., (ed.) Black Literature and Literary Theory, New York and London, Methuen, 1984, p. 5
5. James Olney, "I Was Born: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and Literature" in The Slave's Narrative, (eds.) Davis and Gates, 1985, pp. 148-174
6. Angelo Costanzo, Surprising Narrative: Olaudah Equiano and the Beginnings of Black Autobiography, London, Greenwood Press, 1987. Keith A. Sandiford, Measuring the Moment: Strategies of Protest in Eighteenth Century Afro-English Writing, Selvingrove, Sesquehanna University Press, 1988
7. Josephine Ann Adams, "Sisters of The Light: The Importance of Spirituality in the Afro-American Novel", unpublished PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 1989. A number of wide ranging studies attempt to identify and describe women's life writing, for example, Estelle C. Jelinek, The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present, Boston, Twayne, 1986
8. Olney, "I Was Born...", p. 148
9. Olney, *ibid.*, p. 150
10. Olney, *ibid.* p. 151
11. Olney, *ibid.*, p. 151
12. Olney, *ibid.*, p. 163
13. Jelinek, The Tradition of Women's Autobiography..., p. xii
14. Olney, "I Was Born...", p. 149

15. Olney, *ibid.*, p. 150. Olney quotes from an unpublished work by Professor Ricoeur
16. Olney, *ibid.*, p. 156
17. Helen Perold (ed.), Equiano: The Slave Who Fought to be Free, People's College Comics, Ravan Press, Braamfontein, South Africa and the Sached Trust, Johannesburg, 1988
18. see Appendix A for extracts from the Equiano comic-book
19. Bill and Rosamund Billington, " 'A Burning Zeal for Righteousness': Women in the British Anti-Slavery Movement, 1820-1860" in Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800-1914, (ed.) Jane Rendal, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1987, pp. 82 - 111
20. Jane H. and William H. Pease, They Who Would Be Free: Black's Search for Freedom 1830-1861, New York, Atheneum, 1974 :

Both black and white lecturers buttressed their analysis of slavery with shocking atrocity stories to rouse their audiences' emotions. For most white writers these stories came second-hand from compilations... But most black lecturers could rely on first-hand experience--albeit often supplemented by stock tales... Those who dealt more specifically with the subject relied mostly heavily on shocking tales of the sexual use and abuse of female slaves. (p. 38)

21. Billington, "A Burning Zeal...", p. 88
22. Billington, *ibid.*, p. 88
23. The reasons which Watts cites for the absence of American women's writing in the early 18th century are similar to those obstacles faced by the slave, particularly women, in achieving literacy. See Emily Stipes Watt, The Poetry of American Women from 1632 to 1945, Austin and London, University of Texas Press, 1977, p. 22.
24. Billington, "A Burning Zeal...", p. 88
25. Olney, "I Was Born...", p. 152-3
26. Jean Fagan Yellin (ed.) , Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written By Herself (1861), Cambridge, Mass., London, Harvard University Press, ¹⁹⁸⁴ p. xxvii
27. Yellin (ed.) , Incidents..., p. xxvi
28. Melvin Dixon, "Singing Swords: The Literary Legacy of *Slavery* " in The Slave's Narrative, (eds.) Davis and Gates, 1985, pp. 298-318; p. 300
29. Minrose C. Gwin, "Green-Eyed Monsters of the Slavocracy: Jealous Mistresses in Two Slave Narratives" in Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction,

and Literary Tradition, (eds.) Marjorie Pyrse and Hortense Spillers, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1988, p. 42

30. Deborah McDowell, "New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism" in Black American Literature Forum, 14, (Winter, 1980), pp. 153-159. McDowell is responding to Barbara Smith, "Towards a Black Feminist Criticism" in Conditions: Two, 1, (October, 1977). McDowell writes:

The earliest theoretical statement on Black Feminist criticism is Barbara Smith's "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism"...Though its importance as a ground-breaking piece of scholarship cannot be denied, it suffers from lack of precision and detail (p. 154)

31. Michele Wallace, "Who Owns Zora Neale Hurston? Critics Carve up the Legend" in Invisibility Blues: from Pop to Theory, London, New York, Verso Books, 1990, p. 178

32. Yellin (ed.), Incidents..., p. xxvi; p. xxviii

33. Sherley Anne Williams, Dessa Rose, London, Futura, p. 59; p. 62

34. Paul Edwards (ed.), The Life of Olaudah Equiano (1789), Longman African Classics, 1988, p. xxv

35. Peter Fryer, Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain, London, Pluto Press, 1984. Fryer provides a good overview of Sancho's life, pp. 93-98, in which he describes Sancho's interests in the arts, as well as other, earthier pursuits:

The Duke of Montagu... admired [Sancho's] 'native frankness of manner as yet unbroken by servitude', gave him presents of books, and advised the three sisters [who 'owned' Sancho] to attend to his education. But they were unflexible... Sancho... ran away and sought refuge with the Montagus. The Duke had recently died; the Duchess wanted to send the runaway back to Greenwich, but he threatened to shoot himself rather than return, so she engaged him as a butler. Now he could freely indulge his passion for reading and cultivate a broad range of talents. He wrote poetry, two stage plays, and a "Theory of Music", dedicated to the Princess Royal, which was never published and is apparently lost. He emerged also as a minor composer: three small collections of songs, minuets and other pieces for violin, mandolin, flute and harpsicord were published anonymously... Sancho adored the theatre and would spend his last shilling to see Garrick, greatest actor of the age, at Drury Lane. But he was not a clear enough speaker to play Othello or Oroonoko, though it seems he would have liked to. His other passions were for women and gambling; he was cured of the latter weakness when he lost his clothes playing cribbage (pp. 93-4)

36. Fryer, Staying Power, p. 91. Fryer provides a good overview of Wheatley's life and accomplishments, as well as the sad circumstances of her early death, pp. 91-93. Of her skill as a poet Fryer writes:

Phillis was segregated from the other household servants and taught to read and write. Within sixteen months she was reading the Bible fluently. She learned Latin and was 'proud of the fact that Terence was at least of African birth'... She seems to have begun to write poetry at about the age of thirteen. One of her earliest and shortest surviving poems, showing the influence of both missionary propaganda and of Alexander Pope-- whose neo-classicism permeates all her later work-- was called "On being brought from Africa to America".

When Phillis came to London in 1773, in the company of her mistress's son, she was lionized. The Countess of Huntington, to whom she had dedicated her first published poem three years before, introduced her to the Earl of Dartmouth and other prominent members of London society. Her visitors included Benjamin Franklin, then agent in Europe for the North American colonies. The Lord Mayor presented her with a valuable edition of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (pp. 91-2)

For a less objective but passionate interpretation of Wheatley's life and work, see June Jordan, "The Difficult Miracle of Black Poetry in America, or Something Like a Sonnet for Phillis Wheatley" in Massachusetts Review, 27/2, (Summer, 1986), pp. 252-262. In her PhD dissertation, "Four Contemporary Black Women Poets: Lucille Clifton, June Jordan, Audre Lorde and Sherley Anne Williams", Doris Davenport points to three works that attempt a reading of the tradition of Black women's poetry from Wheatley to the present.

- Boston,
37. Phillis Wheatley, Poems on various subjects religious and moral (1773)
 38. Keith Sandiford, Measuring the Moment: Strategies of Protest in Eighteenth Century Afro-English Writing, Seligrove, Susquehanna University Press, 1988. Paul Edwards and David Dabydeen (eds.), Black Writers in Britain, 1760-1890, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1991
 39. Abraham Chapman, (ed.) Steal Away: Stories of the Runaway Slaves, New York, Washington, London, Praeger, 1971
 40. Chapman, Steal Away, p. 5
 41. Chapman, ibid., 46-50. Baquaqua's reference to Hamlet is taken from Act 1, Scene 5
 42. Fryer, Staying Power, p. 93
 43. Wilfred Samuels, "Metaphor of Self: 'African Man as Warrior' ", unpublished, paper, 1989, p. 132

Significantly, Johnson also published for the Corresponding Society, a worker's educational enterprise founded by Thomas Hardy, the shoemaker, an enterprising tradesman who rose to become a wealthy industrialist. Equiano lodged with Hardy in London, and of the two surviving manuscript letters of Equiano, one was written from Hardy's address. The other, written from Edinburgh, was to Hardy.

44. It seems Equiano was adept at reading and manipulating his audience, evidence for which Samuels finds in the 1791 Dublin edition: "Equiano was careful to include a list of Irish subscribers which preceded the list of English subscribers", "Metaphor of Self...", p. 133
45. Paul Edwards, "'... Written By Himself': A Manuscript Letter of Olaudah Equiano" in Notes and Queries, (June, 1968), pp. 222-225; p. 225
46. Samuels, "Metaphor of Self...", p. 130-1
47. Samuels, *ibid.*, 131
48. Robert Burns Stepto, 'I Rose and Found My Voice: Narration, Authentication and Authorial Control in Four Slave Narratives' in The Slave's Narrative, (eds.), Davis and Gates, 1985. pp. 225-241; p. 229
49. Stepto, "I Rose...", pp. 225-226
50. Samuels, "Metaphor of Self...", pp. 131-2
51. Olney, "I Was Born...", p. 166
52. Olney, *ibid.*, p. 166
53. Jane H. and William H. Pease, They Who Would be Free, p. 3-4

The contrast the Peases draw between black practicality and white idealism is well illustrated in Douglass' account of purchasing his freedom after self-emancipation: "Some of my uncompromising anti-slavery friends... thought it a violation of anti-slavery principles... and a wasteful expenditure of money [to purchase Douglass' freedom]. On the other hand, viewing it simply in the light of a ransom, or as money extorted by a robber, and my liberty of more value than one hundred fifty pounds, I could not see neither a violation of the laws of morality, nor those of economy, in the transaction" (p. 228/1855). See pp. 228-230, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, for Douglass' full account.

54. Benjamin Quarles, "The Breach Between Douglass and Garrison" in Journal of Negro History, 23, (April, 1938), pp. 144-154. "As lecturing abolitionists in company with each other, the two developed a fast friendship during the early eighteen-forties. Douglass' autobiography, published in 1845, bore an introductory letter from Garrison. Together during the latter half of 1846 they had exhorted audiences in the British Isles to support the anti-slavery cause" (p. 145)

55. Quarles, "The Breach...". p. 147
56. Quarles, *ibid.*, p.147
57. Quarles, *ibid.*, p. 146
58. Olney, "I Was Born...", p. 166
59. Olney, "I Was Born...", pp. 153-4
60. Baker, p. 253
61. Stepto, p. 225
62. Laura Tanner, "Self-Conscious Representation in the Slave Narrative" in Black American Literature Forum, 21/4 (Winter, 1987), pp. 415-424
63. Tanner writes:
- I cannot argue with Stepto's assertion that such an assimilation of authenticating documents and strategies into the texts results in what he calls "a more sophisticated narrative form"... [but] I would argue that there is good reason to support the very separation of authentication and narrative that Stepto criticizes so strongly (p. 420)
64. Olney, "I Was Born...", p. 169
65. Melvin Dixon, "Singing Swords...", p. 299

NOTES
CHAPTER II

1. Stanley Elkins, Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1959. For a discussion of the problems, as well the strengths, of Elkins' thesis, see Michele Wallace, "Slaves of History" in Invisibility Blues, (ed.), Michele Wallace, pp. 137-145
2. Larousse Gran Diccionario, Marcella, Mexico, 1983, p. 535-6
3. Raymond Hedin, "Strategies of Form in American Slave Narrative" in The Art of Slave Narrative: Original Essays in Criticism and Theory, (eds.), John Sekora and Darwin T. Turner, Western Illinois University Foundation, 1982. pp. 25-35; p. 26
4. Charles Nichols, "The Slave Narrators and the Picaresque Mode: Archetypes for Modern Black Personae" in The Slave's Narrative, (eds.), Davis and Gates, 1985, pp. 283-297; p. 283 - 284
5. Susan Thistlethwaite, Race, Sex, and God: Christian Feminism in Black and White, London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1990. p. 1
6. Thistlethwaite, Race, Sex and God, p. 1
7. Julio Roderiguez-Luis, "*Picaras*: The Modal Approach to the Picaresque" in Comparative Literature, 31/1, (Winter, 1979), pp. 32-46.
8. Frances Smith-Foster, " 'In Respect to Females...': Differences in the Portrayals of Women by Male and Female Narrators" in Black American Literature Forum, 15 (Summer, 1981), pp. 66-70
9. James Olney, " 'I Was Born': ^{Slave Narratives,} Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature" in The Slave's Narrative (eds.), Davis and Gates, 1985, pp. 148-174; p. 151
10. Lawrence Levine, Black Culture and Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom, New York, Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 132-3
11. Keith Byerman, "We Wear the Mask: Deceit as Theme and Style in Slave Narratives" in The Art of Slave Narrative, (eds.) Sekora and Turner, 1982, pp. 70-82; p. 70

12. Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves" in Black Scholar, December, 1971. Davis writes:

precisely through performing the drudgery which has long been a central expression of the socially conditioned inferiority of women, the black woman in chains could help lay the foundations for some degree of autonomy for herself and her men. Even as she was suffering under her unique oppression as female, she was thrust by the forces of circumstances into the center of the slave community. She was, therefore, essential to the *survival* of the community (p. 7)

13. Byerman, "We Wear the Mask...", p. 74

14. Lucinda MacKethan, "Mother Wit: Humor in Afro-American Women's Autobiography" in Studies in American Humor, 4/1-2, (Spring/Summer, 1985), pp. 51-61; p. 52

15. Raymond Hedin, "The American Slave Narrator: The Justification of the Picaro" in American Literature, 53, (January, 1982), pp. 630-644; p. 630

16. The picaresque can be identified in a wide range of folk and literary traditions; perhaps all human societies have manifested in cultural practice this wise, disruptive, subversive, elusive figure. see Mikhail Bakhtin's Rabelais and His World (translated from Russian by Helene Iswolsky), Cambridge, Mass., London, MIT Press, 1968. Mikhail Bakhtin views folk comedy as the European peasant's answer to the masker:

The profound originality expressed by the culture of folk humor in the past has remained unexplored until now... And yet, the scope and importance of this culture were immense in the Renaissance and Middle Ages. A boundless world of humorous forms and manifestations opposed the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture (p. 4).

In a different context, Mary Ellison observes that "Trickster figures contain the key to black and indian responses in repressive situations", and that "Black and indian writers in the sixties and seventies have continued to incorporate the trickster element into their novels". see Mary Ellison, "Black Perceptions and Red Images: Indian and Black Literary Links" in Phylon, XLIV/1, (March, 1983), pp. 33-43; pp. 48-9.

Ellison writes:

It is specifically within the area of folktales and myths that the culture of blacks and indians seems to mingle most powerfully and most inextricably... The similarity between the tales have been the subject of long debate, yet whether their origin is black or indian is ultimately less important than that they became a shared element in cultures that had much in common. The natural affinity of two peoples oppressed by a dominant race frequently survived attempts of whites to drive them apart. Their similar responses are reflected in stories that have parallel ways of coping with oppressive

situations. Beyond this lay a bond that united peoples who shared a harmonious interaction with natural forces and a deep regard for the actuality and symbolism of animal behavior...

The most remarkable body of shared tales was stored and embellished by the black slaves and the Five Civilised Tribes of the Southeast. The similarities are most startling between the rabbit tales collected not only by Joel Chandler Harrison but numerous other recorders or anthropologists among the slaves or ex-slaves, and those gathered by James Mooney among the Cherokees at the end of the nineteenth century... Mooney is among that minority of anthropologists who have propounded the belief that the rabbit tales are of Indian origin. Because the Cherokee commonly regard the rabbit as a successful trickster, he is convinced that the Brer Rabbit stories sprang from Cherokee prototypes... Alan Dundes explains the prevalence of the rabbit stories as emanating from East Africans who had passed on their popular trickster figure not only to other slaves but to Indians as distant as the Natchez and the Hitchiti. All revelled in the outwitting of the powerful by the apparently weak (pp. 44-47)

For a more critical view of the relationship between black and Native American peoples, see R. Haliburton, Red Over Black: Slavery Among the Cherokee Indians, London, Greenwood Press, 1977. This work includes an appendix of FWP interviews with ex-slaves of mixed black/Indian ancestry. Haliburton argues that the Cherokee maintained an attitude of superiority over blacks, whom they enslaved in much the same way that the white man enslaved the black man:

From the earliest times, the Cherokee appear to have been one of the largest and most advanced Indian tribes. They were an ethnocentric people and believed they were superior to others, regardless of their tribes, races, or origins.

Both the Spanish and the French used black slaves on their expeditions of discovery into the Indian country, and when the Cherokees first met these Europeans, they saw black men bearing burdens, performing labor, tending livestock, and acting as body servants. The Cherokees did not at that time or subsequently develop an affinity with blacks as brothers of color, both oppressed by the white man.

Runaway blacks who made their way to the Cherokees seeking sanctuary were usually considered to be intruders and treated accordingly. Later, when the Cherokees came into possession of blacks by marauding and other means, they viewed them as economic commodities to be ransomed, exchanged, sold, or retained as slaves. Although the tribe had employed enforced adoption for as long as their oral history recalled, only other Indians and whites were considered adoptable. Like the colonists, the Indians considered Negroes to be an inferior and servile people. (p. 139-140)

It is interesting to note in relation to Haliburton's observation above that in *Beloved*, the Cherokee who provide sanctuary for Paul D and the other

slaves running from slavery in Alfred, Georgia, are indians who are themselves deracinated and isolated:

Decimated but stubborn, they [the Cherokee] were among those who chose a fugitive life rather than Oklahoma. The illness that swept them now was reminiscent of the one that had killed half their number two hundred years earlier. In between that calamity and this, they had visited George III in London, published a newspaper, made baskets, led Oglethorpe through the forests, helped Andrew Jackson fight Creek, cooked maize, drawn up a constitution, petitioned the King of Spain, been experimented on by Dartmouth, established asylums, wrote their language, resisted settlers, shot bear and translated scripture. All to no avail. The forced move to the Arkansas River, insisted upon by the same president they fought for against the Creek, destroyed another quarter of their already shattered number.

That was it, they thought, and removed themselves from those Cherokee who signed the treaty, in order to retire into the forest and await the end of the world. The disease they suffered now was a mere inconvenience compared to the devastation they remembered. Still, they protected each other as best they could. The healthy were sent some miles away; the sick stayed behind with the dead-- to survive or join them (p. 111).

A text recently brought to my attention, but which I have been unable to locate, considerably broadens the trickster's terrain. See Roguery: The Picaresque Tradition in Australian, Canadian, and Indian Fiction, (eds.), Ronald Blaber and Marvin Gilman, Springwood, New South Wales, Butterfly Books, 1990

17. Ulrich Wicks, "The Nature of Picaresque Narrative: A Modal Approach" in PMLA, 89, (1974), pp. 240-9; p. 241.

Wicks' "Picaro, Picaresque: The Picaresque in Literary Scholarship" is a useful guide, to which is appended the comprehensive "A Picaresque Bibliography". Both can be found in Genre, 5, (1972), pp. 153-192; 193-216. This work is the basis for Wicks' full length study, Picaresque Narratives, Picaresque Fictions: A Theory and Research Guide, New York/London, Greenwood Press, 1989

18. Roderiguez-Luis, "*Picaras...*", p. 32
19. Wicks, "The Nature of Picaresque Narrative...", p. 248
20. Wicks, *ibid.*, p. 244-5
21. Paul Edwards (ed.), The Life of Olaudah Equiano, Essex, Longman, 1988. p. xxv
22. Paul Edwards, "Narrative Strategies in Equiano's Autobiography: Irony and Ambivalence", unpublished paper delivered at the Equiano Conference,

- "Looking Back with Pleasure", University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, November, 1989
23. Thistlethwaite, Race Sex and God..., p. 7
 24. Barbara Christian, "An Angle of Seeing: Motherhood in Buchi Emecheta's *Joy of Motherhood* and Alice Walker's *Meridian*" in Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers,^{Barbara Christian} Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1985, pp. 211-253
 25. Hedin, "Strategies of Form...", p. 25
 26. Hedin, *ibid.*, p. 26
 27. Hedin, "The American Slave Narrative...", p. 632
 28. Hedin, *ibid.*, p. 630
 29. Hedin, *ibid.*, p. 632
 30. Hedin, *ibid.*, p. 633
 31. Hedin, *ibid.*, p. 633
 32. Hedin, *ibid.*, p. 633
 33. Abraham Chapman (ed.), Steal Away: Stories of the Runaway Slaves, New York, Washington, London, Praeger, 1971. p. 3
 34. Chapman, Steal Away, p. 5
 35. Paul Edwards (ed.), The Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, London, 1969
 36. Angelo Costanzo, Surprising Narrative: Olaudah Equiano and the Beginnings of Black Autobiography, London, Greenwood Press, 1987, p. 6
 37. Paul Edwards, "'Master' and 'Father' in Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*" in Slavery and Abolition, 11/2, (1990), pp. 217-227; p. 217
 38. Edwards, "'Master' and 'Father'...", p. 217
 39. Hedin, "The American Slave Narrative...", p. 636
 40. Hedin, *ibid.*, p. 632
 41. Melvin Dixon, "Singing Swords: The Literary Legacy of *Slavery*" in The Slave's Narrative, (eds.) Davis and Gates, 1985, p. 300
 42. Dixon, "Singing Swords...", p. 300
 43. Paul Edwards and Rosalind Shaw, "The Invisible *Chi* in Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*" in Journal of Religion in Africa, XIX/2, (1989) pp. 146-156, p. 148

44. Edwards and Shaw, "The Invisible *Chi...*", p. 149
45. Edwards and Shaw, *ibid.*, p. 153
46. Winks, Robin (ed.) Slavery : A Comparative Perspective : Readings on Slavery from Ancient Times to the Present, New York, New York University Press, 1972, p. xiv
47. Hedin, "The American Slave Narrative...", p. 636
48. Hedin, *ibid.*, 634-5
49. Hedin, *ibid.*, p. 636
50. Henry Louis Gates^{Jr.}, The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 4
51. Martha K. Cobb, "The Slave Narrative and The Black Literary Tradition" in The Art of Slave Narrative, (eds.) Sekora and Turner, 1982, pp. 36-45

To those who know and read black literature, the tendency is to see it in compartments defined by the language in which it is written. "Afro-American" to many means black literature written in English in the United States, forgetting that the term can also designate two continents and the Caribbean archipelago where the slave diaspora situated black men and woman. The slave narrative is presented here [in Cobb's article] in its relation to the whole of black literature whose nexus is the chronological dispersion of Africans to the New World and the geographical extension in English-, French-, Spanish- and Portugese-speaking countries (p. 43)
52. Byerman, "We Wear the Mask...", p. 76
53. William Andrews, To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1986, p. 267
54. Hedin, "Strategies of Form...", p. 27
55. Michele Wallace, Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory, London, New York, Verso Books, 1990, p. 142
56. Linda Elena Opyr, "The Black Woman in the Novels of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison", unpublished PhD dissertation, St. John's University, 1988, p. 201
57. Roderiguez-Luis, "*Picaras...*", p. 37
58. Roderiguez-Luis, *ibid.* p. 33
59. Thistlethwaite, Race, Sex and God, p. 6

60. Hedin, "Strategies of Form...", p. 27
61. Thistlethwaite, Race, Sex and God, p. 44. see Ann Petry, The Street (1946), New York, BJ Publishing Group, 1969
62. Hortense Spillers, "Cross-Currents, Discontinuities: Black Women's Fiction" in Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction and Literary Tradition, (eds.), Marjorie Pryse and Hortense Spillers, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1985, pp. 249-261; p. 254
63. Mary Helen Washington, ^(ed.) Invented Lives: Narratives of Black Women, 1860-1960, New York, Doubleday, 1987, p. 297
64. Thistlethwaite, Race, Sex and God, p. 7
65. Washington, Invented Lives, p. 298
66. Washington, *ibid.*, p. 299-300
67. Washington, *ibid.*, p. 298
68. Barbara Christian, "Trajectories of Self-Definition: Placing Contemporary Afro-American Women's Fiction" in Conjuring, (eds.) Pryse and Spillers, 1985, pp. 233-248; p. 237
69. Jean Fagan Yellin (ed.), Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861), p. xxx
70. MacKethan, "Mother Wit...", p. 53
71. MacKethan, *ibid.*, p. 54
72. Andrews, To Tell a Free Story, p. 252
73. Andrews, *ibid.*, p. 251
74. Hazel Carby, "Ideologies of Black Folk: The Historical Novel of Slavery" in Slavery and the Literary Imagination, (eds.), Deborah McDowell and Arnold Rampersad, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, p. 127
75. Josephine Adams, "Sisters of the Light: The Importance of Spirituality in the Afro-American Novel", unpublished PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 1989 p. 2
76. Catherine Obianuju Acholonu, The Igbo Roots of Olaudah Equiano, Owerri Nigeria, AFA Publications, 1989
77. Adams, "Sisters of the Light...", p. 27-8
78. James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel" in Price of The Ticket: Collected Non-Fiction, 1948-1985, London, Michael Joseph, 1985, pp. 27-34, p. 28

79. Paul Edwards, "Edward W. Blyden: Sense and Sentimentality" in The Commonwealth Writer Overseas (ed.), Alastair Niven, Didier, 1976, pp. 139-150; p. 143
80. Hollis R. Lynch (ed.), Selected Letters of Edward Wilmot Blyden, New York, KTO Press, 1978, p. 16
81. Edwards, "Edward W. Blyden: Sense and Sentimentality", p. 149
82. Carol Iannone, "Toni Morrison's Career" in Commentary, (December, 1987), pp. 59-63; p. 63
83. Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel", p. 28
84. Baldwin, *ibid.*, p. 33
85. Toni Morrison, Beloved (1987), Picador, 1988, p. 198-99
86. Nichols, "The Slave Narrators...", p. 284-5
87. Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel", p. 32

1. Until the late 1970's, Jean Fagan Yellin accepted, as did other scholars, that the authenticity of Jacobs' narrative was questionable because it did not disclose authorial identity, carrying only Maria Childs' name as editor. But Yellin reckoned that Childs would not have risked damaging the credibility of the American abolitionist movement by lying about the extent of her involvement in the text. In 1981 Yellin's attention was brought to an important collection of Jacobs' letters which established the authenticity of Jacobs' text. Yellin published her discovery in "Texts and Contexts of Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written By Herself*" in The Slave's Narrative, (eds.), Davis and Gates, 1985, pp. 262-282
2. L. J. Jordanova, "The History of the Family" in Women in Society, Interdisciplinary Essays, Cambridge Women's Studies Group, London, Virago Press, 1981, p. 42
3. In Sherley Anne Williams' short story "Meditations on History", from which *Dessa Rose* grew, the white man Adam Nehemiah's attitudes toward Dessa Rose demonstrates this:

I asked [Dessa Rose] how to pronounce the name of the young darky with whom she had lived (I am puzzled in my own mind about how to refer to him. Certainly they were not married and she never speaks of having gone through even the slave ceremony of jumping over the broom)... Her attachment to this Kaine seems appears quite sincere and... is probably rooted in the basest of physical attractions (p. 266)

See "Meditations on History" in Black Eyed Susans/Midnight Birds, (ed.), Mary Helen Washington, New York, Anchor Books, 1990. pp. 230-290. In the novel *Dessa Rose*, Dessa reflects that

Wasn't no "death do us part" in slavery; wasn't even no "dead or sold" less'n two peoples made it that. Far as two peoples loving with each other, it was any handy place if you was willing-- and sometimes if you wasn't; or you jumped the broom if the masters let you marry. But you couldn't help dreaming. Dreams was one of the reasons you got up the next day (p. 190-1)

In Beloved, Sethe's explanation of the origin of her crystal earrings reveals Sethe to be one who, in Dessa's words above, "couldn't help dreaming":

That lady I worked for in Kentucky gave them to me when I got married. What they called married back there and back then. I guess she saw how bad I felt when I found out there wasn't going to be no ceremony, no preacher. Nothing. I thought there should be something-- something to say it was right and true. I didn't want it to be just me moving over a bit of pallet full of corn husks. Or just me bringing my night bucket into his cabin. I thought there should be some ceremony. Dancing maybe. A little sweet William in my hair (p. 58-59)

For an excellent reading of the meaning of the formal marriage ceremony and contract to nineteenth century American blacks, see Claudia Tate, "Allegories of ^{Black} Female Desire; or, Rereading Nineteenth-Century Sentimental Narratives of Black Female Authority" in Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory, and Writing by Black Women, (ed.), Cheryl A. Wall, New York, Rutgers University Press, 1989, pp. 98-126

4. Morrison, Beloved, pp. 107-8
5. Martha Cobb, "The Slave Narrative and the Black Literary Tradition" in The Art of Slave Narrative, (eds.), Sekora and Turner, 1982, pp. 36-42; p. 41. see Estaban Montejo, The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave (ed.), Miguel Barnet (translated from the Spanish by Jocasta Innes), New York, Pantheon, 1968
6. Cobb, "The Slave Narrative...", p. 41
7. Sherley Anne Williams, Dessa Rose, London, Futura, 1986. The link between choice, control and sexuality is clear in the presentation of the white mistress, Miz Lorraine in *Dessa Rose*:

Miz Lorraine took her bedmates young, saw that they learned some more conventional trade, and, about the time their fear of discovery and their awe of her abated, about the time they found their tongues with her and might have boasted to others, about that time she got rid of them, sold them off. Nathan was young enough when he came to her that it took a long time for him to reach that stage, at least in front of her. He believed Miz Lorraine implicitly when she told him, with a finger over his lips, that talking to niggers was like trying to get monkeys to talk (it was even longer before he thought to ask himself what fucking niggers was like), and she, for one, did not want to do it. By the time Nathan found his voice, he also understood (or thought he did) something of why his mistress chose her belly-warmers from among the lowest of the low. Nature was strong in her; she did not call on him that often, no more than once or twice every month or so, but when she did, she kept him ^{awake most of the night and sometimes kept her} for a day or even two. If she had tried to satisfy her sexual needs with white men, even ones outside her own class, she would have had no way of ensuring their silence. If a black man boasted, she could have his life.

- He never learned who else, if anyone, besides her maid knew of the mistress's habits. He talked to no one about what he did and no one talked to him. This was what Miz Lorraine wanted; to be in control (p. 156-7)
8. Elaine Hobby, Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing, 1649-88, London, Virago, 1988, p. 1
 9. Hobby, Virtue of Necessity, p. 96
 10. Emily Stipes Watts, The Poetry Of American Women from 1632-1945, Austin and London, University of Texas Press, 1977, p. 5
 11. Watts, The Poetry of American Women, p. 70
 12. McDowell, "New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism" in Black American Literature Forum, 14, (Winter, 1980), pp. 153-159; p. 156
 13. Josephine Adams "Sisters of the Light: The Importance of Spirituality in the Afro-American Novel", unpublished PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 199, pp. 27-8
 14. Adams, "Sisters of the Light...", pp. 27-8
 15. Michele Wallace, Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory, London, New York, Verso, 1990, p. 1
 16. James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel" in Price of the Ticket: Collected Non-Fiction, 1948-1985, London, Michael Joseph, 1985, pp. 27-34
 17. Wallace, Invisibility Blues, p. 4
 18. Carol Iannone, "Toni Morrison's Career" in Commentary, (December, 1987), pp. 59-63; p. 63
 19. Linda Elena Opyr, "The Black Woman in the Novels of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison", unpublished PhD dissertation, St. John's University, 1988, p. 97
 20. Opyr, "The Black Woman...", p. 195
 21. Bernard W. Bell, The Afro-American Novel and its Tradition, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1987, p. 289
 22. Deborah E. McDowell, "Negotiating Between Tenses: Witnessing Slavery After Freedom-- *Dessa Rose*" in Slavery and the Literary Imagination, (eds.), Deborah E. McDowell and Arnold Rampersad, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University, 1989, pp. 144-163; p. 146-7
 23. Michele Wallace, "Slaves to History" in Invisibility Blues..., pp. 137-145; p. 141

24. McDowell, "Negotiating Between Tenses...", p. 145-6
25. Toni Morrison, "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation", an interview with Toni Morrison in Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Evaluation, (ed.), Mari Evans, New York, Anchor, 1984, pp. 339-345; p. 341
26. Barbara Christian, "Trajectories of Self-Definition: Placing Contemporary Afro-American Women's Fiction" in Conjuring, (ed.), Pyrse and Spillers, 1985, pp. 233-248; p. 244
27. The sense of stifled atmosphere in which "mosquitoes would not condescend to buzz" might bring to mind Emily Dickinson's picture of isolation developed below:

I heard a Fly buzz-- when I died--
The stillness in the Room
Was like the stillness in the Air--
Between the Heaves of Storm

Emily Dickinson, The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson, (ed.), Thomas H. Johnson, Boston, Toronto, Little, Brown and Co., 1955, p. 233.

The mosquito image is possibly from Tennyson's "Mariana"-- "The blue fly sung in the pane"

28. Raymond Hedin, "Strategies of Form in American Slave Narrative" in The Art of Slave Narrative, (eds.), Sekora and Turner, 1982, pp. 25-35; p. 27
29. Emily Dickinson, Complete Works, p. 60
30. Jean Fagan Yellin (ed.), Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861), p. xxxi
31. Keith Byerman, "We Wear the Mask: Deceit as Theme and Style in Slave Narrative" in The Art of Slave Narrative, (eds.), Sekora and Turner, 1982, pp. 70-82; p. 74
32. Yellin (ed.), Incidents, p. xxviii
33. Hobby, Virtue of Necessity, p. 62. A facsimilie reprint of part of An Collins' *Devine Songs and Meditacions* (1653) has been printed by the Augustan Reprint Society.
34. Watts, The Poetry of American Women, p. 74
35. Dickinson, Complete Works, p. 143
36. For example, see Folarin O. Shyllon, "Olaudah Equiano: Nigerian Abolitionist and First National Leader of Africans in Britain" in Journal of African Studies, 4 (1977), pp. 433-51, and, for the negative view of My Bondage and My Freedom which typifies critical perspective of the second autobiography, James Matlock, "The Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass" in Phylon, 40, 1979, pp. 15-28. See William Andrews, To Tell a

Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography 1760-1865, Urbana and Chicago, University of Press, 1986, chapter six (pp. 265-293), for a review of conventional critical treatment of My Bondage and My Freedom.

37. Gwendolyn Brooks' "Afterword" is reprinted in Invented Lives: Narratives of Black Women, 1860-1960, (ed.) Mary Helen Washington, New York, Double Day, 1987, pp. 433-7; p. 433
38. Byerman, "We Wear the Mask...", p. 71
39. Morrison, Beloved, p. 220
40. Morrison, Beloved, p. 188
41. Yellin (ed.), Incidents, p. xxxii-xxxiii
42. Louis and Rosamund Billington, " 'A Burning Zeal for Righteousness': Women in the British Anti-Slavery Movement, 1820-1860", in Equal or Different: Women's Politics, 1800-1914, (ed.), Jane Rendal, Oxford, Blackwell, 1987, pp. 82-111; p. 88
43. Phillip S. Foner, (ed.), Frederick Douglass on Women's Rights, West Port, Conn., Greenwood Press, 1976. See Foner's introduction, pp. 3-43 for a discussion of the inter-relationship of the American Anti-Slavery Movement and the nascent American Women's Rights Movement. Yellin's introduction to Incidents shows how Jacobs' life intersected with these two movements:

In Rochester [New York] Jacobs joined a circle of anti-slavery activists, and early in March 1849, she began working in the antislavery reading room, office and bookstore they had established in the rooms above the offices of Frederick Douglass' newspaper, *The North Star*. The breadth of references to literature and current events in *Incidents* suggests that during her eighteen months in Rochester she read her way through the abolitionists' library of books and papers... Jacobs also had the opportunity to join the circle of abolitionist women who met each Thursday in the reading room to sew, knit, read, and talk for the cause.

Jacobs lived for nine months in the home of the Quaker reformers, Issac and Amy Post. A participant in the first Women's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls [New York] in July 1848, Amy Post had helped to organise the follow-up Rochester Convention. (pp. xvi-xvii)
44. Susan Thistlethwaite, Race, Sex, and God: Christian Feminism in Black and White, London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1990, p. 45
45. Michele Wallace, Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory, London, Verso Books, 1990, p. 5
46. Washington (ed.), Invented Lives, p. xxvii

47. Patricia Jagentowicz Mills, Women, Psyche and Nature, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1987, p. 208
48. Thistlethwaite, Race, Sex and God, p. 8
49. Watts, The Poetry of American Women, p. 3
50. see Paul Edwards' review of the Schomburg edition of Wheatley's poetry in Research in African Literatures, 20/2, (Summer, 1989)
51. Patsy Brewington Perry, "The Literary Content of Frederick Douglass' Newspaper" in CLA Journal, 17, (1973), pp. 214-229; p. 221. Perry notes as significant that three of the four black poets whom Douglass promoted "have stood the test of time" and are anthologised in *Early Black American Poets* (1969) (p. 223). Douglass' commitment to providing a vehicle for the black literary voice also expressed itself as a consistent emphasis on abolition, the plight of the slave, and related issues, in his selections from English and American writers. "While Douglass made more selections from the the works of American poets than from those of English poets, he published mainly the poems of... Phillis Wheatley, William Cullen Bryant, Henry Wordsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Harriet Beecher Stowe " (p. 219).
52. Watts, The Poetry of American Women, p. 132-3
53. Washington, Invented Lives, p. 73
54. Abraham Chapman (ed.), Black Voices: An Anthology of Afro-American Literature, New York and Ontario, Mentor Books, 1968, p. 458. Margaret Walker, For My People, New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 1969
55. Watts, The Poetry of American Women, p. 174
56. Eugenia Collier, "Fields Watered with Blood: Myth and Ritual in the Poetry of Margaret Walker" in Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Evaluation, (ed.), Mari Evans, New York, Anchor Books, 1984, pp. 499-510. p. 499
57. Claudia Tate (ed.), Black Women Writers at Work, England, Oldcastle Books, 1985, p. 205-6
58. Tate, Black Women Writers, p. 212-13
59. Tate, *ibid.*, p. 121-22
60. Tate, *ibid.*, p. 122-3

NOTES
CHAPTER IV

1. Martin Jackson's words are quoted by C. Vann Woodward, "History From Slave Sources" in The Slave's Narrative, (eds.) Davis and Gates, 1985, pp. 48-59; p. 52. The interview with Martin Jackson can be found in The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography, vol. 4, "Texas Narratives", (general ed.) George W. Rawick, West Port, Conn., Greenwood Press, 1972
2. Davis and Gates (eds.), The Slave's Narrative, p. v
3. John W. Blassingame, "Using the Testimonies of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems" in The Slave's Narrative, (eds.) Davis and Gates, 1985, pp. 78-97; p. 73

Minrose C. Gwin sees the paucity of written female slave narrative linked to woman's position in the family: "most slave women were so tied to their children that they found the harrowing journey North impossible". see "Green-eyed Monsters of the Slavocracy: Jealous Mistresses in Two Slave Narratives" in Conjuring, (ed) Pyrse and Spillers, 1985

In chapter twenty-one of *My Bondage and My Freedom*, "My Escape from Slavery", Douglass expresses his "opinion that thousands would escape from slavery who now remain there, but for the strong cords of affection that bind them to their family, relatives and friends" (p. 202/1855), suggesting that men as well as women were attached to their homes.

4. Gloria Shepherd, "The Rape of Black Women During Slavery", unpublished PhD dissertation, State University of New York at Albany, 1988, p. 51
5. Shepherd, "The Rape of Black Women...", p. 53
6. C. Vann Woodward, "History From Slave Sources...", p. 53
7. Robert Burns Stepto, "I Rose and Found My Voice: Narration, Authentic ation, and Authorial Control in Four Slave Narratives" in The Slave's Narrative, (eds.), Davis and Gates, 1985, pp. 225-241; p. 225
8. Gerald Jaynes, "Plantation Factories and the Slave's Work Ethic" in The Slave's Narrative, (eds.), Davis and Gates, 1985, pp. 98-111; p. 108
9. Dorothy Bass Spann, Black Pioneers: A History of a Pioneer Family in Colorado Springs, as told to Inez Hunt, Colorado Springs, Colorado, Little London Press, 1978. This is not a 'known' slave narrative text, but a local

- publication that I had the good fortune to find in a Colorado Bookshop, near my home.
10. Toni Morrison, Song of Solomon, New York, Signet, 1978. see Beloved pp. 111-113, for the section dealing with the Cherokee people, and see note no. 16, chapter two of this study.
 11. Margaret McDowell, "The Black Woman as Artist and Critic: Four Versions" in Kentucky Review, 7/1, (Spring, 1987), pp. 19-41; p. 34
 12. Margaret McDowell, "The Black Woman...", p. 38
 13. Margaret McDowell, *ibid.*, p. 35
 14. Davis and Gates, (eds.), The Slave's Narrative, p. xxiii
 15. Elizabeth Jo MacDaniel, "The Past: A Performance-Centered Analysis of Personal Experience Narrative", unpublished PhD Dissertation, Ohio State University, 1988, p. 12
 16. MacDaniel, "The Past...", pp. 11-12
 17. MacDaniel, *ibid.*, p. 8
 18. Jaynes, "Plantation Factories...", p. 100
 19. MacDaniel, "The Past...", p. 5
 20. Paul Escott, "The Art and Science of Reading WPA Narratives" in The Slave's Narrative, (eds.), Davis and Gates, 1985, pp. 40-48; pp. 42-43
 21. Paul Edwards (ed.), The Life of Olaudah Equiano, Essex, Longman African Classics, 1989, p. 18
 22. Chinosole, "Tryin' to Get Over: Narrative Posture in Equiano's Autobiography" in The Art of Slave Narrative, (eds.), Sekora and Turner, 1982, pp. 45-55; p. 45
 23. William Andrews, To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography 1760-1865, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1986, p. 57
 24. Keith Byerman, "We Wear the Mask: Deceit as Theme and Style in Slave Narratives" in The Art of Slave Narrative, (eds.), Sekora and Turner, 1982, pp. 70-82; pp. 71-73
 25. Helen Perold (ed.), Equiano: The Slave Who Fought to be Free, People's College Comics, Ravan Press, Braamfontein, and The Sached Trust, Johannesburg, South Africa, pp. 42-43. See Appendix B
 26. Chinosole, "Tryin' to Get Over...", p. 45

27. Deborah McDowell, "Negotiating Between Tenses" in Slavery and the Literary Imagination, (eds.), Deborah McDowell and Arnold Rampersad, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, pp. 143-166; p. 148
28. Shepherd, "The Rape of Black Women...", p. 51
29. Laura Tanner, "Self-Conscious Representation in ^{the} Slave Narrative" in Black American Literature Forum, 21/4, (Winter, 1987), pp. 415-424
30. Shepherd, "The Rape of Black Women...", p. 154
31. Michele Wallace, Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory, London, Verso Press, 1990, p.7
32. Shepherd, "The Rape of Black Women...", pp. 54-5
33. Yellin (ed.), Incidents, p. xvii
34. Harriet Beecher Stowe, Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin: Presenting the Original Facts Upon Which the Story is Founded, London, 1853
35. Yellin, (ed.), Incidents..., p. xix
36. quoted by Yellin in her introduction to Incidents, p. xix
37. Laura Tanner, "Self-Conscious Representation in the Slave Narrative" in Black American Literature Forum, 21/4, (Winter, 1987), pp. 415- "a white Christian ethic that fails to take her life situation into account"
38. Sherley Anne Williams, Dessa Rose, London, Futura, 1986, p. 147
39. Tanner, "Self-Conscious Representation...", p. 415
40. Yellin (ed.), Incidents, p. xxxi
41. Tanner, "Self-Conscious Representation...", p. 418
42. For the often heated and occasionally amusing debate, see Joyce A. Joyce, "The Black Canon: Reconstructing Black American Literary Criticism", pp. 335-343; Henry Louis Gates' commentary in reply to Joyce, "'What's Love Got To Do With It?': Critical Theory, Integrity, and the Black Idiom", pp. 345-361; as well as Houston Baker's commentary in reply to Joyce, "In Dubious Battle", pp. 363-369; and, finally, Joyce's reply to the comments of Gates and Baker, "'Who the Cap Fit': Unconsciousness and Unconscionableness in the Criticism of Houston A. Baker Jr. and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.", pp. 371-383. These articles can be found in New Literary History, 18/2 (Winter, 1987).
43. Wallace, Invisibility Blues, p. 8

(ed.),

44. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Black Literature and Literary Theory, New York and London, Methuen, 1984, p. 6
45. McDowell, "Negotiating Between Tenses", p. 155
46. MacDaniel, "The Past...", p. 14
47. Victor Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites De Passage*" (1964) in Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach, (eds.), William A. Lessa and Evon Vogt, New York, Harper and Row, 1979, pp. 234-242; p. 235
48. Turner, "Betwixt and Between...", p. 236
49. Turner, *ibid.*, pp. 236-7
50. Kimberly Benston, "I yam what I am: the topos of (un) naming in Afro-American Literature" in Black Literature and Literary Theory, (ed.), Gates, 1984, pp. 151-172; p. 152-3
51. Wilfred Samuels, "Metaphor of Self: 'African Man as Warrior' ", unpublished paper, 1989, p. 127
52. Shepherd, "The Rape of Black Women...", p. 59
53. Melvin Dixon, "Singing Swords: The Literary Legacy of Slavery" in The Slave's Narrative, (eds.), Davis and Gates, 1985, pp. 298-317; p. 301
54. Turner, "Betwixt and Between", p. 238
55. See Gates' introduction to Black Literature and Literary Theory for his observations about Soyinka's and Baker's different uses of 'anthropology' in relation to black creative expression
56. Turner, "Betwixt and Between", p. 273

1. Paul Edwards, " 'Master' and 'Father' in Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*", in Slavery and Abolition, Vol. II, No. 2, 1990, pp. 217-227, quoted in this study. Also see Edwards, "Equiano and His Captains" in Common Wealth, (ed.), Anna Rutherford, 1971. Edwards discusses Equiano's search for a father figure, his complex relationships to men such as Farmer and Doran, and the significance of his assuming the role of captain upon gaining his freedom. Angelo Costanzo, Surprizing Narrative: Olaudah Equiano and the Beginnings of Black Autobiography London, Greenwood Press, 1987, p. 6, as quoted in chapter two of this study.
2. Keith Sandiford's Measuring the Moment: Strategies of Protest in Eighteenth Century Afro-English Writing, Seligrove, 1985, acknowledges women in the narrative but does not analyse their significance.
3. Houston Baker, The Journey Back: Issues in Black Literature and Criticism, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1980. p. 15.
4. Deborah McDowell, "New Directions For Black Feminist Criticism", in Black American Literature Forum, Winter, 1980, 14, pp. 153-158; p. 157. If a critic had to be distinguished as singularly influential in determining the shape of this chapter, it would be McDowell in this article which encouraged me to consider in a single chapter the narratives of Equiano and Jacobs, rather than isolate each text by treating them separately. To do so seems more in line with the spirit of this study generally, which, from its inception, has embraced both male and female perspectives of slavery, ^{and has} not ^{been} limited to the nineteenth century American tradition.
5. Paul Edwards and Rosalind Shaw, "The Invisible *Chi* in Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*", Journal of Religion in Africa, 18, 2 (1989), pp. 146-156; p. 154.
6. Wilfred D. Samuels "Disguised Voice in *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African* " in Black American Literature Forum, 19/2, (Summer 1985), pp. 64-69; p. 66
7. Ian Duffield and Paul Edwards, "Equiano's Turks and Christians: An Eighteenth Century African View of Islam", in Journal of African Studies, 2(4) Winter, 1975/76, pp. 433-444; p. 438. This is the only work of which I am aware that provides useful insight into female presence in the narrative, though gender is not the focus of the article.

8. C.K. Meek, Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe, London, Oxford University Press, 1937. Meek points out a number of Igbo women's roles in agriculture:

In most areas men do all the heavy work, i.e, fell the small trees, burn down the large ones, clear the ground, make the yam mounds, collect the props for the vines, and prepare the ground for the women's crops. The women do the planting and the weeding. But custom varies. In the Owerri Division, for instance, women take a very active part in the farming, assisting the men in making the mounds and in planting, and being entirely responsible for weeding. But among the Ika-Ibo women contribute little if anything to the work of the men. In other areas again, (e.g. at Nkpologu) it is an offence for women to plant yams, and if a woman is detected breaking this rule the yams she has planted are forfeit to the principal officials of the town (p. 17)

9. Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness (1902), Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, Penguin, 1984

When near the building, I met a white man, in such an unexpected elegance of get up that in the first moment I took him for a sort of vision. I saw a high starched collar, white cuffs, a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clear necktie, and varnished boots. No hat. Hair parted, brushed oiled, under a green lined parasol held in a big white hand. He was amazing, and had a penholder behind his ear.

I shook hands with this miracle, and I learned he was the Company's chief accountant, and that all the book keeping was done at this station. He had come out for a moment, he said, "to get a breath of fresh air". The expression sounded wonderfully odd, with its suggestion of sedentary desk-life. I wouldn't have mentioned the fellow to you at all, only it was from his lips that I first heard the name of the man who is so indissolubly connected with the memories. Moreover, I respected the fellow. Yes, I respected his collars, his vast cuffs, his brushed hair. His appearance was certainly that of a dress-maker's dummy; but in the great demoralisation of the land, he kept up on his appearance. That's backbone. His starched collars and got-up shirt fronts were achievements of character. He had been out nearly three years; and later, I could not help asking him how he managed to sport such linen. He had just the faintest blush, and said modestly, "I've been teaching one of the native women about the station. It was difficult. She had a distaste for work." Thus this man had verily accomplished something. And he was devoted to his books, which were in apple-pie order. (pp. 45-6)

The signification of the elemental and the uncontrollable in the figure of woman can be seen to permeate patriarchal societies, and may be expressed as a basic male fear of being made vulnerable. The "mobs of frenzied Amazons" in Meek's description of the 1929 Women's Riots is a good example of the imaginative projection which combines unrestrained sexuality and lust in a fantastical

image of domineering female presence as threat to established order; she is utterly *other*, in the realm of the unhuman, virtually animalistic in her raw energy and instinct, as in the Kurtz's African woman in *Heart of Darkness*:

From left to right along the lighted shore moved a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman.

She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed clothes, treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high; her hair was done in the shape of a helmet; she had brass leggings to the knees, brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, innumerable necklaces of glass beads on her neck; bizarre things, charms, gifts of witchmen, that hung about her, glittered and trembled at every step. She must have had the value of several elephant tusks upon her. She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress. And in the hush that had fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land, the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul (pp. 100-101).

10. Meek, Law and Authority, p. 332. The introduction to Law and Authority discusses the 1929 Women's Riots and helps ^{Meek} establish his thesis that the British must bring law and order to Igboland. Meek also refers to the 1929 Igbo Women's Riots as an example "of sex solidarity and of the political power which women can exercise when they choose to do so... Huge meetings of women were summoned without difficulty at selected points all over the country by leaders who displayed high gifts of oratory and organisation" (p. 201).

In Female and Male in West Africa, the editor Christine Oponng observes that

although the Women's War took place during the colonial era and was a protest against the rumoured taxation of women and the excesses of the indirect rule system in Igboland, the sociopolitical factors which made possible an organised protest embracing an area of about 520 sq. km are to be sought for in a traditional structure, which recognised the rights of Igbo women to manage their own affairs. Although in Igbo political history, as is the case in the political history of most of Africa, it is not easy to ascertain the exact dimensions of women's political powers, yet it is obvious from their elevated sociopolitical status at the turn of the century, when Nigeria came under British rule, that Igbo women enjoyed a great deal of political independence and that they had their own women's councils which enacted laws (p. 218).

11. Christine Oponng, Female and Male in West Africa, p. 72

12. Oppong, Female and Male, p. 72

13. see Barbara Christian, "An Angle of Seeing: Motherhood in Buchi Emecheta's *Joys of Motherhood* and Alice Walker's *Meridian*" in Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers, Barbara Christian, Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1985, pp. 211-252. Christian describes the paucity of black female heroes in the early tradition of the black American novel:

From *Clotel* (1850), the first Afro-American novel to be published, until Ann Petry's *The Street* in 1945, the prevailing qualities of black female heroes were their light-skinned beauty and their refinement, rather than their strength and endurance as mothers under pressure. Mothers were sometimes backdrop characters, as the practical, refined mother in Pauline Hopkins' *Contending Forces* (1900) or Bigger Thomas' narrow-minded mother in Wright's *Native Son* (1941). Sometimes the heroine might incidentally be a mother, as Irene Redfield is in Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929), but the focus in the novel is not on the mother... Some male novelists did feature strong mother figures, as did Langston Hughes in *Not Without Laughter* (1935), but the few figures who match the image in Afro-American poetry of mothers under stress are... grandmother figures who have become elders (p. 225)

14. Throughout Douglass' second autobiography, he calls attention to qualities in slave culture clearly rooted to African tradition. In My Bondage and My freedom, Douglass writes:

Strange, and even ridiculous as it may seem, among a people so uncultivated, and with so many stern trials to look in the face, there is not to be found among any people, a more rigid enforcement of the law of respect to elders, than they maintain. I set this down as partly constitutional with my race, and partly conventional. There is no better material in the world for making a gentleman, than is furnished in the Africa. He shows to others, and exacts for himself, all the tokens of respect which he is compelled to manifest toward his master (p. 49/1855)

Early in his narrative, Equiano points to similar qualities associated with his own countrymen which make them valued as slaves: "The West India planters prefer the slaves of Benin or Eboe to those of any other parts of Guinea, for their hardiness, intelligence, integrity, and zeal" (I. 21). Equiano records that, when accompanying his master to purchase slaves, Equiano chose his own "countrymen" because of physical strength and reliability. Equiano writes: "Our vessel being ready to sail for the Mosquito shore, I went with the Doctor on board a Guinea-man, to purchase some slaves to carry with us, and cultivate a plantation; and I chose them all my own countrymen" (II.178)

15. While I agree with Catherine Acholonu's identification of the strong, meaningful relationship between Equiano and his mother, I am uncomfortable with her characterisation of Equiano as "effeminate", "a

boy who was obviously more of a woman than a man", and with her suggestion that Equiano's father arranged to have his son kidnapped because he was an embarrassment to the family. See Acholonu, Catherine Obianuju The Igbo Roots Of Olaudah Equiano, Owerri Nigeria, AFA Publications, 1989

16. See Meek, Law and Authority, for an illustration of the role of the market in Igbo women's lives. For example, Meek contends that "perhaps the most striking feature of Igbo life is the keenness displayed by the women in petty trade--many women seem to do little else but attend markets" (p. 19). "The proceeds of a woman's marketing are used for her own requirements and those of her children, though she may give a share of it to her husband, and possibly even to a co-wife. A woman owns her own cooking utensils, and besides cooking for her husband and children, is responsible for collecting firewood and water" (p. 98)
17. Henry Louis Gates, The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism, New York, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988. p. 4
18. in Staying Power: The History of Blacks in Britain, ^{the author} Peter Fryer details the sort of cruelty which Equiano witnesses:

Unable to torture the slaves freely, sadistic captains had to make do with their own sea men. To these they were so cruel that by the 1780's it was growing hard to recruit men for slaving voyages... the death rate among crews as well as cargoes was notoriously high... From 1784 to 1790 the death rate among seamen on slaving voyages was one in five, more than twice as high as the death rate among slaves in transit in the period... According to Hugh Crow, master of the last slaver to sail from an English port, many of these sea men were the very dregs of the community. (pp. 55-6)
19. Keith Byerman, "We Wear the Mask..." in The Art Of Slave Narrative (eds.) Sekora and Turner, pp. 72-3
20. Oppong, Female and Male, p. 72
21. Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie, "The Female Writer and Her Commitment" in Women in African literature Today, (ed.), Eldred Durosimi Jones et. al. p. 10
22. Barbara Christian "An Angle of Seeing..." in Black Feminist Criticism, p. 215
23. Christian, "An Angle of Seeing...", p. 218
24. James Africanus Horton, West African Countries and Peoples, British and Native, and a Vindication of the African Race, London, 1886. p. 51. Horton was the University of Edinburgh's first African doctor of medicine.
25. Edward Wilmot Blyden, Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race, London, 1887. p. 89

26. Hollis R. Lynch (ed.), Selected Letters of Edward Wilmot Blyden, New York, KTO Press, 1978. Lynch writes:

In Liberia, Blyden's life was one of constant frustration. This stemmed less from his generally impucunious condition than it did from the lack of sympathy and support for his career as an educator and a literary figure, and also for his intense, patriotic and Pan-African ambitions for Liberia. His preoccupation with books alienated his family and he in turn resented them. The fact that none of his three children by his mulatto wife showed much intellectual ability and, indeed, that one of the two girls was retarded, Blyden seemed to have regarded as a penalty for marrying 'outside his race' (p. 14-15).

27. Phillip S. Foner, (ed.) Frederick Douglass on Women's Rights, London, Greenwood Press, 1976. p. 21. Foner is sensitive to the consequences for Anna of Douglass' split with Garrison:

Unquestionably, Mrs Douglass regretted her husband's split with Garrison. When the family lived in Massachusetts, she had been close to Garrison's followers; she had been active in the local anti-slavery societies and had many friends there. When the family moved to Rochester, she continued to be active in the local anti-slavery societies, but found it more difficult to make friends in the Upstate New York community. She must have often regretted the decision to leave New England and the many friends she had made there among the Garrisonians (p. 21).

28. Foner's introduction to Frederick Douglass on Women's Rights, is an excellent source on Douglass as race leader and passionate defender of equal rights generally. Foner quotes Douglass' daughter, Rosetta Douglass Sprague, Anna Murray Douglass: My Mother as I knew Her: Delivered Before the Anna Murray Douglass Union W.C.T.U. Washington, D.C., 1900 (reprinted Washington, D.C., 1923), pp. 12-14
29. Margaret Green Igbo Village Affairs, London, 1937 p. 177
30. Meek, Law and Authority, p. 158
31. Meek, p. 169
32. Christine Obbo, African Women: Their Struggle for Economic Independence, London, Zed Press, 1980, p. 143
33. In terms strikingly similar to those of Obbo, Douglass records his intense desire for freedom in My Bondage and My Freedom, observing: "the thought of only being a creature of the *present* and the *past*, troubled me, I longed to have a *future* with hope in it" (p. 167/1855). Douglass does not explicitly link his longing for a hopeful future to women, but his grandmother and mother in particular prepare and nurture him in a way that can be seen as mediating between the past and present, while Douglass' involvement in the American Women's Rights Movement

suggests the prominent, public role of women in Douglass' life as a freeman. For Douglass' involvement in the Women's Rights campaign, see note no. 27, this chapter

34. Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie discusses a number of stereotypes in "The Female Writer and Her Commitment", pp. 6-10. Katherine Frank provides a concise summary of these stereotypes in "Women Without Men :The Feminist Novel in Africa", p. 15. Minneke Schipper in , "Mother Africa on a Pedestal: The Male Heritage in African Literature and Criticism", pp. 15-34, provides a literary-historical context for such stereotypes. These articles can be found in Women in African Literature Today, (eds.), Jones et. al.
35. Baker, The Journey Back, p. 16
36. Katherine Frank, "Women Without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa", in Women in African Literature Today, (eds.), Jones et. al., pp. 15-16.
37. Frank, "Women Without Men...", p. 16
38. Ogundipe-Leslie, "The Female Writer..."p. 8
39. Nimrod Asante-Darko and Sjaak van Der Geest, "Male Chauvinism: Men and Women in Ghanaian Highlife Songs", in Female and Male,(ed.) Oppong, p. 209
40. Eldred Durosimi Jones, ed., Women in African Literature Today, p. 2
41. Minneke Schipper quotes from an interview with Miriama Ba in the Dutch edition of Ba's So Long A Letter. See Schipper, "Mother Africa on a Pedestal..." p. 47.
42. Samuels, "Disguised Voice...", p. 68
43. Jones, Women in African Literature Today, p. 2. Jones refers to Frank, "Women Without Men...", p. 15
44. Christian, "An Angle of Seeing...", p. 219
45. Paul Edwards, " 'Master and 'Father'...", p. 225.
46. Hazel Carby, Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist, New York, Oxford University Press, 1987. p. 27.
47. Frances Smith Foster, " 'In Respect To Females...": Differences in the Portrayals of Women by Male and Female Narrators' in Black American Literature Forum, 15 (Summer 1981), pp. 66-70
48. Baker, The Journey Back, p. 17
49. Toni Morrison, Beloved, p. 71

50. See Susan Willis, "Eruptions of funk: historicising Toni Morrison" in Black Literature, (ed.), Gates, pp. 263-285. Willis argues that "the temporal focus of each of Morrison's novels locate strategic moments in black American history, during which social and cultural forms underwent disruption and transformation", p. 265. Beloved, published three years after Willis' article, can be seen to fit neatly into her argument.
51. Carby, Reconstructing Womanhood, 35
52. Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man (1952), Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1986. See chapter one:
- Blindfolded, I could no longer control my motions. I had no dignity. I stumbled about like a baby or a drunken man... Everyone fought hysterically. It was complete anarchy. Everybody fought everybody else (p. 23).
53. Equiano knew all too well that being attended by a black servant, in Peter Fryer's words:
- conferred on their masters and mistresses an air of luxurious well-being. They were at once charming, exotic ornaments, objects of curiosity, talking points and, above all, symbols of prestige. In the phrase of a minor poet of the 1790's, who wrote when the fashion was past its peak, a black attendant served as the 'Index of Rank or Opulence Supreme'. One gains the impression that there was scarcely a titled woman in eighteenth-century England who would have been seen dead without one (p. 73, Staying Power)
54. Carby, Reconstructing Womanhood, p. 32
55. Abena Busia, "What is Your Nation? Reconnecting Africa and Her Diaspora through Paule Marshall's *Praisesong For The Widow*", in Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory, and Writing, (ed.), Cheryl Wall, London, Rutgers University Press, 1970 p. 197.
56. McDowell, "New Directions...", p. 156

NOTES
CHAPTER VI

1. William Andrews, To Tell A Free Story : The First Century Of Afro-American Autobiography 1760-1865, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1986, pp. 266-7. Andrews quotes from James Matlock, "The Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass," in Phylon, 40, (1979), pp. 15-28
2. Andrews, To Tell a Free Story, p. 267
3. Andrews, *ibid.*, p. 267
4. Deborah McDowell, "Negotiating Between Tenses: Witnessing Slavery After Freedom-- *Dessa Rose*" in Slavery and the Literary Imagination, (eds.) Deborah McDowell and Arnold Rampersand, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, pp. 144-163; p. 155
5. William Andrews (ed), My Bondage and My Freedom (1955), Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1987, p. xviii
6. Andrews (ed.), My Bondage and My Freedom, p. xix
7. Andrews, *ibid.*, p. xvii
8. See Patsy Brewington Perry, "The Literary Content of Frederick Douglass's Paper Through 1868" in CLA Journal, 17, (1973), pp. 214-229, and note no. 51, chapter three of this study
9. Andrews, (ed.), My Bondage and My Freedom, p. xviii
10. See, for example, Kimberly Benston, "I yam what I am: the topos of (un)naming in Afro-American Literature" in Black Literature and Literary Theory, (ed.), Henry Louis Gates, Jr., New York and London, Methuen, 1984, pp. 151-172
11. Toni Morrison, Beloved (1987), London, Picador, 1988, p. 106
12. Morrison, Beloved, p. 113
13. see chapter eight of the 1845 *Narrative*, which includes the description of Betsy Baily's fate .
14. It is not only the lack of a black community presence, but also the inflated, rhetoric with which Douglass describes his grandmother's fate in the 1845 *Narrative* that contrasts sharply with the treatment of Betsy

Baily in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855). In the 1845 *Narrative*, Douglass describes his grandmother's fate in this way:

...My grandmother, who was now very old, having outlived my old master and all his children, having seen the beginning and end of all of them, and her present owners finding she was of but little value, her frame already racked with the pains of old age, and complete helplessness fast stealing over her once active limbs, they took her to the woods, built her a little hut, put up a little mud-chimney, and then made her welcome to the privilege of supporting herself there in perfect loneliness; thus virtually turning her out to die! If my poor old grandmother now lives, she lives to suffer in utter loneliness; she lives to remember and mourn over the loss of children, the loss of grandchildren, and the loss of great-grandchildren. They are, in the language of the slave's poet, Whittier,--

"Gone, gone, sold and gone
To the rice swamp dank and lone,
Where the slave-whip ceaseless swings,
Where the noisome insect stings,
Where the fever-demon strews
Poison with the Falling dews,
Where the sickly sunbeams glare
Through the hot and misty air:--
Gone, gone, sold and gone
To the rice swamp dank and lone,
From Virginia hills and waters--
Woe is me, my stolen daughters!"

The hearth is desolate. The children, the unconscious children, who once sang and danced in her presence, are gone. She gropes her way, in the darkness of age, for a drink of water. Instead of the voices of her children she hears by day the moans of the dove, and by night the screams of the hideous owl. All is gloom. The grave is at the door. And now, when weighed down by the pains and aches of old age, when the head inclines to the feet, when the beginning and ending of human existence meet, and helpless infancy and painful old age combine together-- at this time, this most needful time, the time for the existence of that tenderness and affection which children only can exercise towards a declining parent-- my poor old grandmother, the devoted mother of twelve children, is left all alone, in yonder little hut, before a few dim embers. She stands-- she sits-- she staggers-- she falls-- she groans-- she dies-- and there are none of her children or grandchildren present, to wipe from her wrinkled brow the cold sweat of death, or to place beneath the sod her fallen remains. Will not a righteous God visit for these things? (p. 92-3/1845)

15. See Deborah McDowell, "Negotiating Between Tenses", for a reading of the bandanna worn by slave women as a symbol of servitude which, in

McDowell's reading of Sherley Anne Williams' *Dessa Rose*, does not allow the slave woman Dorcas to emerge as the sort of specific maternal presence which Betsy Baily signifies in *My Bondage and My Freedom*. McDowell writes:

As [Rufel] remembers her faithful servant, Mammy, whose death she mourns, Rufel performs another familiar substitution, visualising Mammy's "cream colored bandanna", the traditional sign of the slave woman's servitude. She corrects the memory by recalling that "the silky-looking cloth on the darky's head bore little resemblance to the gaudy-colored swatch most darkies tied about their heads. This was a scarf, knotted in a rosette behind one ear" (p. 123/*Dessa Rose*). These passages suggest that, while Rufel seems able to adjust her vision of these slaves, she cannot right their names, not even "Mammy", the name of the slave woman she professes to love (p. 152)

16. Andrews (ed.), *My Bondage and My Freedom*, xviii
17. Andrews, *ibid.*, p. xx
18. See Lucinda MacKethan, "Metaphors of Mastery in the Slave Narratives" in *The Art Of Slave Narrative*, (ed.), Sekora and Turner, 1982, pp. 55-69, for a reading of animal images as "metaphors of mastery" in slave narrative. Douglass' description of Covey as a trickster-like "snake" is superb:

It was... scarcely necessary for Mr. Covey to be really present in the field, to have his work go on industriously. He had the faculty of making us feel that he was always present. By a series of adroitly managed surprises, which he practiced, I was prepared to expect his at any moment. His plan was, never to approach the spot where his hands were at work, in an open, manly and directly manner. No thief was ever more artful in his devices than this man Covey. He would creep and crawl, in ditches and gullies; hide behind stumps and bushes, and practice so much of the cunning of the serpent, that Bill Smith and I-- between ourselves-- never called him by any other name than "*The snake*". We fancied that in his eyes and his gait we could see a snakish resemblance. One half of his proficiency in the art of negro breaking, consisted, I should think, in this species of cunning. We were never secure. He could see or hear us nearly all the time. He was, to us, behind every stump, tree, bush and fence on the plantation. He carried this kind of trickery so far, that he would sometimes mount his horse, and make believe he was going to St. Michael's; and, in thirty minutes afterward, you might find his horse tied in the woods, and the snake-like Covey lying flat in a ditch, with his head lifted above its edge, or in a fence corner, watching every movement of the slaves (p. 133-4/1855)

19. Charles Nichols, "The Slave Narrators and the Picaresque Mode: Archetypes for Modern Black Personae" in *The Slave's Narrative*, (eds.), Davis and Gates, 1985, pp. 283-297; p. 284-5

20. Andrews, To Tell a Free Story, p. 220
21. Andrews, *ibid.*, p. 220
22. Barbara Christian, "An Angle of Seeing: Motherhood in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Alice Walker's *Meridian*:" in Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers,^{Barbara Christian} Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1985, pp. 211-252; p. 220
23. Andrews, To Tell a Free Story, p. 221
24. Andrews, *ibid.*, p. 224
25. Andrews (ed.), My Bondage and My Freedom, p. xix
26. Andrews, To Tell a Free Story, p. 214-239
27. Andrews (ed.), My Bondage and My Freedom, p. xxiii
28. Deborah McDowell, "New Directions For Black Feminist Criticism" in Black American Literature Forum, 14, (Winter, 1980), pp. 153-159; p. 157
29. Andrews, To Tell a Free Story, p. 228. Andrews contextualises the Prometheus metaphor:
- Douglass' emphasis on the satanic in Prometheus is in keeping with the views of many of his Romantic literary contemporaries, like the black Delany or the white Percy Bysshe Shelley, both of whom admire and accentuate the proud antiauthoritarian *daimon* of their Promethean heroes and show aversion to only one element of the the purely satanic rebel, namely, what Shelley calls his exclusive "desire for personal aggrandisement". From the time of Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, the Western literary tradition has felt both pity and fear for the tragic rebel who pronounces defiantly: "I am the enemy of all the gods that gave me ill for good". White as well as black nineteenth century readers could be drawn to a bold transgressor of the established order if his fall, like that of self-sacrificial Prometheus, ensured the elevation of others (p. 229-230).
30. Andrews, To Tell a Free Story, p. 231-2
31. Andrews, *ibid.*, p. 226-7
32. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Theory, New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 4
33. Gerald Jaynes, "Plantation Factories and the Slave's Work Ethic" in The Slave's Narrative, (eds.), Davis and Gates, 1985, pp. 98-111; p. 108-9
34. Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World (translated from Russian by Helene Iswolsky), Cambridge, Mass., London, M.I.T. Press, 1968, p. 10.

In Beloved, Toni Morrison's description of the carnival which Sethe, Paul D and Denver visit, captures the spirit of Bakhtin's observation:

As they pressed to get to the rope entrance they were lit like lamps. Breathless with the excitement of seeing whitepeople loose: doing magic, clowning, without heads or with two heads, twenty feet tall or two feet tall, weighing a ton, completely tattooed, eating glass, swallowing fire, spitting ribbons, twisted into knots, forming pyramids, playing with snakes and beating each other up.

All of this was advertisement, read by those who could and heard by those who could not, and the fact that none of it was true did not extinguish their appetite a bit. The barker called them and their children names ("Pickaninnies free!") but the food on his vest and the hole in his pants rendered it fairly harmless. In any case it was a small price to pay for the fun they might not ever have again. Two pennies and an insult were well spent if it meant seeing the spectacle of whitefolks making a spectacle of themselves (pp. 47-8)

35. Kalamu ya Salaam, Our Music is No Accident, The New Orleans Cultural Foundation Inc., New Orleans, 1988, p. 9
36. Kalamu ya Salaam, Our Music is No Accident, p.5; p. 30
37. Andrews (ed.), My Bondage and My Freedom, p. 170 Andrews informs us that "Douglass gave this song ["Run to Jesus"] to the Fisk University Jubilee Singers with the interesting statement that it first suggested to him the thought of escaping from slavery" (p. 170/1855)
38. Kalamu ya Salaam, Our Music is No Accident, p. 9
39. Claudia Tate (ed.) Black Women Writers at Work, New York, Continuum, 1984, p. 208
40. Elizabeth Jo MacDaniel, "The Past: A Performance-Centered Analysis of Personal Experience Narrative", unpublished PhD dissertation, Ohio State University, 1989, p. 11-12

NOTES
CHAPTER VII

1. Bell refers to fictional narratives as slavery as "neo-slave narratives". See Bernard W. Bell, The Afro-American Novel and its Tradition, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1987, p. 298. Henry Louis Gates Jr. refers to the "slave narrative novel" in his introduction to The Slave's Narrative, (eds.), Davis and Gates, 1984
2. Deborah McDowell, "Negotiating Between Tenses: Witnessing Slavery After Freedom-- *Dessa Rose*" in Slavery and the Literary Imagination, (eds.), Deborah E. McDowell and Arnold Rampersad, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University, 1989, pp. 144-163; p. 146
3. Linda Elena Opyr, "The Black Woman in the Novels of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison", unpublished PhD dissertation, St. John's University, 1988, p. 96.
4. Margaret McDowell, "The Black Woman as Artist and Critic: Four Versions" in The Kentucky Review, Lexington, Kentucky, 7/1, (Spring 1987), pp. 19-41; p. 26
5. Claudia Tate (ed.) Black Women Writers at Work, New York, Continuum, 1984, p. 206.
6. Tate, Black Women Writers at Work, p. 207
7. Tate, *ibid.*, p. 213
8. Victor Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites De Passage*" in Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach, (eds.) William A Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt, New York, Harper and Row, 1979, pp. 234-243; p. 273
9. Houston A. Baker Jr., "Autobiographical Acts and the Voice of the Southern Slave" in The Slave's Narrative, (eds.) Davis and Gates, 1984, pp. 242-261; p. 253
10. Tate, The Black Woman Writer at Work, p. 208

Sherley Anne Williams' interest in the blues is rooted in what she describes as formative reading and life experiences that shaped her interests as a writer. Sherley Anne Williams describes how the autobiographies of female entertainers such as Eartha Kitt, were the only works she discovered as an adolescent which spoke directly to her own

experience as a working class black American woman. Sherley Anne Williams observes that in these life stories she discovered how "they too had had to cope with early and forced sex and sexuality, with mothers who could not express love in the terms that they desperately needed. Yet they had risen above this, turned their differences into something that was respected in the world beyond their homes". Sherley Anne Williams also describes her sister, Ruby, and Ruby's black women friends, as mentors "who provided me with a community, with models, both real life and literary". see Mary Helen Washington (ed.), Black-Eyed Susans/ Midnight Birds, New York, Doubleday, 1990, pp. 223-290; p. 224-5

11. see Doris Davenport, "Four Contemporary Black Women Poets: Lucille Clifton, June Jordan, Audre Lorde and Sherley Anne Williams", unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Southern California, 1985, pp. 83-91

In Sherley Anne Williams' "Afterword" to an edition of Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God, Williams writes:

In the speech of [Hurston's] characters I heard my own country voice and saw in the heroine [of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*] something of my own country self... In the speech of her characters, black voices-- whether rural or urban, northern or southern-- come alive. [Hurston's] fidelity to diction, metaphor and syntax... rings, even across forty years, with an aching familiarity that is a testament to Hurston's skill and to the durability of black speech (p. 291)

In the Tate interview, Williams makes the general observation that "the blues has dealt with intimate relationships", and the blues provides "a natural way of focussing" on such relationships, providing a vehicle for both "form and setting" in creative writing. (p. 209).

12. Doris Davenport, "Four Contemporary Black Women Poets...", p. 82
13. Davenport, *ibid.*, p. 90
14. Tate, The Black Woman Writer at Work, p. 205
15. Barbara Christian, "Community and Nature: The Novels of Toni Morrison" (1981) in Black Feminist Criticism, Barbara Christian, 1985, pp. 47-65; p. 47.
16. Mari Evans (ed.), Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Evaluation, New York, Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1984, p. 339
(ed.)
17. Evans, Black Women Writers (1950-1980), p. 339-340
18. Toni Morrison consistently refers to these "superwomen" as the interviews with Nellie McKay, Mari Evans and Claudia Tate, all cited in this chapter, demonstrate.

19. Margaret McDowell, "The Black Woman as Artist and Critic: Four Versions", p. 26-7
20. Opyr, "The Black Woman in the Novels of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison", p. 193
21. Opyr, *ibid.*, 193
22. Opyr, *ibid.*, p. 95-6
23. Margaret McDowell, "The Black Woman as Artist and Critic: Four Versions" p. 26
(*ed.*)
24. Evans, Black Women Writers (1950-1980), p. 341
25. Tate, Black Women Writers at Work, p. 125
26. Tate, *ibid.* p. 124
27. Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves" in The Black Scholar 3, (December, 1971), pp. 3-15. This article relates a number of historical incidents reminiscent of circumstances *and* events in both *Dessa Rose* and *Beloved*.
28. Michele Wallace, "Slaves to History" in Invisibility Blues..., pp. 137-145; p. 145
29. Deborah McDowell, "Negotiating Between Tenses", p. 148
30. Lawrence Levine, Black Culture and Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom, New York, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 133
31. Nellie McKay, "An Interview with Toni Morrison" in Contemporary Literature XXIV/4 1983, pp. 413-429; p. 417
32. Deborah McDowell, p. 151

McDowell observes:

In escaping from Nehemiah, Dessa seizes physical freedom, but she does not escape the text of slavery. She continues to be misnamed and to perform her own misnaming. We might say that sections ^{one} and two [of *Dessa Rose*] juxtapose two consubstantial systems of representation-- one id verbal, the other, visual. Told largely from the point of view of Rufel, a white woman, this second section is structured on the language of the visible that she employs while remembering her own past and her complicity in and victimisation by the institution of slavery.

Whereas the first section is based on a series of oppositions-- of orality and literacy, of public and private discourse, of a free white

man and an enslaved black woman-- the second problematizes "the whole business of choosing sides", and moves toward an ethic and an energy of cooperation. That ethic is most readily apparent in the links established between Dessa and Rufel, an escaped slave and a one-time slave mistress. Both are separated from their families; both are mourning personal losses; both are raising children; both live under a system that denies either full control over her body. But these commonalities are produced by radically different material circumstances and thus engender radically different effects (p. 150-1)

33. McDowell, *ibid.*, p. 155

34. McDowell, p. 151

35. Wallace, "Slaves of History", p. 145

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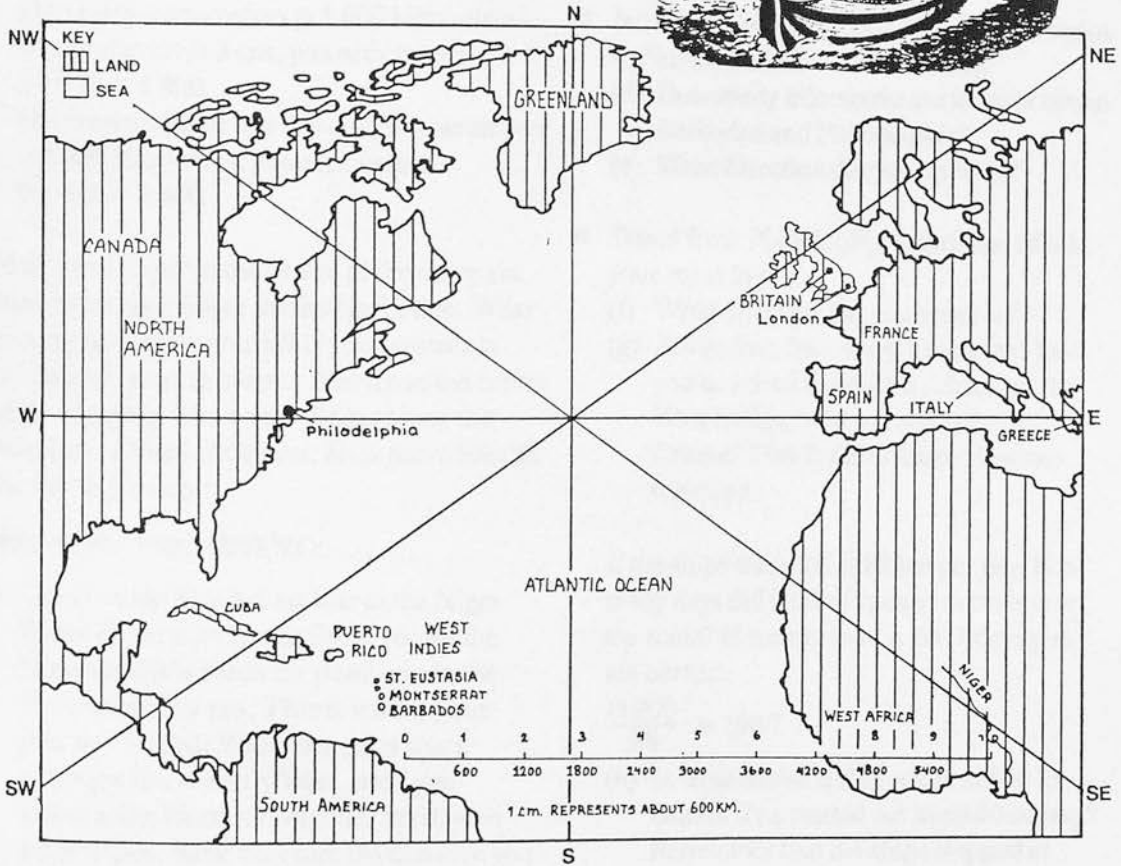
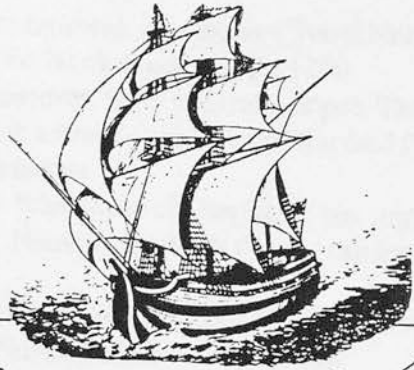
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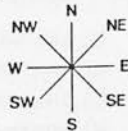
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Be a navigator

The first slave auction that Equiano witnessed was in the West Indies. Find the West Indies on this map. Now let's learn some more about geography from Equiano's travels.



This map shows the countries that Equiano visited on his travels. The lines on the map show us the position or direction of each country. So these lines are similar to a compass.



At the bottom of the map there is a scale which measures distance in centimetres.

1 cm on this map represents about 600 kilometres on the earth.

For this activity you will need a ruler to measure distance off our scale and on to the map. You will also need a pen to mark your route on the map.

We are going to follow the route that Equiano travelled from West Africa to England. In those

days people travelled by sailing ships which relied on the wind for their movement. So they travelled very slowly, especially on long distances, like from West Africa to England. Before we see how long the journey took, let's practise using the compass and the scale. Take your ruler and place it along the horizontal (—) line of the scale.

- How many centimetres is 1 800 kilometres? If your answer is 3 cm, you are correct:
 $3 \times 600 = 1\,800$.
- How many kilometres is 9 cm? If your answer is 5 400 kilometres, you are correct:
 $9 \times 600 = 5\,400$.

Place your finger in the centre of the compass. Now move your finger up the North line. What country have you come to? If your answer is Greenland, you are correct. Return to the centre of the compass. Move your finger along the West line to North America. Now move East all the way to Greece.

NOW START YOUR JOURNEY...

- Travel on the South-East line to the Niger River. Move your finger South, down the Niger until you reach the point where the Niger meets the sea. **This is where your journey begins.** With your ruler mark a straight line directly West, until you arrive at the North-South line. Mark your route in pen. Now, measure the distance you have travelled in centimetres.
 - (a) How many centimetres does it measure? How many kilometres have you travelled?

- Continue with your journey. Travel North, on the North-South line, for 1 200 kilometres. Mark your route in pen. Then mark a straight line directly West for 1 800 kilometres.
 - (b) What group of islands have you come to?
 - (c) Name three islands that you can see.
- Now draw a line from the Island of Barbados to Philadelphia in North America.
 - (d) How many kilometres are there between Barbados and Philadelphia?
 - (e) What direction did you travel in?
- Travel from Philadelphia to Britain. Mark your route in pen.
 - (f) What direction did you travel in?
 - (g) Altogether, how many kilometres have you travelled from West Africa, to the West Indies, to North America, to Britain? This is the distance Equiano travelled.

If the ships travelled at 88 km per day, how many days did it take Equiano to complete the route? If your answer is 180.7 days you are correct:

$$\frac{15\,900}{88} = 180.7$$

- (h) In what month did Equiano arrive in Britain if he started out in mid-January? Remember that the ships stopped at various ports so it took Equiano about 8 months to get to Britain. Today we can fly that distance in a few days.

Find Greenland on the map on page 44. When Equiano travelled to Greenland he learnt something special about water. Let's discover what he learnt on page 46.

Answers

(a) 7.5 cm, 4 500 km (b) The West Indies

(c) Barbados, Montserrat, St Eustasia, Puerto Rico

(d) 3 000 kms (e) North, North-West

(f) North-East (g) 15 900 km

(h) Equiano would have arrived in Britain in about September.

$$\frac{15\,900}{88} = 180.7$$

January - September = $\frac{30}{180.7}$ = about 6 months and the time spent at ports.

Water is special

In 1773 Equiano joined explorers who were trying to find a route to India via the North Pole. In his book he reports:

'On 28 June we reached Greenland. The weather now became extremely cold. As we sailed we saw many very high and curious mountains of ice. By the 1st August our ships got completely stuck in the ice. We feared that they would be squeezed to pieces. It was on the 11th day of being stuck in the ice that the wind changed. The weather became mild and the ice broke up. We could now push our ships into the open water.'



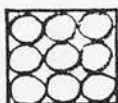
Which of the following did Equiano see?

- Water as a liquid
- Water as a solid
- Water as a gas

In the surrounding sea, Equiano saw water as a liquid. When he saw ice, he saw water as a solid. But water also exists as a gas, as steam.

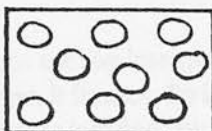
Water, like everything around us is made up of tiny particles which are packed together. Look at the pictures below. They are diagrams which show what nine particles of a substance look like in the solid state, the liquid state and the gas state. In most substances particles can be packed together in three ways:

In the **solid** state the nine particles are densely packed together. The particles take up a small amount of space.



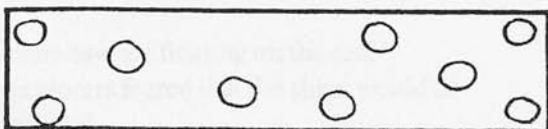
solid

In the **liquid** state the nine particles are less densely packed together. The particles take up more space.



liquid

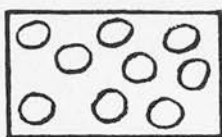
In the **gas** state the nine particles are the least densely packed together. The particles take up the most space.



gas

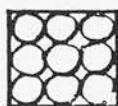
But water is different. Look at the pictures below. In each picture there are nine particles of water. Fill in the missing words in each sentence to find out why water is different.

- 1 In the **solid** state (ice) the nine water particles are less _____ packed together than in the liquid state.



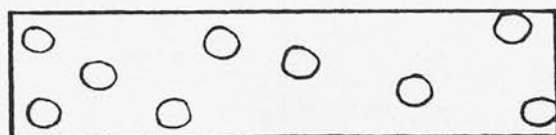
water as a solid

- 2 In the **liquid** state the nine water particles are _____ densely packed together. The particles take up _____ space than in the solid state.



water as a liquid

- 3 In the **gas** state the nine water particles are the least _____ packed together. The particles take up the _____ space.



water as a gas

Most substances contract or take up less space when they freeze. But water actually expands when it freezes. So it takes up more space because the water particles are less densely packed. This is the reason for some of the things Equiano experienced, like ice floating on the sea and the ship being squeezed to pieces by the ice.

- 4 Why do you think Equiano saw ice floating on the sea?
- 5 Why do you think the explorers feared that the ships would be squeezed to pieces by the ice?
- 6 Why do you think the ships were freed from the ice when it began to melt?

Answers

- 1 In the solid state (ice) the nine water particles are less densely packed together than in the liquid state.
- 2 In the liquid state the nine water particles are more densely packed together. The particles take up less space than in the solid state.
- 3 In the gas state the nine water particles are the least densely packed together. The particles take up the most space.
- 4 Ice is less dense than water. This is why ice can float on water, like the icebergs Equiano saw.
- 5 The water around the ships froze and as it did this it expanded. This is why the explorers feared that the ships would be squeezed to pieces.
- 6 When heat is added to ice it begins to melt and becomes liquid again. The water particles are more densely packed than ice and take up less space. This is why the ships were freed from the ice when it began to melt.

Slave Auctions

In the West Indies in 1829, this poster told slave buyers that there was to be a slave auction. Slaves were going to be sold or hired out. This

poster can teach us a great deal about people's attitudes to slaves at that time. See how well you can read it. Answer the questions below.

TO BE SOLD & LET
BY PUBLIC AUCTION,
On MONDAY the 18th of MAY, 1829,
UNDER THE TREES.

FOR SALE,
THE THREE FOLLOWING
SLAVES,

THE
HANNIBAL, about 30 Years old, an excellent House Servant, of Good Character.
WILLIAM, about 35 Years old, a Labourer.
NANCY, an excellent House Servant and Nurse.
The MEN belonging to "LEITCH'S" Estate, and the WOMAN to Mrs. D. SMIT

TO BE LET,
On the usual conditions of the Hærer finding them in Food, Cloth & Medical
THE FOLLOWING
MALE and FEMALE
SLAVES,

62 0063 8248677222.
ROBERT BAGLEY, about 20 Years old, a good House Servant.
WILLIAM BAGLEY, about 18 Years old, a Labourer.
JOHN ARMS, about 18 Years old.
JACK ANTONIA, about 40 Years old, a Labourer.
PHILIP, an Excellent Fisherman.
HARRY, about 27 Years old, a good House Servant.
LUCY, a Young Woman of good Character, used to House Work and the Nursery.
FLAZA, an Excellent Washerwoman.
CLARA, an Excellent Washerwoman.
FANNY, about 14 Years old, House Servant.
KARAH, about 14 Years old, House Servant.

Also for Sale, at Eleven o'Clock,
Fine Rice, Gram, Paddy, Books, Muslins,
Needles, Pins, Ribbons, &c. &c.
AT ONE O'CLOCK, THAT CELEBRATED ENGLISH HORSE
BLUCHER,
FOR THE ADDISON PALMER GOVERNMENT 67777.

* Tick the correct answers:

- 1 A **Public Auction** is where: goods are sold or hired at a set price goods are sold or hired to the highest bidder .
 - What does this tell you about people's attitudes towards slaves?
- 2 In the poster there are: 3 11 slaves for sale.
- 3 **To be let:** is to be sold to a new owner to be rented out for a period .
 - What does this tell you about people's attitudes towards slaves?
- 4 In the poster there are: 3 11 slaves to be let.

- 5 In what century was this slave auction held?
 19th century 18th century
 20th century .
- 6 In 1833 Britain abolished slavery. How many years after 1829 was this?
 154 years 4 years 54 years .
- 7 How many years older is the slave Hannibal, than the slave William Bagley?
 12 years 10 years 5 years .
- 8 A number of slaves are described as 'excellent' workers. Does this mean they are: very skilled young and healthy not rebellious and willing to work hard .
- What does this tell you about people's attitudes towards slaves?
- 9 The slaves who are to be let are described as 'of good character'. Does this mean they are: honest and reliable happy and content hard working .
- What does this tell you about people's attitudes towards slaves?

Work out these answers for yourself.

- Slaves took the surname of their owners. So each time they were bought by a new boss, their surname changed. What does this tell you about people's attitudes to slaves?
- When slave owners ran short of money they hired out some of their slaves. The slaves did not change owners so their surnames did not change. Look at the poster again.
 - Who is the owner of Robert and William Bagley? ... Leech, Smith or Bagley?
 - Who is the owner of John Arms? ... Leech, Bagley or Arms?
 - What is the connection between Robert and William Bagley?
- On the poster slaves are said to be **about 30 years old, or about 18 years old**. Why do you think the slave owners did not know the exact ages of the slaves?
- The poster also advertises the sale of rice, books and other goods. What does the advertisement of these goods on the same poster, tell you about people's attitudes to slaves?

4. 11 slaves 5. 19th century 6. 4 years 7. 12 years
 8. Not rebellious and is willing to work hard. The more
 submissive and subservient slaves were, the more their masters
 saw them as being 'good' or 'excellent' workers.
 9. Answers may differ. You could have included one, two or all of
 the descriptions. Slaves were described as being 'of good
 character' if they were not rebellious, but were submissive and
 willing to work hard for their masters.

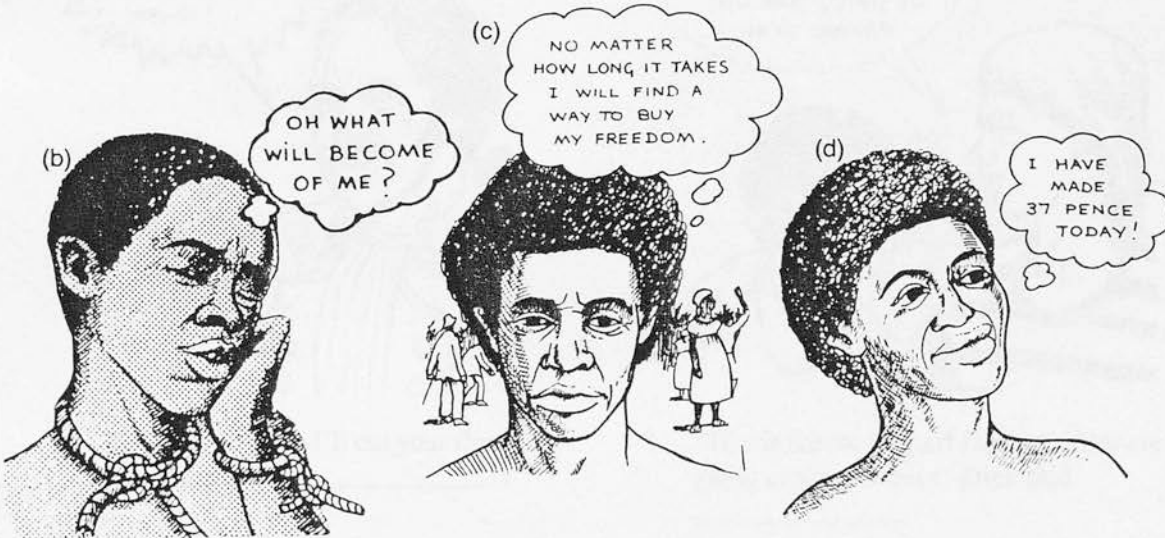
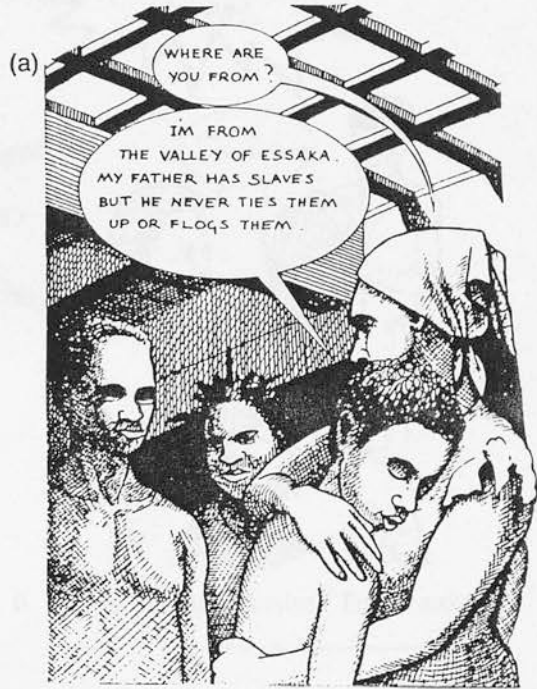
1. A Public Auction is where goods are sold or hired to the highest
 bidder. In a slave auction people were seen as goods that could
 be bought and sold. They were not seen as human beings. (Your
 answer may be different.)
 2. 3 slaves
 3. To be let is to be rented out for a period. The letting of people
 again indicates that people are seen as goods and not as human
 beings. (Your answer may be different.)

Answers

Feelings behind words

We use words to let other people know how we are feeling. Here are some bubbles from the comic, but they are jumbled up. Below is a list of descriptions of how the words are spoken. Match each bubble with the best description. Then complete the sentences by filling in the missing words. Remember to use quotation marks '_____':

- 1 _____
_____, he said with determination.
- 2 _____, she asked
comfortingly.
- 3 _____,
he cried desperately.
- 4 _____,
he exclaimed happily.



Now choose the adverb which best describes how the words in the bubbles are spoken. Choose your answers from this list of adverbs. But use each adverb only once. Write your answer in the space provided.

WRITERS USE WORDS AND PHRASES LIKE LOUPLY, BRAVELY OR WITH SURPRISE TO SHOW HOW WORDS ARE SAID. WE CALL THESE WORDS ADVERBS.



5 'Well I'll be damned,' Mr King said _____.

- WITH SURPRISE
- SADLY
- AGGRESSIVELY
- POLITELY



6 'How is Miss Watson?' Pascal asked _____.



7 'If you try to leave I'll cut your throat', Pascal screamed _____.



8 'This is where we part Equiano. You are going to a new owner,' Dick said _____.

Answers
1 (c) 2 (a) 3 (b) 4 (d) 5 with surprise
6 politely 7 aggressively 8 sadly